

*Act Your Age: Reading and Performing  
Shakespeare's Ageing Women*

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**D.Phil.**

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## ABSTRACT

### *Act Your Age: Reading and Performing Shakespeare's Ageing Women*

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This thesis provides the first study of the representation, performance, and reception of Shakespeare's ageing women in early modern and present-day England. It contributes an exposition of the physiology and theory of early modern ageing, drawing on this original material to make an argument for the ageing woman as a source of anxiety within the plays as they were originally staged, and as they are performed and received today. It finds the old and ageing woman in Shakespeare's drama to be represented as physically and verbally excessive; the thesis also identifies a corresponding urge in the plays and in their reception towards the ageing woman's containment and control. This containment is exercised in the text, the rehearsal room, the theatre, and the public space of performance reviews.

My introduction determines my methodology and establishes the terms of reference for the project. The first chapter defines early modern old age and delivers a study of the early modern literature and theory of the ageing body. Each of the four subsequent chapters explores an ageing female character or characters through the lens of a theme: magic, motherhood, sexuality, and memory. The characters studied are drawn from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Coriolanus*, *King John*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*. Some brief concluding remarks complete the thesis.

The larger project of the thesis is a cultural study. Throughout, I am keen to learn how characters are talked about as well as written and performed. My effort to understand the work which Shakespeare's older women are asked to carry out in the present day defines my methodology: I draw on prompt books, production recordings, reviews, costume, photographs, programmes, and interviews with actors and directors to aid my investigation, juxtaposing these with close study of the written plays and the early modern culture and knowledge which underpins them.

The word count, exclusive of bibliography but inclusive of all footnotes and an appendix, is approximately 92,000.

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## *Conventions and Abbreviations*

For the reader's ease, I have used a modernised spelling throughout the thesis for quotations from Shakespeare's plays. Orthography and lineation refers to the edition provided in *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997), unless another edition is specified. When using the Norton lineation, I follow those editors on the choice of whether to quote from a quarto text or the text collected in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: 1623) (the 'First Folio'). Further decisions made between texts are footnoted in the chapters where relevant.

In order to assist the reader, when quoting from non-Shakespearean plays or prose I refer to a modern edition, and follow the orthography of such an edition, where one is easily available. In other cases, I cite the original and retain original spelling accordingly.

Newspaper reviews accessed online are provided with a URL; other reviews were accessed in archives, and, when the original could not be recovered, are titled as per the archive's system (the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, for instance, frequently re-types reviews and alters the banner headline from the original). Newspaper reviews of RSC, Globe, and National Theatre productions are on archive at the Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive, Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archive, and the National Theatre Archive respectively, unless otherwise noted. All online materials used were accessed on 1 January 2014, unless noted.

The style sheet followed is *MHRA Style Guide: A Handbook for Authors, Editors, and Writers of Theses*, 2nd edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008).

Abbreviations used throughout are as follows:

<i>CUP</i>	Cambridge University Press
<i>F</i>	Shakespeare's First Folio
<i>OUP</i>	Oxford University Press
<i>Q(1, 2, 3 etc.)</i>	Quarto edition of the play under discussion
<i>SCLA</i>	Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive (Stratford-upon-Avon)
<i>SGLA</i>	Shakespeare's Globe Library and Archive (London)
<i>TLS</i>	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i>

## *Introduction*

In 2006, Royal Shakespeare Company actor Harriet Walter curated a collection of portrait photographs, *Infinite Variety*, which was exhibited at the Courtyard Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.<sup>1</sup> Walter's exhibition was designed to complement her performance as Cleopatra in the Gregory Doran-directed *Antony and Cleopatra*, running that season at the Courtyard.<sup>2</sup> The subject of each portrait was an old or ageing woman or women, and the exhibition was designed to demonstrate the older woman's beauty.<sup>3</sup> It was hoped that the photographs would call attention to the absence of the older woman from public discourse and, relatedly, to the paucity of parts available to the older female actor on the early twenty-first century stage. Walter revived the exhibition four years later in London while playing the role of Livia in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* at the National Theatre.<sup>4</sup>

The 2010 London revival of the exhibition sparked an online debate on the *Guardian*'s 'Theatre Blog' website between theatre critics Lyn Gardner and Kate Kellaway on the need for more substantial parts for female actors over fifty. For Kellaway, 'age itself [was] immaterial': 'As a 51-year-old woman, I don't feel desperate to see other 51-year-olds tread the boards'.<sup>5</sup> Gardner disagreed, worrying that 'the few classical roles there are for older women are not safe', and claiming that 'the current directorial trend is for younger Gertrudes and Lady Macbeths, and it's not uncommon to see Lady Capulet represented as a

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<sup>1</sup> *Infinite Variety*, collated by Harriet Walter (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> RSC press office, 'Harriet Walter celebrates the beauty of the ageing female face' (Stratford-upon-Avon: RSC, 2006) <[http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/420\\_4620.aspx](http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/420_4620.aspx)> [Accessed 12 January 2009].

<sup>4</sup> *Women Beware Women*, dir. Marianne Elliott (London: The National Theatre [Olivier], 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Kate Kellaway, 'Our older actresses are doing just fine, thanks', Theatre Blog, *Guardian*, 19 March 2010 <[www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/mar/19/stage-roles-older-actresses-theatre](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/mar/19/stage-roles-older-actresses-theatre)>.

gymslip mum turned housewife'.<sup>6</sup> Gardner and Kellaway's conversation betrays the tension with which staged female age, and staged Shakespearean female age, is interpreted and received today. This tension will be fundamental to my thesis. Examining recent stagings of Shakespeare's old and ageing female characters by three major national theatre companies, this thesis argues for the reiteration and perpetuation of early modern and contemporary anxieties of female age in present-day performances.

My choice of subject emerges from a double interest in the place of the elderly in early modern and present-day society. I address the presence and representation of the aged in early modern England in the following chapter; today, the elderly are a political hot potato making an increasing impact on the national finances.<sup>7</sup> The rising numbers of pensionable Britons are generating increased interest in the role of the aged in society, an interest to which Walter's exhibition bears witness.<sup>8</sup> Critics of early modern literature, who historically have neglected the subject of age and the aged, are now beginning its appraisal. A major step forward was taken with the 2007 publication of Helen Small's very well-received *The Long Life*, a study of representations of old age across Western literature and philosophy from Plato through *King Lear* to Philip Roth.<sup>9</sup> Small's strategy, the use of literature to illuminate and situate her arguments on philosophies of age, allowed for an in-depth consideration of the meaning and significance of old age at various points in Western

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<sup>6</sup> Lyn Gardner, 'What happened to great stage roles for older women?', Theatre Blog, *Guardian*, 16 March 2010 <[www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/mar/16/stage-roles-older-women](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/mar/16/stage-roles-older-women)>.

<sup>7</sup> Britain's NHS spends £4.6 million each day covering the costs of falls in the over-sixty-fives alone, with outlays due to rise as the pensionable population increases. The rising median age is causing economic concern across ageing Western economies such as the UK, Japan, the United States, France, and Germany: see Anon., 'The Japan syndrome', *Economist*, 397: 8709 (2010), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Between 1983 and 2008 the number of Britons aged sixty-five or older increased by 1.5 million people to reach 16% of the population, raising the national median age from thirty-five years old to thirty-nine. A further increase in the size of this cohort to 23% of the population is expected by 2033, again raising the median age to forty years old. The number of the very oldest, those aged eighty-five and above, more than doubled from 600,000 to over 1.5 million between 1983 and 2008, and is predicted to double again by 2033. By that time, the number of over-sixties in the national population will exceed the number of under-sixteens. The Office for National Statistics, 'Ageing' <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?ID=949>>.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Small, *The Long Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2007). Small's book was awarded the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism in 2008, and the Rose Mary Crawshay Prize, a British Academy award, in 2008.

history. Published in the same year, Nina Taunton's *Fictions of Old Age in Early Modern Literature and Culture* used ideas of age as a point of departure for exploring the literature and history of early modern England.<sup>10</sup> Erin Campbell's collection of essays published a year earlier, *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe*, had similar aims.<sup>11</sup> Anthony Ellis's *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama* drew parallels between the dramas of England and Italy in its exposition of the function of male ageing on the early modern stage.<sup>12</sup> Turning to works wholly dedicated to Shakespeare, Gordon McMullan's *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, Jonathan Bate's *The Soul of the Age*, and David Bevington's *Shakespeare: The Seven Ages of Human Experience* similarly attest to the mounting scholarly interest in old age in literature.<sup>13</sup> Neither these four works, nor Maurice Charney's *Wrinkled Deep in Time* (which, unlike the others, aspired to be a full account of Shakespearean old age), provide a thorough, historicised study of ageing in Shakespearean drama, nor an interrogation of what the performance of that ageing on today's stages might mean.<sup>14</sup> My thesis serves as a response to a gap in the literature which still remains.

The thesis also addresses a second age-related problem identifiable across a reading of the work of Ellis, Bate, Bevington, and Charney: the overwhelming concentration of interest on male characters. The astigmatic scholarly focus on the older men of Shakespeare's drama to the neglect of the older women is often admitted to be the fruit of a

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<sup>10</sup> Nina Taunton, *Fictions of Old Age in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Representations*, ed. Erin Campbell (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007). McMullan, it should be noted, was not aiming to provide an exposition of age in Shakespeare's writing. Jonathan Bate, *The Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind and World of William Shakespeare* (London: Viking, 2008); David Bevington, *Shakespeare: The Seven Ages of Human Experience*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Charney, *Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

biographical approach to reading the plays, as in the work of Bevington and Charney.<sup>15</sup> It is assumed, problematically, that Shakespeare chose to write about (male) age as he himself aged: Bevington claims that ‘Shakespeare wrote poetry and plays about love when he was young and plays about ageing when he was old’.<sup>16</sup> A Shakespeare who apparently withdrew from writing at forty-nine could not yet safely be described as ‘old’, as my discussion of the early modern life-stages in the first chapter will show; earlier plays such as *The Comedy of Errors*, the *Henry VI* plays, and *Richard III* feature old men and old women in important roles, and the late plays are still very interested in young love.<sup>17</sup> Finding Shakespeare’s biography to be a sometimes unhelpful distraction from the work of reading the plays and understanding their performance, I direct my attention towards the often-overlooked older female characters. As Kate Chedgzoy has argued, we would do well to ‘introduc[e] into the critical debate the issues of subordination by age as well as gender’, yet at the time of writing no published research is available which has the old and ageing women of Shakespeare’s drama as its primary concern.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the term ‘Shakespeare’s women’ is frequently assumed to include only the playwright’s apparently younger heroines, such as Juliet, Rosalind, Cordelia, Isabella, and Ophelia. It rarely accounts for the older cohort.<sup>19</sup> A typical scholarly strategy of neglect is that which places the older female character at the very end of the analysis, in the final chapter or chapters, conducting a

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<sup>15</sup> Bevington, p. 234; Charney, p. 1. Charney identifies a further, autobiographical element to his work in his opening lines.

<sup>16</sup> Bevington, p. 234.

<sup>17</sup> For a study of scenes, and plays, from all stages of Shakespeare’s life, see Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes From His Life*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson Learning, 2001). See in particular pp. 255-7 for Shakespeare’s final, ‘retired’ years.

<sup>18</sup> Kate Chedgzoy, ‘Playing With Cupid: Gender, Sexuality and Adolescence’, in *Alternative Shakespeares 3*, ed. Diana E. Henderson (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 138-57 (p. 139).

<sup>19</sup> See for example the female characters included and excluded by Carol Chillington Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare’s Women Today* (London: The Women’s Press, 1988); Mary Beth Rose, ‘Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42: 3 (1991), 291-314 (a reading of Renaissance motherhood which lacks any consideration of age); Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare’s Unruly Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), which seems to believe only the younger women of the comedies to be unruly; Judith Cook, *Women in Shakespeare* (London: Harrap, 1980); and David Mann, *Shakespeare’s Women: Performance and Conception* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008) which devotes a disproportionate amount of time to the study of the younger characters.

relegation in print.<sup>20</sup> Exiling the plays' older female characters risks falsely presenting 'Shakespeare's women' as a homogenously young, attractive, feisty group, with all the belittling such a reading entails.

When critics have turned their attention to Shakespeare's older female characters, they frequently have done so as a means of considering the plays' responses to the ageing of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth was already ageing when Shakespeare began his career as a poet and playwright, in perhaps the late 1580s or early 1590s. The study of Shakespeare's possible responses to the ageing Elizabeth is an obviously attractive historical platform on which to build readings of some of the older female characters. Steven Mullaney, for instance, has identified a suppressed response to the ageing and death of Elizabeth in *Hamlet's* Gertrude, and Leah Marcus has understood Shakespeare's 1590s comedy to be in part an attempt to 'perpetuate the magic of the queen's rhetoric' even as her 'black teeth and wrinkled breast' paralleled the 'waning of the nation'.<sup>21</sup> While in the second chapter we will encounter the ageing Elizabeth at work in recent performances of (and by) Mistress Quickly and Titania, this thesis will not dedicate much time to the queen. Work such as Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson's *England's Elizabeth* calls useful attention to the reactions and responses to Elizabeth unfolding from Shakespeare's time into the present day; however, for a thesis such as this one which is most interested in how the ageing women written into Shakespeare's plays are staged and used today, a wholly Elizabeth-focused approach may be found to be overly restrictive.<sup>22</sup> To encounter the plays and their

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<sup>20</sup> See for example Charney's *Wrinkled Deep in Time*, which takes as its title an ageing woman's words yet confines its study of ageing female characters to the final three chapters, with an interlude chapter dealing with the 'old and experienced' (p. 9) Antony and Cleopatra.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Mullaney, 'Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet, The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45: 2 (1994), 139-62; Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 102-3.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson, *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (Oxford: OUP, 2002). For further examples of the kinds of directions in which such an approach could move, see Keith Rinehart, 'Shakespeare's Cleopatra and England's Elizabeth', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 23: 1 (1972), 81-6;

characters for the first time in the light of Elizabeth, her reign, and her memory threatens a set of overdetermined, prescriptive readings which could prove unhelpful when seeking a fresh perspective on Shakespeare's older women.

As a feminist critic writing on performed Shakespeare, then, it will be my aim to think about the plays and their characters in a way which is open to the full variety of meanings that a performance and its reception can give rise to. Placing performance at the heart of my analysis means recognising, like Sarah Werner, that 'Shakespeare's plays do not espouse universal values'.<sup>23</sup> Rather, the plays are recreated and reshaped in every staging; indeed, '[o]ver the centuries they have been appropriated and deployed across the political spectrum to convey specific ideologies in pursuit of particular goals'.<sup>24</sup> Today, the staged plays articulate a version of womanhood, and women's ageing, which has its roots in early modern writing and thinking, yet which is re-shaped to meet the ideologies and expectations of contemporary British society. My thesis is provoked by what happens to the early modern ideas of age at work in Shakespeare's plays when they are performed anew today. For Evelyn Gajowski, my response to the plays is inevitable: '[f]eminist and queer critical practices are inextricably rooted in the political, economic and social forces of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Feminist scholars cannot help but be

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Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*; Mullaney, 'Mourning and Misogyny'; and Helen Hackett, *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: The Meeting of Two Myths* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). On Elizabeth herself, a wealth of scholarship on the negotiation of her physical age and public persona already exists, to which I cannot hope to add: see Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989); Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987); Susan Doran, 'Virginity, Divinity and Power: The Portraits of Elizabeth I', in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, eds. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 171-99; *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture', *Representations*, 1: 2 (1983), 61-94; and Andrew Hadfield, 'Duessa's Trial and Elizabeth's Error: Judging Elizabeth in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*', in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, pp. 56-76.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance*, p. 2.

aware of this connection'.<sup>25</sup> As a work of feminist criticism, then, my thesis is also associated with presentism, a strand of theatre criticism which brings the present to bear on the plays of the past, asking how, what, and why Shakespearean drama continues to mean in the present day.<sup>26</sup>

Presentism emerges naturally from late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century currents in the study of performance.<sup>27</sup> W. B. Worthen has demonstrated the inseparability of performance and the present moment, and Michael Bristol has traced the 'new intonation' of the present heard in every performative and interpretive act.<sup>28</sup> Performance itself, and its critical reception, is inevitably, and often self-consciously, presentist. A 2010 production by Tom Morris and Sean O'Connor at the Bristol Old Vic, *Juliet and Her Romeo*, is an example of a highly presentist piece of Shakespearean performance.<sup>29</sup> The play recast Shakespeare's adolescent love-tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, as a story of doomed love in present-day old age, altering remarkably little of the text to resituate the play in a modern British old folks' home, with Siân Phillips playing Juliet and Michael Byrne as Romeo. By tackling some of the issues of the day – who will look after our elderly parents? How can we afford their care? – while testing the uncertain waters of public reaction to

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<sup>25</sup> *Presentism, Gender, and Sexuality in Shakespeare*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> See *Presentist Shakespeares*, eds. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 2007); Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Hodgdon provides a helpful review of these currents in her 'Introduction: A Kind of History', in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, eds. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), pp. 1-9.

<sup>28</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Michael D. Bristol, *Big-time Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 13. Bristol's argument differs to Worthen's insofar as he retains a role for the text and its earliest meanings, a role he finds lastingly relevant to later performances; for Worthen, Austin's speech-act theory provides a lens through which performance can be understood to have a force independent of the text (pp. 10-11, and see also W. B. Worthen, 'Shakespearean Performativity' in *Shakespeare and Modern Theatre: The performance of modernity*, eds. Michael Bristol and Kathleen McLuskie, with Christopher Holmes [London: Routledge, 2001], pp. 117-41). Paul Menzer warns against forgetting the 'historical load' that 'weighs upon even the most thoroughly presentist [Shakespearean] production', a warning my thesis's balance of early modern and present day bears in mind: Paul Menzer, 'The Spirit of '76: Original Practices and Revolutionary Nostalgia', in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies*, pp. 94-108 (p. 103).

<sup>29</sup> *Juliet and Her Romeo*, dir. Tom Morris (Bristol: The Old Vic Theatre, 2010).

romantic and sexual love in old age, *Juliet and Her Romeo* provided a way into thinking about what happens when a Shakespearean play is performed in a present-day context. The productions I examine in this thesis do not always orient themselves so consciously or radically to the present moment, yet they cannot insulate themselves from their performance contexts. The present infiltrates and generates the meaning of a play as it is understood by audiences and readers; it makes itself felt in the perceptions and experiences of the audience, the responses of critics, the professional and personal histories of the director, the physicality of the actors' bodies, their accents, the training and experience they bring to bear on the plays, and the materials from which the set, stage, and theatre are made.<sup>30</sup> As an approach, presentism is well positioned to address the continued popularity of, and cultural currency afforded to, Shakespeare in today's England; I will use it as a means of studying what happens when the early modern ideas of female ageing I set out in Chapter One are reproduced and re-performed on current stages.

My topic is broad in scope and as such requires a tightly focused methodology. I have limited my study of the present-day performance of early modern ageing female characters to one dramatist, Shakespeare. In addition, I confine the performances I consider to just three theatre companies. I selected Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and the National Theatre due to their size and influence. Each of these companies' productions of Shakespeare generates national attention to an extent unmatched by smaller regional companies' stagings. Their performances command a level of publicity, newspaper reviews, and audience attendance which affords them a unique role in shaping the public reception and understanding of Shakespeare today. As such, RSC,

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<sup>30</sup> See Laurie E. Osborne on Jerome McGann's concept of the 'work' as a way of understanding these multiple contributions to a play experience. Laurie E. Osborne, 'Rethinking the Performance Editions: Theatrical and textual productions of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed. James C. Bulman (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 168-86 (p. 170). See also Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2009) on the 'the work' as emerging out of the discourses through which we interpret Shakespeare in the present day; and Bridget Escolme, 'Shakespeare and Our Contemporaries', in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies*, pp. 162-77.

Globe, and National productions are ideally positioned to communicate their preferred interpretations of ageing Shakespearean women to a national audience. Consequently, they are most likely to shape the public's impressions of Shakespeare's representation of female ageing and, potentially, to construct through Shakespeare an idea or ideas of female ageing in society today. As theatre-goers, Shakespeareans, and scholars it is vital that we fully appreciate the uses to which staged Shakespeare is put, and that we engage with ideas which may be communicated, endorsed, and accepted simply by virtue of being 'Shakespeare's'. As Gajowski has written, Shakespeare is 'a privileged site from which to comment on society in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries'.<sup>31</sup> It is for reasons of privilege and reach that I restrict my attention to the Globe, RSC, and National theatres only.

My research is further shaped by my understanding of the term 'present', an evanescent and largely indefinable concept. While the present always terminates in the here and now, the moment at which 'pastness' ends and 'present' begins is never wholly fixed. The present cultural moment, and our understanding of what that moment means, is relentlessly acted upon by what has gone before, the past moulding our experience of the present. New productions recall past stagings, and audiences bring memories of earlier performances into the theatre when attending a new show. I am nevertheless anxious to acknowledge a common sense of a shared cultural era which may be understood as 'the present', a time derived from the past which still retains a distinct sense of being 'of the current moment'. Seeking to reconcile the present with the past which acts upon it, I have elected to concentrate my attentions on those RSC, Globe, and National Theatre productions which took place over the past two decades (1991-2011), while retaining an

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<sup>31</sup> *Presentism, Gender, and Sexuality in Shakespeare*, p. 17.

ear to hear echoes of earlier productions which may have influenced the performances taking place in today's British theatres.

This thesis begins with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theories and concepts of female ageing which are discussed in Chapter One; however, its driving concern is with the work carried out by present-day performances of early modern plays. Throughout, I draw on episodes from recent productions as a means not only of shining a spotlight on the anxieties and oddities of today's performance of female ageing which, I will argue, are present across Globe, National, and RSC stages, but also as a way of pushing that argument forward, of drawing parallels across plays, productions, and characters, and of building a broader sense of the present-day tension surrounding the performance of early modern old women characters. I do not attempt to account for the full breadth of early modern drama's depictions of female ageing as they may be manifested on present-day stages. Instead, I choose Shakespeare as my playwright of focus for similar reasons to those which prompted my selection of the National, Globe, and RSC as my theatre companies. Shakespeare's present-day status as a benchmark of British literary culture, his seemingly inevitable invocation in any public discussion of early modern drama (witness Gardner's remarks on Shakespearean characters delivered in response to Walters's exhibition presented alongside a production of a Thomas Middleton play), the sheer volume of Shakespearean productions in comparison to productions of plays authored by other early modern playwrights, and his lasting 'celebrity', make him a central figure in any project seeking to understand how early modern drama functions on present-day stages. In choosing to concentrate on Shakespeare I am at once acknowledging and perpetuating the far greater afterlife and richer endowment of cultural capital afforded to him than to his contemporaries.<sup>32</sup> The

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<sup>32</sup> See Emma Smith, 'Performing Relevance/Relevant Performances: Shakespeare, Jonson, Hitchcock', in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies*, ed. Sarah Werner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 147-61.

benefits of focusing on Shakespeare are tempered by the disadvantages of taking the work of one playwright in isolation from his contemporaries in what was a dynamic and collaborative era of theatrical practice. While I believe the subject-matter of my thesis renders my choice inevitable, there are undoubtedly other theses to be written which may study representations and performances of female ageing found elsewhere in early modern drama. My study of Shakespeare alone necessarily takes him at a false remove from his contexts. The benefit of this choice, however, is that it makes available a present-day afterlife of unparalleled richness, one best qualified to provide the materials necessary for my study.

Much of the research supporting this thesis was carried out in the archives of theatre performance at Stratford-upon-Avon and London. Each of the theatre companies I study maintains a well-stocked performance archive featuring artefacts of stagings ranging from stage design blueprints and fabric scraps to fully digitised recordings and searchable online image directories. A great deal of time was spent in the archives consulting these and other materials in an effort to recover and understand past productions. I examined and documented photographs, newspaper reviews, prompt-books, actors' interviews, costumes, sketches, plans, and DVD and video recordings.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will draw repeatedly on these materials in my readings of the plays and their recent performances.

When selecting my materials, my strategy has been to range as broadly as possible in the records and archives of the theatres of my study, in order to gain the fullest possible sense of the plays as they recently have been performed and received. I did not seek to visit other archives, or to consult smaller or regional collections attached to local centres of

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<sup>33</sup> As a student researcher, some materials were more readily available than others: face-to-face interviews with performers were agreed to on only one occasion, and complete archived stage costumes could not be accessed. By contrast, photographs, documentation, scraps of fabric, recorded productions, prompt-books, minutes of rehearsals, and archived media reports were accessible and valuable.

performance; rather, I chose to linger in the better-stocked, more easily accessed, and carefully curated collections of the RSC, National, and Globe Theatres. The dominance of these archives in my work, like the theatres to which they are attached, should be acknowledged as a drawback. The problems associated with the archives I have consulted are reflected in the materials themselves: like the archives of which they form a part, the prompt-books, newspaper reviews, photographs, and recordings I rely on assert an authority of performance memory at once disarming and dangerous. Theatre archives, like all archives, claim sovereignty of memory; they assert the impossibility of alternative performance histories beyond their walls, proposing to account for the entirety of an event or experience in their collation of records.<sup>34</sup> Their task is the containment and management of an excess of recollection. In executing this task, the acts of collecting, choosing, cataloguing, retrieving, and occasionally exhibiting in which archivists engage involve a choice or choices made between alternative possible records and systems.<sup>35</sup> There is a sense in which the archives of performance in which I have worked have conditioned my arguments before they were made, by the acts of selection which took place long before I encountered their contents: ‘Putting the matter bluntly, an archive produces history just as much as it records and preserves history’.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Richard W. Schoch, ‘Shakespeare the Victorian’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, pp. 233-48 (p. 236). On the archive as a site of authority and the exercise of power, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Paul J. Voss and Marta L. Werner, ‘Toward a poetics of the archive: Introduction’, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 32: 1 (1999), i-viii (p. i).

<sup>35</sup> Lauren Shohet writes that ‘[t]he lure of unmediated access is a dream’; ‘[a]rchives are curated by professionals who filter acquisitions and evaluate retention, and they are often built upon collections assembled for a particular proprietor’s interests’. Lauren Shohet, ‘YouTube, Use, and the Idea of the Archive’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 38 (2010), 68-76 (pp. 73-4). See Derrida; Voss and Werner; and David Greetham, “‘Who’s in, who’s out’: The cultural poetics of archival exclusion”, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 32: 1 (1999), 1-28. See however Kate Dorney, ‘The Ordering of Things: Allure, Access, and Archives’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 28: 1 (2010), 19-36 for a reading of the archive from the archive worker’s perspective.

<sup>36</sup> Schoch, p. 236. Elizabeth Schafer has further noted of the theatre archive that it is ‘particularly subject to space constraints’: ‘put crudely, sets and costumes are less likely to be well archived because they are difficult to preserve, bulky, costly and eminently recyclable’. Elizabeth Schafer, ‘Performance Editions, Editing and Editors’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 59 (2006), 198-212 (p. 202).

Neither archives nor their materials are apolitical and they should not be thought of as neutral or dispassionate markers of past theatrical events.<sup>37</sup> Peter Holland has shown how the prompt book is not an objective record of performance but rather a single, subjective interpretation produced in the rehearsal space at a particular point in a play's evolution.<sup>38</sup> The photographer's-eye view on a performance is angled and focused in close-up as the audience member's perspective will never be; video recordings, while helpful, present shallow reproductions of performances, viewed and heard alone in a darkened room through a set of headphones. Among scholars working in theatre history, the newspaper review has long been held to be a research tool of great importance, a fact which has been problematised by Elizabeth Schafer, Paul Prescott, and Peter Holland.<sup>39</sup> Reviews promise a reconstitution, if not of the moment of performance, then of one audience member's memory, experience, and sense of a production. In doing so, they offer a point of entry into what was found meaningful and memorable in the staging.<sup>40</sup> These recorded memories, however, are targeted towards a particular readership, with the tone of reviews sometimes seeming to mirror the political orientation of the publication. This thesis uses national newspaper reviews throughout; like many students of performed Shakespeare, I afford such reviews a significant degree of authority. Given the apparent bias at work in some reviews – 'this captivating Cleopatra suddenly looks like the raddled,

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<sup>37</sup> Nor, indeed, are productions themselves necessarily apolitical; Shakespeare's plays are on occasion revived to serve what can read as a political purpose. For one example of a performance history of *Henry V* which emphasises this, see *King Henry V*, ed. Emma Smith, *Shakespeare in Production* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Peter Holland, 'The Lost Workers: Process, Performance and the Archive', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 28: 1 (2010), 7-18. On the problems of prompt books, see also Schafer, 'Performance Editions', (pp. 203-4).

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Schafer, *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1998), p. 11; Paul Prescott, 'Inheriting the Globe: The Reception of Shakespearean Space and Audience in Contemporary Reviewing', in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, pp. 359-75; Peter Holland, *English Shakespeares: Shakespeare on the English stage in the 1990s* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997). See also Gay, *As She Likes It*, pp. 10-3.

<sup>40</sup> On theatre criticism's role in the establishment of a tradition of great performances and performers, see David Roberts, 'Shakespeare, Theater Criticism, and the Acting Tradition', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53: 3 (2002), 341-61. Academic reviews too can play a role in the study of performed Shakespeare: for thoughts on the workings of the academic review as published in a scholarly journal, see Jeremy Lopez, 'Spreading the Shakespeare Gospel: A Rhetorical History of the Academic Theater Review', in *New Directions in Renaissance Drama and Performance Studies*, pp. 109-28.

overweight, ageing woman she actually is’ – this authority can be unsettling.<sup>41</sup> Reviews such as this one by Charles Spencer seem to bring to bear on the play a memory of previous productions, and an insistence upon a received or prefabricated understanding of the character Cleopatra ‘actually is’. In doing so, the problems they pose become the objects of my thesis’ interest, revealing something of the ways in which Shakespeare is acted upon to articulate an idea of ageing womanhood at once descended from and separate to that which underpins the written plays themselves.

Performance editions and performance histories of Shakespeare’s plays such as the Manchester University Press *Shakespeare in Performance* series and the Cambridge University Press *Shakespeare in Production* series are based in archival research and offer an alternative means of recalling performance, providing students and theatre historians with an initial line of approach to productions. Manchester’s essay-style analyses of performed plays, often grouping productions by period, give comprehensive interpretative overviews of stagings; Cambridge’s editions couch the New Cambridge Shakespeare texts in theatre history, footnoting each line with reviews, accounts, and commentary from the stage. The Oxford Shakespeare and Arden Shakespeare series too, while serving as edited play texts in the first instance, dedicate increasing proportions of their introductory material to performance history and in doing so provide helpful directions for students of the recent stage. I draw on all four series throughout my thesis, consulting them for evidence of performance practices as well as for textual support and insight. Inevitably, no single edition, essay, or indeed thesis can ever serve to account for the full multiplicity and breadth of a performance or production, there being as many versions of that production as there were audience members and participants in attendance. Rather than despairing in the difficulty of ever fully recovering the ‘meaning’ of a performance or, by extension, the

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<sup>41</sup> Charles Spencer, ‘A comedy of bewitchment’, *Daily Telegraph*, 9 November 1992.

entirety of the work that performance carries out, my thesis takes its cue from the very impossibility of finalising the meaning of a play, character, or production, seeking instead to understand how and why the absence of finality has been filled with absolutisms such as that quoted from the *Telegraph*'s Charles Spencer above.

The nature of the object of my study is such that each scholar who was to approach the topic could potentially draw a different set of conclusions and write a different thesis on the work carried out by Shakespeare's old and ageing female characters on British stages today. It has been my strategy to focus my attention on what may broadly be understood to be major productions, delivered by large, successful theatre companies in key centres of Shakespearean performance. My logic in doing so is that these choices allow me the closest possible access to the version of Shakespeare which is most widely received and reproduced in the public sphere. The study of smaller productions, of avant-garde performance or alternative theatre, or indeed a study with a slightly different focus, such as one which prioritised the ways in which the characters it studied 'spoke back' to their problematic representation and treatment, could have generated a different set of conclusions as to what happens on a British stage today when Shakespeare's older women are performed. It is possible that my approach has exposed a more conservative set of perspectives on ageing womanhood than would otherwise have been unearthed had an alternative methodology been adhered to. Nonetheless, given the weight of cultural capital and influence associated with the theatres and productions I study, the newspaper reviews I read, and the archives in which I work, the light my research hopes to shine on the frequently disparaging attitudes towards female old age circulating in the staging of Shakespeare today should be at once revealing and necessary.

The thesis unfolds across five chapters. I begin with a short historical contextualisation of the representation of older women in Shakespeare, outlining the early

modern theory of human ageing and the female body, and, briefly, the interface between this thinking and the probable performance conditions of ageing female roles on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London stages. This historical context serves as the foundation for the succeeding chapters and readings, each of which is based around one of four themes (magic, motherhood, sexuality, and memory). In Chapter Two I consider magic and the ageing woman, drawing out the ideas of performance, witchcraft, stage appearance, and the ageing body which resonate across *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*. My third chapter studies Shakespeare's representations of motherhood in old age: I explore the operation of aged maternal vocality, theatrical acoustics, and silence across *Coriolanus*, *King John*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. My fourth chapter considers how the ageing woman's sexuality is represented and talked about, examining Shakespeare's breaches of early modern age-theory and the plays' anxious responses in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet*. Having moved through ideas of watching, hearing, and reviewing ageing women in Shakespeare's plays, my fifth chapter on female ageing and memory considers the old woman in *Richard III* as a (problematic) rememberer of earlier narrative and performative histories. Some brief concluding remarks complete the thesis and establish directions for future research.

The aim of my thesis is to extend in new directions the existing critical thinking on Shakespeare's representations of ageing women and on our re-articulation of those representations on present-day stages. Across five chapters it demonstrates a pervasive and lasting anxiety circulating around the body of the older woman, an anxiety made manifest in Shakespeare's early modern plays and performed anew in today's major theatres. Britain's population, as we have seen, is greying rapidly; a study of the version of female ageing we articulate when we stage a Shakespeare play today is long overdue.

## *Chapter One*

### *You Are Nothing Then: Age in Early Modern England*

Writing in 1594, French physician and gerontologist André du Laurens began his *Discourse of the Preseruation of the sight* (translated by Richard Surphlet in 1599) with a dedication to the ageing Duchess of Uzès.<sup>1</sup> In his dedication, du Laurens understands himself to have been tasked by God to be ‘the meanes for the lengthening of your yeares, and making of your old age more blessed and happie’.<sup>2</sup> Despite his claim that the Duchess has ‘not felt any eclipse of your vigour and lustines’ with her advancing years, du Laurens’s subsequent listing of her ailments suggests otherwise: ‘In your right eye, you haue some small beginnings of a Cataract’; ‘You feele at certaine times some touches of the windie melancholie’; ‘The thing that is most tedious and troublesome vnto you, is those pettie distillations and fluxes of humours which fall down vpon your eyes, teeth, armes and legges’.<sup>3</sup> The *Discourse* is presented to the Duchess as a means of addressing these symptoms, with separate sections treating of ‘*the sight*’, ‘*melancholie*’, and ‘*Rheumes*’: what is more, ‘vnto these in the ende I haue ioyned a little treatise of Olde age, which may bee for your vse against the time to come’.<sup>4</sup> Seeming to rethink the implications of his words, however, the author subsequently shifts his tone, stating that ‘no man can call you old in any respect, if it were not that you are past fiftie, and that custome in accounts hath designed the first degree of old age to this number’.<sup>5</sup> Indicating his addressee’s discontent at the onset of age, du Laurens concludes with a hearty ‘Cheere vp your selfe then

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Du Laurens, *A Discourse of the Preseruation of the sight; of Melancholike diseases; of Rheumes, and of Old age*, trans. Richard Surphlet (London: 1599).

<sup>2</sup> Du Laurens, *A Discourse*, sig. A4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Du Laurens, *A Discourse*, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Du Laurens, *A Discourse*, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Du Laurens, *A Discourse*, sig. B1<sup>r</sup>.

Madame, you are but yet on the first step of your old age, which is ouergrowne with flourishing greene, and afoording an vndaunted courage'.<sup>6</sup> The preface is complex, presenting two early modern approaches to old age side by side, the chronological and the symptomatological. In this brief opening chapter I will attempt to unpick some of the early modern thinking about ageing which we see at work in Du Laurens's dedication and elsewhere in the period. In doing so, I will begin the thesis' work of examining the implications of early modern theories of old age for the writing of Shakespeare's plays and for their performance in the present day.

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What did 'old age' mean in early modern England? In chronological terms, as du Laurens suggests, senescence for both men and women can be understood to have begun around the age of fifty years, with old age proper emerging in the mid-sixties. Using evidence gathered from parish records, a presence of a little more than three women aged over sixty per hundred early modern individuals can be estimated.<sup>7</sup> The old woman, then, was not a rare sight, despite her average life expectancy between 1540 and 1800 being just thirty-five years.<sup>8</sup> Historians of the elderly until recently have largely neglected the study of the experience of the old woman in Shakespeare's England: as Lynn Botelho and Pat

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<sup>6</sup> Du Laurens, *A Discourse*, sig. B1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Alice Tobriner has argued that the over-sixties of both genders composed 'about 6½%' of the population in Tudor and Stuart times; Pat Thane has calculated that 'about 7% of the population' was aged over sixty in 1581. Alice Tobriner, 'Old Age in Tudor-Stuart Broadside Ballads', *Folklore*, 102: 2 (1991), 149-74 (p. 151); Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Life expectancy statistics were heavily skewed by high levels of infant and childhood mortality, but '[t]hose who survived the hazardous earlier years of life in medieval and early modern England had a respectable chance of living at least into what would now be defined as middle age – that is, their late forties and fifties – and often for longer still': Thane, p. 19.

Thane have observed, ‘within old age studies the battle for gender analysis has had to be fought once again’.<sup>9</sup> Some social and cultural historians are beginning to establish a field of early modern old women’s studies, with much work having been done in recent years to develop a nuanced sense of the meaning of female old age in the period, and to recover an understanding of the variety of elderly female experiences at the time.<sup>10</sup> Scholarly accounts of the early modern elderly woman’s experience are often split, as Lynn Botelho has complained, between ideas of female old age as devastatingly lonely and ‘worthy of an old hag or suspected witch’ and, alternatively, full of ‘love, and good cheer’ shared with children and grandchildren by the fireside.<sup>11</sup> Outside of court circles there was undoubtedly much poverty and hardship among the early modern elderly, a situation which has been thought to have been reflected on the stage: Anthony Ellis has associated the stage figure of the *senex* or comic old man with the contemporary rise in the numbers of aged poor in late Elizabethan England.<sup>12</sup>

Ellis’s work identifies a sense of anxiety towards old men characters at work on the early modern stage, an anxiety which he finds to be symbolically representative of what he terms a concurrent ‘crisis of the elderly’.<sup>13</sup> Jeanne Addison Roberts has developed similar

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<sup>9</sup> Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane, eds., *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> For a range of definitions of old age in early modern England which seek to account for discrepancies between subjective and objective statements of age, see Anthony Ellis, *Old Age*, especially ‘Introduction’; Aki C. L. Beam, “‘Should I As Yet Call You Old?’: Testing the Boundaries of Female Old Age in Early Modern England”, in *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 95-116; Thane, p. 24; Janet Roebuck, ‘When Does “Old Age” Begin? The Evolution of the English Definition’, *Journal of Social History*, 12: 3 (1979), 416-28.

<sup>11</sup> Lynn Botelho, “‘The old woman’s wish’: widows by the family fire? Widows’ old age provisions in rural England, 1500-1700”, *The History of the Family*, 7: 1 (2002), 59-78 (p. 60). A range of representations of elderly female experience spanning a spectrum from highly negative to highly positive may be found in Tobriner; Thane; Beam; Margaret Pelling, ‘Thoroughly Resented? Older Women and the Medical Role in Early Modern London’, in *Women, Science and Medicine 1500-1700: Mothers and Sisters of the Royal Society*, eds. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1997), pp. 63-88; Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1998); and Amy M. Froide, ‘Old maids: the lifecycle of single women in early modern England’, in *Women and Ageing*, pp. 89-110.

<sup>12</sup> Ellis, *Old Age*, pp. 10-11; see also Anthony Ellis, ‘Senescence in Jonson’s *Alchemist*: Magic, Mortality, and the Debasement of (the Golden) Age’, *Ben Jonson Journal*, 12 (2005), 23-44.

<sup>13</sup> Ellis, *Old Age*, p. 10.

thinking on the staged old woman, whom she finds to speak to a tapestry of early modern fears towards powerful contemporary female rulers, the association of old women with care for the dead, and ‘physical decay [and] crooked and deformed bodies’.<sup>14</sup> The anxieties of male and female old age at work in the period and pinpointed by Ellis and Roberts will be found to resonate among the characters I study. Much of the thesis will serve to explore the unease surrounding the figure of the aged woman in Shakespeare’s drama, tracing the initial dramatic responses to the old woman inscribed in the plays alongside their present-day reformations and reworkings. I will find fears of disintegrating, decrepit female bodies to underwrite much of the anxiety of age at work in the plays. In order to understand those unstable ageing female bodies, we need first to understand the physiology of early modern ageing.

Theories of ageing in Shakespeare’s England were founded in the humoral physiology of the time, a system of thought which understood the body to be composed of fluctuating combinations of four ‘humours’: blood, phlegm, choler (or yellow bile), and melancholy (or black bile).<sup>15</sup> Derived from Hippocrates via Galen, this dominant approach to the early modern body believed health to be a matter of maintaining the optimal balance of the humours; illness was understood to result from an excess of one humour or a shortage of another. Galenic thought was all-encompassing in early modern England,

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<sup>14</sup> Jeanne Addison Roberts, ‘The Crone in English Renaissance Drama’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 15 (2002), 116-37 (p. 129).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Elyot, *The Castell of Health, Corrected, and in some places Augmented* (London: 1595), sig. C2<sup>v</sup>; William Bullein, *The Gouernment of Health* (London: 1595), sig. C5<sup>r</sup>; William Vaughan, *Approved Directions for Health, both Naturall and Artificiall* (London: 1612), pp. 121-2. See also Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), especially ‘Introduction: Civilizing the Humoral Body’, pp. 1-23; for further scholarship on the early modern body in literature, see Peter Stallybrass, ‘Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed’, in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 123-42; Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the human body in Renaissance culture* (London: Routledge, 1995); Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); and *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (London: Routledge, 1997).

reaching beyond the human body to embrace the natural world: animals and plants also were believed to be composed of a balance of humours, the dominant humour varying by species. Accordingly, an unwell individual could recover health by consuming food, drinks, or medicines which would boost a humour in which one was lacking, or counteract one which was present in excess.<sup>16</sup> Each humour had an associated temperature and consistency, with blood believed to be warm and wet, phlegm cold and wet, cholera warm and dry, and melancholy cold and dry.<sup>17</sup> Temperature, texture, and humours were closely interlinked: an individual diagnosed with an illness caused by excessive phlegm, for instance, could be treated by administering medicines or foods which would heat, dry, and rebalance the body, evening out the effects of a glut of the cold, wet humour.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of this humoral physiology, ageing in early modern England was experienced as a gradual process unfolding across the lifespan which brought about the cooling and drying of the bodily humours. As a result, melancholy was thought to be the dominant humour among the aged: for Pedro Mexia, first translated into English in 1571, ‘We in this age are cold and dry, of complexion none other or better then Melancouly’.<sup>19</sup> A newborn baby began life with a ‘greate aboundance of natural heate’ and moisture.<sup>20</sup> This moist heat was associated with blood, which was thought to dissipate slowly across the lifespan, cooling and drying the body until eventual death. Robert Burton believed melancholy, or ‘blacke cholera’, to be ‘super-abundant in [the elderly]’, naming old age as a cause of heightened levels of melancholy: ‘olde age, which being colde and dry, and of the same quality as melancholy is, must needs cause it by diminution of spirits and

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<sup>16</sup> Elyot, sig. C2<sup>v</sup>; see also Thomas Cogan, *The Hauen of Health* (London: 1596).

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie* (London: 1586), pp. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Elyot’s highly popular *Castell of Health* which sets out the health benefits of a wide range of foods. Excesses of any given humour could also be treated by bloodletting or purging, reducing and rebalancing the body’s levels of the troubling humour: see also Nicholas Gyer, *The English Phlebotomy: or, Method and way of healing by letting of blood* (London: 1592).

<sup>19</sup> Pedro Mexia, *The Forest or Collection of Historyes*, trans. Thomas Fortescue (London: 1576), fol. 38<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Levinus Lemnius, *The Touchstone of Complexions*, trans. Thomas Newton (London: 1581), fol. 29<sup>v</sup>; for more on the constitution of newborns, see Bullein, sig. C2<sup>v</sup> and Cogan, sigs. M7<sup>v</sup>, M8<sup>r</sup>.

substance'.<sup>21</sup> The association between old age and melancholy in drama was bidirectional, however; grief, a naturally melancholic state, was thought to accelerate the process of ageing. *Romeo and Juliet*'s Lady Capulet claims that 'I was your mother much upon these years / That you are now a maid' (1.3.74-5), making her at most twenty-eight years old; her later statement that 'this sight of death is as a bell / That warns my old age to a sepulchre' (5.3.205-6) suggests she has aged through the double deaths of Juliet.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Webster's *White Devil* has Francisco announce to Flamineo that 'Your reverend mother / Is grown a very old woman in two hours' (5.4.49-50) following the murder of her son Marcello, the character ageing through her grief and its associated melancholy.<sup>23</sup>

As blood receded over time, then, the body cooled and dried. This process was phased, believed to occur gradually across a number of life stages which are still recognisable today. Henry Cuffe defined an age or life stage as 'a period and tearme of mans life, wherein his naturall complexion and temperature naturally and of its owne accord is evidently changed'.<sup>24</sup> Following this sense of distinguishable life stages, early modern theorists of ageing postulated between three and twelve stages of life, expanding on Aristotelian and Ovidian formulations. While Aristotle identified three stages (youth, middle age, and old age), and Ovid, working around the seasons of the year, posited four (infancy, youth, middle age, and old age), some early modern writers built their theories around frameworks such as the months of the year, developing schemes as extended as Robert Farley's twelve-stage theory of ageing.<sup>25</sup> For Farley the individual, like the year,

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy, What It Is* (Oxford: 1621), pp. 78-9.

<sup>22</sup> *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997). All quotations from Shakespeare's plays throughout are from this edition, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>23</sup> John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. René Weis (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Henry Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (London: 1607), p. 113.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *A Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique*, trans. Anon. (London: 1637), especially pp. 108-13; *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, ed. E. J. Kenney, 3rd edn (Oxford: OUP, 1998), especially 'The Doctrines of Pythagoras', pp. 354-66.

progressed through ‘Mans birth’, ‘infancie’, ‘Childhood’, ‘Mans young age’, ‘Striplings age’, ‘Youth’, ‘Mans age’, ‘middle age’, ‘age farre spent’, ‘old age’, and ‘Death’; this eleventh stage was succeeded for Farley by a ghostly literary afterlife of ‘Epitaphs on the dead’.<sup>26</sup>

At the time at which Shakespeare was writing his plays, however, scholars were more likely to assign seven or eight stages to an individual’s life. Henry Cuffe wrote of eight stages – infancy (from birth to four years old), ‘our boy hood’ lasting five years to the age of nine, ‘our budding and blossoming age’ from ten to eighteen, youth from eighteen to twenty-five, ‘our Prime’ from twenty-five to approximately forty years old, our ‘Manhood [when] our naturall heat beginnes a little to decay and decline’ up to the age of fifty, and finally two stages of old age: ‘the first [from fifty] wherein our strength and heat are evidently impaired, yet not so much, but that there remaineth a will and readinesse to bee doing’, and the second from ‘our three-score and fiue [...] which they call decrepit old age’.<sup>27</sup> This subdivision of old age into multiple states of capability is common. Du Laurens wrote in his *Discourse* of ‘Infancie, Adolescencie, Youth, Manhood or the constant age, and Old age’; old age he subdivided into three stages of ‘greene’ old age (from fifty to seventy) ‘accompanied with prudence, full of experience, and fit to gouerne’, middle old age from ‘seuentie yeeres’ to an unspecified later age, and finally ‘the last olde age, which is called decrepite’, which immediately preceded death.<sup>28</sup> Like du Laurens, Thomas Wright fragmented the lifespan into seven stages: ‘*infantia*’ from birth to age seven, ‘*pueritia*’ to fourteen, ‘*adolescencia*’ to age twenty-one, ‘*iuentus*’ to twenty-eight, ‘*in statu virili*’ (‘manhood’, to age forty-nine), ‘*senectus*’ to age sixty-three, and lastly ‘*decrepita aetas*’ or ‘the decrepit state’, lasting, if one was lucky, to the age of seventy-

<sup>26</sup> Robert Farley, *The Kalendar of Mans Life* (London: 1638).

<sup>27</sup> Cuffe, pp. 118-20.

<sup>28</sup> Du Laurens, *A Discourse*, sigs. 2A3<sup>r</sup>-2A4<sup>r</sup>.

seven.<sup>29</sup> Each of Cuffe, du Laurens, and Wright, then, understood an initial decline into age to begin at fifty, with true, or ‘decrepit’, old age coming at a later stage, the mid-sixties or age seventy. Levinus Lemnius, too, followed this pattern in his theorisation of age: while for Lemnius ‘Mans Age’ or middle age lasted only ‘to the fiftieth yeare or somewhat further’, the body experienced ‘no greate mutation, til sixty three, or sixty fiue yeares of age’ at which point a homogenous yet gradually declining ‘Old Age’ was entered, which ‘hath no tyme to it appoynted, but to liue as longe as he may’.<sup>30</sup> Pedro Mexia’s framework of ageing as translated in *The Forest* timed old age as emerging slightly later. He outlined seven stages of life (infancy, childhood, ‘Adolescencie’, youth, manhood, ‘Senectus’ from fifty-seven to sixty-eight, and decrepit old age up to eighty-eight) then allowed for an eighth potential stage of second childhood beyond the eighty-eighth year: ‘if any among us passe now this last age [...] the same then returneth to the state in manner of infancy [...] by reason whereof, these ancient and white hedded fathers shew them selues none other, then little babes’.<sup>31</sup>

These life-stage developmental schemes of age had a presence on the early modern stage, in Shakespeare’s drama as in the drama of his contemporaries. When Rosencrantz tells Hamlet that ‘they say an old man is twice a child’, he echoes commonplaces elsewhere in the drama of the time, as in Thomas Middleton’s Duchess’s comment that ‘an old mans twice a childe’.<sup>32</sup> For Lady Macbeth, remembering theories of the drying-up of blood with age, it is a surprise that ‘the old man [...] had so much blood in him’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Wright, *A Succinct Philosophicall declaration of the nature of Clymactericall yeeres* (London: 1604), sig. B3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Lemnius, fol. 30<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Mexia, fols. 37<sup>r</sup>-38<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, 2.2.368; Thomas Middleton, *The Revengers Tragaedie* (London: 1607), sig. B1<sup>v</sup>. The image of the old man as child is so common in early modern writing as to be suspected to be proverbial, however it is not listed as such in Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950).

<sup>33</sup> *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, 5.1.33-4.

Shakespeare's best-known piece of writing on the subject of age is *As You Like It's* Jaques's famous seven-stage account of the lifespan. Jaques's 'infant' (2.7.142), 'schoolboy' (2.7.144), 'lover' (2.7.146), 'soldier' (2.7.148), 'justice' (2.7.152), 'pantaloon' (2.7.157), and 'second childishness and mere oblivion' (2.7.164) stages are quite obviously derived from the contemporary schemes of ageing in circulation at the time. Like the physiological prose narratives, Jaques's speech concerns itself solely with the male experience of ageing. Perhaps Hamlet has been reading the same material:

*Enter Hamlet reading on a book. [...]*

the satirical slave says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber or plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams.

(2.2.168-99)

Shakespeare, it seems, was well versed in contemporary gerontology.<sup>34</sup>

While early modern theories of male ageing abound in the physiological literature of the time, the thinking on female ageing is more difficult to locate. Pre-empting the neglect of the study of female old age in Shakespeare's writing today is the hesitation among early modern theorists of age to account for the female experience. Little work was printed in the period which treated of the stages of a woman's life, meaning that an appreciation of contemporary beliefs regarding the ageing woman can only be achieved by piecing together snippets of information from various sources. One thing that is known

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<sup>34</sup> The book Hamlet was reading may have been du Laurens' *A Discourse*. At sig. 2A3<sup>v</sup> du Laurens offers up a description of old men which speaks to Hamlet's:

[...] a man shal see the eyes of these old men alwaies distilling teares, their nose alwaies running, there commeth out of their mouth euermore great store of water, yea, they do nothing but cough and spet: [...] their leannes, wrinkles, stifnes of sinewes and skin, and stifnes of joints doe sufficiently shew their drie temperature.

Katherine Duncan-Jones, however, has argued for Aristotle's *Art of Retorique*, which features a lengthy description of male old age, as a more likely referent: private communication from Katherine Duncan-Jones, 16 July 2011.

from prose accounts of ageing is that women were thought to be naturally cooler and wetter in constitution than men across each stage of the lifespan: 'like as men be hot and drie, so be women colde and moist'.<sup>35</sup> Building on this idea of the colder, moister woman, Henry Cuffe and André du Laurens argued that 'the male [...] is by nature better fitted for long life than the female, hauing greater force of heat'.<sup>36</sup> As du Laurens wrote, 'the female groweth old alwaies sooner then the male'; for Cuffe 'women for the most part are sooner perfected than men, being sooner fit for generation, sooner in the flower and prime of their age, and finally, sooner old'.<sup>37</sup> Both Cuffe and du Laurens, then, maintained that a woman's ageing proceeded at a faster rate than that of a man. Du Laurens's argument is undone by his own dedicatory epistle, however; as we have seen, the author states that he is 'perswaded (Madame) that no man can call you old in any respect, if it were not that you are past fiftie [...] you are but yet on the first step of your old age, which is ouergrowne with flourishing greene'.<sup>38</sup> Despite his later claim of accelerated women's ageing, then, du Laurens has here described a pattern of gradual female senescence with functional capability lasting past the age of fifty into the first, 'greene', old age, a narrative which exactly reflects that which he will later set out for the male. A stated generalisation of quick, complete female ageing seems to require adjustment and expansion when a single, more carefully-considered individual is being addressed.

In a similar way, current received ideas of the early modern experience of female ageing as being predicated upon reproductive capacity, trisected into 'maiden', 'mother', and 'crone' stages, would benefit from a look at some more complex early modern approaches to female ageing. Basing her argument on classical three-way divisions of a woman's life into virginity, motherhood, and old age, Jeanne Addison Roberts has written

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<sup>35</sup> Bullein, sig. C6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Cuffe, p. 106.

<sup>37</sup> Du Laurens, sig. 2B1<sup>r</sup>; Cuffe, pp. 106-7.

<sup>38</sup> Du Laurens, sig. B1<sup>r</sup>.

that ‘The English Renaissance still classified women in threes [...]. In conventional parlance women could be maids, wives, or widows’.<sup>39</sup> Lois W. Banner extends the tripartite division into specifically ‘Procreational ability’, complementing Roberts’s discussion of ‘the waxing Maiden, the full Mother, and the waning Crone’.<sup>40</sup> While Roberts’s and Banner’s contributions are helpful, an over-emphasis on fertility as the sole barometer by which a woman’s life was to be measured in the early modern period can cause us to consider female experience only insofar as it relates to (impregnating) masculinity, rather than on its own terms. Furthermore, it can mean that we overlook nuances in the representation of late female life in Shakespeare’s time. Writing in 1579, Thomas Salter’s suggestion of three stages of a woman’s life expressed across young girls, ‘Mothers and auncient Matrones’ seems to agree with Roberts and Banner; he complicates this elsewhere, however, by distinguishing between ‘Maidens and yonge Children’, ‘yong daughters and maidens’, suggesting a fourth stage of the female life.<sup>41</sup> Shakespeare used sexuality itself to disturb schemes of female age which were overly predicated upon fertility. In conversation with Mariana, *Measure for Measure*’s Duke seems to have a firmly-defined sense of the stages of a woman’s life as being threefold:

<i>Duke</i>	What, are you married?
<i>Mariana</i>	No, my lord.
<i>Duke</i>	Are you a maid?
<i>Mariana</i>	No, my lord.
<i>Duke</i>	A widow then?
<i>Mariana</i>	Neither, my lord.

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<sup>39</sup> Jeanne Addison Roberts, ‘Types of Crone: The Nurse and the Wise Woman in English Renaissance Drama’, *Renaissance Papers* (2000), 71-86 (p. 73).

<sup>40</sup> Lois W. Banner, *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power, and Sexuality, A History* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992), p. 15; Roberts, ‘Types of Crone’, p. 71.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Salter, *A Mirrhor mete for all Mothers, Matrones, and Maidens* (London: 1579), sigs. A4<sup>v</sup>, A6<sup>r</sup>.

*Duke*            Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow,  
nor wife!

(5.1.170-6)

Lucio's response is a disruptive and timely reminder of the complexities of female chronology: 'she may be a punk, for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife' (5.1.177-8).

Shakespeare's characters, male and female, span a spectrum of ages. Among the women, they range from the newborn Perdita to the definitively elderly Duchess of York. His characters make themselves more available to age-uncertainty and argument than they do to tripartite categorisation: consider the ambiguous ages of Beatrice, Tamora, and Mistresses Ford and Page. Across four early plays one historical personage, Margaret of Anjou, is depicted in four different states: young girl, wife and lover, warfaring soldier queen, and bereft, cursing ancient.<sup>42</sup> Shakespeare's concern to complicate his representation of female life beyond three restrictive stages, like du Laurens's careful accounting in his dedication, associates his writing with a further system of age set forth by Thomas Wright in 1603, one which was thought to apply equally to men and women – that of the 'Clymactericall' year. Writing on Elizabeth I's death at the age of seventy, a climacteric year thought to be of particular threat to one's health, Wright discusses commonalities of ageing as if male and female experiences differed little: 'Clymax in Greeke signifieth a Staire or a Ladder, and metaphorically is applyed to the yeeres of a man or womans life; as if the whole course of our dayes were a certaine Ladder, compounded of

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<sup>42</sup> See Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scancella Shea, 'Shakespeare's Queen Margaret: Unruly or Unruled?', in *Henry VI: Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas A. Pendleton (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 79-96 for a reading of Margaret's development across the plays which understands her four manifestations as four Jungian archetypes of female ageing (virgin, wife, mother, and crone).

so many steppes'.<sup>43</sup> A final confirmation of the never entirely disparate, often synchronous relationship between the early modern male and female ageing experiences is offered up by



Figure 1: Hans Baldung Grien, *The Seven Ages of Woman* (Leipzig: Museum der Bildenden Künste, 1544) <<http://www.all-art.org/history230-14-2.html>>.

<sup>43</sup> *A Succinct Philosophicall Declaration*, p. 2. Climacteric years were defined by Mexia as years that were 'very dangerous in the whole course and tract of mans life' due to 'the influences of naughtie Planets, as if I would say of Saturn : which [...] caus[eth] great chaunges and alterations euery vii yeere' (*The Forest*, fol. 40<sup>r</sup>). The body was believed gradually to accumulate toxins over a seven-year period, levels peaking in the seventh year. These toxins demanded expulsion in this final, climacteric year, otherwise threatening death. Each seventh year of an individual's life, therefore, was believed uniquely dangerous; Elizabeth I's death at the age of seventy, in her tenth climacteric, prompted Wright's thesis on the subject.

a 1544 painting by Hans Baldung Grien of *The Seven Ages of Women* (Figure 1), an image which redirects towards women the male-oriented age-narratives of Lemnius, du Laurens, Cuffe, and Mexia.<sup>44</sup>

If in fact a woman and a man in early modern England were thought to age in similar stages, as Grien's image, Wright's climacteric theory, and du Laurens's epistle suggest, then the earliest stages of a woman's old age could be expected to be entered from the age of fifty, as du Laurens claims, with a woman being thought of as truly elderly from the mid-sixties onwards. Some social and cultural historians have considered menopause to be the ultimate marker of female old age in the period.<sup>45</sup> While I wish to emphasise both the strong likelihood of post-menopausal change and development among early modern women, it is indeed likely that menopause functioned as an indicator of a woman's advancing age in the period. As is the case today, menopause most usually began around the age of fifty. Philip Barrough's description of the ages of menarche and menopause reveals a set of uniquely female age-experiences which seem to have altered little across the centuries in their chronology:

in manie the floures beginne to flowe the fourteenth yeare, and in verie fewe before the thirteenth or twelfth yeare. And to most women they burst out after the fourteenth yeare [...]. The menstruis also doe stoppe in some the fiftie yeare, or the fiftie fiue yeare, and they flowe not vntill the sixtie yeare, but in fewe women.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Olwen Hufton accounts for such images, acknowledging their representation of a range of female life-stages ('child, adolescent girl at her orisons, betrothed maiden, bride, mother and grandmother'). Her claim that they view the woman's lifecycle only in terms of 'the reproductive process', and her subsequent examination of the woman's life through such a lens (she studies 'Widowhood' [pp. 217-50], rather than the figure of the old woman), encourages a history of femininity entirely predicated on procreation; such a one-dimensional focus threatens to obscure the broader experience of the post-menopausal woman. Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, Volume One 1500-1800* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> See particularly Lynn Botelho, 'Old age and menopause in rural women of early modern Suffolk', in *Women and Ageing*, pp. 43-65, and see Beam.

<sup>46</sup> Philip Barrough, *The Methode of Phisicke* (London: 1583), p. 145.

Thomas Cogan also wrote that ‘the possibility of conception in women commonly ceaseth about fiftie’. These accepted approximate timings remained stable across a century of writing: Andrew Boorde’s *Breuiary of Helthe* explained in 1547 that ‘god hath ordered [menstruation] to all women from .xv. yeres of there age or there about to .l.’<sup>47</sup> Much later, in 1651, Nicholas Culpeper wrote that:

the Menstruis appear not till after the Fourteenth year, in few before, in none til after Twelve. They stop naturally in some Women about the fiftieth year of their age, in some before, they continue in very few Women after the five and fiftieth.<sup>48</sup>

These timings were also articulated on the early modern stage: *The Old Law*’s Duke judges ‘unfruitfullnesse’ to be ‘compleat [...] / In Women at threescore’.<sup>49</sup>

While the chronology of menopause has remained static across the centuries, the event itself held a particular bodily significance in the early modern period. In a younger woman, the halting of the menses was held to be an unnatural and dangerous retention. Menstrual blood itself was believed to be ‘infectious matter’, and unshed menstrual blood was thought to stagnate in the woman’s body, threatening contagion to her and to those around her:

Sometime also it falleth out, that some one or other humor in the body is mixed, besprinckled or bedewed, as it were, with some kind of venemous filth, as when the seedy moysture is kept in and putrifieth : Or menstruall tearmes in vveomen longer retained than is their due course [...] the vapour of these and such like, infecting and decaying the spirits.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Boorde, *The Breuiary of Helthe* (London: 1547), fol. 90<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives* (London: 1651), p. 92.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Middleton, William Rowley and Philip Massinger[?], *The Old Law* (London: 1656), sig. C4<sup>r</sup>. Authorship of this play is uncertain; see *An/The Old Law*, ed. Jeffrey Masten, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 1331-96 (p. 1333).

<sup>50</sup> Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle with Other Philosophers and Phisitions* (London: 1597), sig. [2]E3<sup>r</sup>; Gyer, pp. 136-7.

For Barrough, retained menstrual blood was an ‘euill’ demanding ‘the prouocation and purging of the menstruis’; Bullein described remedies to ‘prouoke and cleanse the termes menstrual’ in the event of their disappearance.<sup>51</sup> The post-menopausal body, crucially, was not believed to lose its content of menstrual blood, which instead accumulated and rotted within the woman: Reginald Scot noted that this now stagnant, putrefying blood could produce the excessive melancholy he believed to be the cause of witchcraft claims.<sup>52</sup> The anonymous *Problemes of Aristotle* describes the consequences for menopausal women and their partners: ‘there is great store of immundicities bred in them [...] & they are by that meanes so infectious, that they infect men with their breath, and then the cough and other infirmities come vpon them’.<sup>53</sup> Alison Rowlands writes that the body of the post-menopausal woman was ‘understood within the early modern economy of bodily fluids as [...] potentially poisonous, because these fluids no longer flowed outwards to purify her body’.<sup>54</sup> The old woman existed in a permanent state of infectiousness, toxicity wafting forth from her body. One example from Reginald Scot tells of how ‘Old women, in whome the ordinarie course of nature faileth in the office of purging their naturall monethlie humors [...] leaue in a looking glasse a certeine froth, by meanes of the grosse vapors proceeding out of their eies’.<sup>55</sup>

A further, associated effect of menopause and the woman’s movement towards old age was that of her perceived loss of femininity and incipient masculinity. John Banister’s *Historie of Man* describes women who, being ‘suppressed of naturall course’ (i.e. past

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<sup>51</sup> Barrough, p. 147; Bullein, sig. H2<sup>v</sup> (and see sig. M3<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>52</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London: 1584), sig. F3<sup>v</sup>. Melancholy, as we saw above, was closely associated with ageing itself.

<sup>53</sup> *The Problemes of Aristotle*, sig. E3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Alison Rowlands, ‘Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany’, *Past and Present*, 173 (2001), 50-89 (p. 58).

<sup>55</sup> *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, sig. 2N3<sup>v</sup>.

menopause) ‘put on virilitie, being then bearded, hoarie, and chau[ng]ed in voyce’.<sup>56</sup> As well as being threateningly infectious, then, the body of the old woman was unnervingly unstable, sliding into masculinity. The result was a deeply unruly imagined old female body; inevitably, such a body was anxiety-inducing. Much of the discomfort towards female age given voice on the early modern stage and which later chapters consider can be traced to this contemporary impression of the aged woman as always potentially physically corrupt and always in need of containment. Peter Stallybrass has shown how imagined early modern female physicality figured contemporary worries regarding the woman’s speech, agency, and sexual behaviour.<sup>57</sup> Gail Kern Paster has explored the early modern sense of the female body as ‘leaky’, identifying an urge towards the management and containment of that leakiness which was bound up with ideas of power.<sup>58</sup> Across the plays I will study, ‘unfeminine’, ‘unruly’, or traditionally masculine behaviour will be seen to be at once typical of the older woman in Shakespeare’s drama and generative of anxiety in both the plays and their recent stagings. The remaining chapters of this thesis demonstrate the work carried out towards the containment of the old woman’s body, speech, and power across Shakespeare’s plays as originally written and performed, and as staged and received in the present day. The plays are seen to be concerned with the control of the unruly ageing woman, often exercised through her silencing; their early effort towards her containment is found to be extended, reproduced, and reinforced in the present day in the hands of Shakespeare’s directors and reviewers.

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<sup>56</sup> John Banister, *The Historie of Man* (London: 1578), sig. B2<sup>v</sup>. For more on old bearded women, see Chapter Two.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Patriarchal Territories’.

<sup>58</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*; for the leaky, ‘grotesque’ body in European Renaissance literature, see also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

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If Shakespeare's plays worked towards the containment of the ageing woman, how was this project effected in the early modern theatre? When considering the plays in their first stagings, we are always on somewhat uncertain, speculative ground. Nonetheless, sufficient evidence exists to allow us to piece together a sense of how a company of players may have approached the performance of a Shakespearean old woman. The most immediately obvious fact to be confronted is that of the male performance of these female roles. Scholars disagree as to the ages of the actors who played Shakespeare's women. Stanley Wells is conservative in his opinion, believing that in early modern English companies of adult actors, such as those for which Shakespeare wrote, 'all female roles were played by boys – i.e., young males with unbroken voices'.<sup>59</sup> Andrew Gurr agrees, writing of the 'small stature and unbroken voices' which equipped young boys to play female parts.<sup>60</sup> Supporting this view of the range of young boy actors extending to incorporate even elderly female parts was the casting of a single, presumably young, actor to play all four roles of '*Comedy, a boy, an ould woman, [and] Ariena Amadines maide*' in an adult company play, *Mucedorus*.<sup>61</sup> Increasingly, however, dissent is emerging. David Mann has collated evidence to support his argument that actors of major female roles in seventeenth-century drama tended to be aged between their mid-teens and early twenties; David Kathman uses early modern narratives of male ageing to bolster his similar argument for Shakespeare's 'boy' actors as being significantly older than the pre-

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<sup>59</sup> Stanley Wells, 'Boys Should be Girls: Shakespeare's Female Roles and the Boy Players', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 25: 2 (2009), 172-7 (p. 172).

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 95.

<sup>61</sup> Anon., *A Most Pleasant Comedie of Mucedorus* (London: 1598), sig. A1<sup>v</sup>. The third quarto (1610) explains that the play was performed at Whitehall by the King's Men, the company for which Shakespeare wrote. This indicates that some of the young actors who first performed Shakespeare's plays may have done so by occupying a range of roles, multiply gendered and multiply aged, at once.

pubescent children that have been envisaged (his estimated median age falls at ‘around sixteen or seventeen’).<sup>62</sup> If Kathman and Mann’s arguments stand, it is likely that at least some of Shakespeare’s female roles first were played by broken-voiced male actors in their late teens and early twenties. Carol Chillington Rutter has found evidence among the papers of Philip Henslowe for mature adult males playing female roles: William Borne, an adult actor, seems to have performed in a ‘womones gowne’.<sup>63</sup> From the *dramatis personae* of Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi* (a King’s Men play like *Mucedorus*) we know that ‘R. Pallant’ doubled the adult male part of the Doctor and the female part of Cariola, a woman who claims to be ‘quick with child’ and who is ‘contracted / To a young gentleman’ (4.2.240-46).<sup>64</sup> Again, this indicates an adult male actor occupying a woman’s role, and not in this case necessarily an aged one. There remains no consensus as to the chronological or physiological ages of the male actors playing Shakespeare’s female roles; even a critic like Kathman, who argues in favour of older actors, claims that puberty was delayed for these actors and that their voices therefore were unbroken.<sup>65</sup> It may be that no set pattern was followed, with casting dependant on the requirements of the role and the player-resources available. The term ‘boy actor’ is, I wish to suggest, inherently unhelpful, restricting our thinking on the performance of femininity on Shakespeare’s stages. This thesis will avoid its use, confining itself instead to the more age-neutral ‘male actor’.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> David Kathman, ‘How Old Were Shakespeare’s Boy Actors?’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 58 (2005), 220-46 (p. 220). Kathman suggests that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century male adolescence, and the unbroken treble voice he associates with it, lasted into a man’s teens and early twenties. Kathman’s argument, however, confuses the early modern life-stage of ‘adolescence’ with ‘puberty’; the timing of early modern puberty was largely similar to today.

<sup>63</sup> *Documents of the Rose Playhouse*, ed. Carol Chillington Rutter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 124-5; see also p. 224.

<sup>64</sup> John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. René Weis (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> For a consideration of the effects of casting older versus younger male actors in female Shakespearean roles on today’s stages, see Abigail Rokison, ‘Authenticity in the twenty-first century: Propeller and Shakespeare’s Globe’, in *Shakespeare in Stages*, eds. Christine Dymkowski and Christie Carson (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 71-90 (pp. 74-7).

<sup>66</sup> On this see also Edel Lamb’s work, which describes how the concept of a ‘child’ actor among the boys’ companies of early modern London was largely age-independent: Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood in the*

With regards to the costuming and appearance of a performed old woman on the early modern stage, we are on similar ground: it is likely that appearance varied on the grounds of the character's class and age, with the ageing Cleopatra requiring very different treatment to that of the wizened Mother Bombie.<sup>67</sup> In thinking about stage appearance, Thomas Lupton's 1578 *All for Money* proves helpful. Describing a woman who claims to be 'a hundred years old', a stage direction states '*Here commeth in mother Croote dressed euill fauoured like an olde woman: Shee shalbe muffled and haue a staffe in her hande and goe stouping*'.<sup>68</sup> Lupton's muffled-up old woman reflects elements of Falstaff's *Merry Wives* old woman disguise, discussed in Chapter Two. It is likely that a wealthier, aged character such as *All's Well That Ends Well*'s Countess of Rousillon wore far more sumptuous, expensive costumes to convey her status.<sup>69</sup> Women earlier in their senescence than Mother Croote – characters more likely to belong to du Laurens's green old age – also required their years to be represented by other means. Aside from effects of movement, such as a subtle bend of the spine or shake of the hand, rudimentary stage cosmetics and wigs may have been used.<sup>70</sup> In a 1965 pamphlet on stage make-up effects, Richard Blore suggested that ink may have been used on Shakespeare's stage to draw wrinkles on the faces of younger actors.<sup>71</sup> Blore did not cite evidence in support of his proposition, however subsequent work has indicated the presence of cosmetics on the early modern stage. Tanya Pollard has described documents supporting the use of face paints on

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*Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies (1599-1613)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>67</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Lupton, *All For Money* (London: 1578), sig. D4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Philip Henslowe's diary describes significant outlays for women's clothing, such as the November 1597 entry recording 'iiij li' for 'viiij y'des of clothe of gow[e]lde for the womones gowne'. *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2nd edn (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 85.

<sup>70</sup> On the bend and shake of aged movement in early modern England, Dekker, Rowley and Ford's *Witch of Edmonton* has Elizabeth Sawyer tell of being 'like a Bow buckl'd and bent together' (Thomas Dekker, William Rowley and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton* [London: 1658], p. 13), and Samuel Harsnett composes a related character sketch of a typical 'olde weather-beaten Croane' who has 'lips trembling with the palsie' (Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* [London: 1603], sig. S4<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>71</sup> Richard Blore, *Stage Make-up* (Bromley: Stacey Publications, 1965), p. 15.

sixteenth-century Coventry stages which have been collated by the *Records of Early English Drama* project: ‘Payd to the paynter for payntyng the players facys, Illj d’.<sup>72</sup> It would be surprising if similar painting of faces did not take place in London theatres. Thomas Tomkis’s 1607 *Lingua* features a scene describing the dressing of ‘a boy like a nice gentlewoman’, an effort which includes ‘painting blew veines and cheekes [...]’.<sup>73</sup> Contemporary character sketches of actors describe the use of makeup: Thomas Overbury’s 1615 description of ‘*An excellent Actor*’ notes that ‘Hee is much affected to painting’, as John Earle’s similar 1628 account of ‘*A Player*’ remarks that ‘He is like our painting Gentle-women, seldome in his owne face’.<sup>74</sup> Remarks such as these indicate that performers were not afraid to use cosmetics in their playing, and make it likely that such paints contributed to the representation of stage ageing by aiding in the creation of wrinkles, shadows, and sagging skin. Wigs, too, were likely to have been used, perhaps with whitening powder to convey greying hair. Henslowe’s *Diary* does not mention wigs among its inventory, however Barnabe Rich’s 1615 *Honestie of This Age* describes

[...] artificiall deformed *Periwigs*, that [...] were fitter to furnish a *Theater*, or for her that in a *Stage play* should represent some Hag of Hel, then to be vsed by a Christian woman [...].<sup>75</sup>

Rich’s words suggest that wigs were a common sight in the theatre. While our understanding of how female old age on the Shakespearean stage looked and was performed can never be perfect, then, there is sufficient extant evidence to indicate that

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<sup>72</sup> Tanya Pollard, ‘Beauty’s Poisonous Properties’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 27 (1999), 187-210 (p. 199). For more on cosmetics on the early modern stage, see Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), and Andrea Stevens, ‘Cosmetic Transformations’, in *Shakespeare’s Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, eds. Karim-Cooper and Stern, pp. 94-117.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Tomkis, *Lingua: Or The Combat of the Tongue, And the fiue Senses For Superiority* (London: 1607), sig. I2<sup>v</sup>. This evidence was first noted in Carol Chillington Rutter, ‘Unpinning Desdemona (Again) or “Who would be toll’d with Wenches in a shew?”’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 28: 1 (2010), 111-32 (p. 111).

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Overbury, *New and Choise Characters* (London: 1615), sigs. M5<sup>v</sup>-M6<sup>r</sup>; John Earle, *Micro-cosmographie* (London: 1628), sig. E3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> Barnabe Rich, *The Honestie of This Age* (London: 1615), sig. C3<sup>r</sup>.

men and boys, wearing costumes tailored to the social status of the roles they played, with painted faces and possibly false hair, bodied forth the contemporary understanding of old womanhood across early modern stages. As later chapters will show, today's costuming of female age at once speaks to and reworks early modern practice, from mad and dishevelled old witches to overtly sexualised Queen Gertrudes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Examining early modern drama and its contemporary supporting literature for evidence of performance practices can bring us some way towards understanding the probable techniques and methods used in Shakespeare's theatres to represent female ageing: as Carol Rutter has written, 'the play operates as an archive of its own world'.<sup>76</sup> Achieving this understanding affords us a firmer grasp of the assumptions of age at work behind the plays and the understandings of female ageing implicitly communicated to an early modern audience when a Shakespearean character such as Gertrude, Margaret, or *King John's* Eleanor was first performed. In order fully to appreciate the nature of what takes place when an ageing woman's role is performed on a present-day stage, it is necessary to have an understanding of the physiological, theoretical, and performative scaffolds on which those roles originally were built and from which juncture today's actors and directors begin their work of retelling, reforming, and reinterpreting the drama. The following two chapters in particular will cover likely original performance conditions in

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<sup>76</sup> Taking the playtexts as a point of departure, Rutter has conducted experiments in early modern performance practices to stand alongside the work of editors choosing between folio and quarto texts. As she writes, 'Shakespeare and his company knew what they were doing. The playwright didn't write scenes the actors couldn't play'. Rutter, 'Unpinning Desdemona (Again)', p. 124.

some detail, demonstrating how stagings in recent times have echoed the work initiated by the plays' earliest performances.

The story of the ageing female body in early modern England as told by its observers is one of unruly, unmanageable excess, with eyes oozing infectious toxicity, noxious humours accumulating and wafting forth, femininity collapsing into nascent masculinity, and decrepitude figuring a living death.<sup>77</sup> The most prolific representative of this early modern take on female ageing still at work in the present day is Shakespeare. Through his plays, a culturally valued and widely endorsed narrative of the ageing woman as anxiety-inducing and uncontrollable continues to be articulated on RSC, Globe, and National Theatre stages, with directors, actors, and reviewers re-speaking and indeed building upon the body of often highly disparaging early modern thinking on female ageing which underlies the plays. While the common language of early modern female age is fundamentally negative in tone, however, the representations set forth in Shakespeare's drama are often nuanced and can prove subtle and challenging. For Shakespeare, physiologies and expectations of age are often of most interest when they are rejected or overturned in order, it seems, to build memorable characters. *As You Like It's* Adam and Orlando have a tender relationship which defies Jaques's bleak depiction of old age ('Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything' [2.7.165]), articulated immediately in advance of their 2.7 entry. The anachronism of the uncontrollably lusty yet aged Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* serves as a further example of the utility Shakespeare found in age theories for character- and plot-building.

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<sup>77</sup> On old age as a living death, see George Minois, *History of Old Age from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, trans. Sarah Hansbury Tenison (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 250. For more, including '[t]he sense of the living body as a burden that can never be cast away', see Emily R. Wilson, *Mocked With Death: Tragic Overliving from Sophocles to Milton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 114.

Shakespeare's depiction of female ageing, like his depiction of women generally, is rarely straightforward. The following chapter's study of magic and the ageing woman in Shakespeare goes some way towards demonstrating this complexity. Across stagings of three plays, we will witness a double movement between the plays' apparent sympathy for the old woman character and their concurrent efforts to contain the threat of her excessive body, knowledge, and power. This ambivalence will repeatedly be seen in the plays and performances studied across the remaining chapters of the thesis, as it seeks to understand the work being carried out in major British theatres when an ageing Shakespearean female character is performed today.

## *Chapter Two*

### *You Should be Women: Magic and the Ageing Woman*

At seventy-seven years old, Dame Judi Dench is, to her chagrin, ‘a woman often described as our greatest national treasure’.<sup>1</sup> Confronted with the title, ‘she makes a face’: ‘I hate that. Too dusty, too in a cupboard, too behind glass, too staid’.<sup>2</sup> Dench’s interpretation of the term suggests the restrictions and subtle conservatism associated with being the object of British national affection; to accept the rank of ‘national treasure’ is to submit oneself, as a performer, to a limiting view of what is believed to be appropriate for such a figure. As a celebrated Shakespearean actor, Dench was named in 2010 by readers of *The Stage* as the ‘greatest stage actor of all time’; responding to the accolade, the *Telegraph*’s Charles Spencer wrote that

The greatness of Dench is [her] transformative power, with which all the greatest actors seem to be blessed. At her best, whatever she is playing, however inappropriate the part might seem in theory, it will prove absolutely right in practice once she has brought her mysterious magic to bear.<sup>3</sup>

Judi Dench’s ‘mysterious magic’, her ‘transformative power’ as an older female actor of classical roles, has proven sanitising: ‘every film she swears in prompts complaints from the public’.<sup>4</sup> As a ‘national treasure’, the ‘magic’ of a Dench performance is made answerable to England’s polite idea of itself, and of the older woman. This idea, as it is

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<sup>1</sup> Kira Cochrane, ‘Judi Dench: “Does nobody ever believe anything I do?”’, *Guardian*, 12 September 2009 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/sep/12/judi-dench-interview>>.

<sup>2</sup> Cochrane; Tim Teeman, ‘Dame Judi Dench: “I am very un-divaish”’, *The Times*, 11 December 2009 <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/film/article6952074.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/article6952074.ece)>.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Spencer, ‘A message to you, Judi Dench’, *Daily Telegraph*, 16 December 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/8207661/A-message-to-you-Judi-Dench.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Cochrane.

articulated across Dench's performances, can afford a kind of power to the older female, yet frequently that power is safely tempered by subordination to a male protagonist (witness her stint as 'M' in the James Bond films) or contained by eventual silencing.<sup>5</sup> The withering scorn poured on Dench's performance as Madame de Marteuil in the 2009 Michael Grandage-directed *Madame de Sade*, a production with an all-female cast, suggests that her pedestal is at its most stable when built on a foundation of safe, unchallenging performances, preferably in complement to a male lead actor.<sup>6</sup>

'National treasure', like the concept of the 'magical', heart-warming performance – 'enjoy the magic of Shakespeare's Globe's first Christmas show' – can serve as a tool of containment.<sup>7</sup> Safely ensconced in the glass-fronted cupboard, Dench is unthreatening; displayed as a national treasure, her body returns every performance to a reiteration of dear old Dame Judi. An audience struggles to see past Dench, and may even be discouraged from doing so; three recent Shakespearean productions of *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* traded relentlessly off the likelihood of their being 'Judi Dench's last stage appearance in a Shakespeare play'.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, given the ephemerality and intangibility of performance, Dench's career as a performer ensures that her presence in the public sphere is tightly controlled. The proscriptive conservatism of the 'national treasure' concept and the seeming impossibility of a challenging Dench performance in a Shakespearean role, when read alongside

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<sup>5</sup> On the silent Dench, see my discussion in Chapter Three of her Countess of Rousillon in Gregory Doran's *All's Well That Ends Well* (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Spencer, in a review which jars with his later account of Dench's 'magic' as an actor, wrote of her 'imperious turn' in this production, 'honed playing such roles as Queen Victoria, Lady Bracknell, Elizabeth I and M', as 'becoming a bit of a bore'. Charles Spencer, 'Madame de Sade at Wyndham's Theatre', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 2009  
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/charlesspencer/5015667/Madame-de-Sade-at-Wyndhams-Theatre-review.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> Press release, 'Christmas Celebrations at Shakespeare's Globe', 3 September 2009  
<[http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/docs/Christmas at Shakespeare's Globe.pdf](http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/docs/Christmas%20at%20Shakespeare's%20Globe.pdf)> [Accessed 19 April 2010].

<sup>8</sup> Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2004', *Shakespeare Survey*, 58 (2005), 268-97 (p. 269). *Merry Wives: The Musical*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2006); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Peter Hall (Kingston: The Rose Theatre, 2010).

Spencer's easy assertion of her 'transformative power' and 'mysterious magic', provides a way into thinking about the concerns of this chapter: the effects of the deployment of the term 'magic' on the performance of an older female Shakespearean role in early modern England and the present day. Thomas Overbury's *New and Choise Characters* describes 'An excellent Actor' who 'charmes our attention [...] by a full and significant action of body'.<sup>9</sup> Situating the magic of theatre, as Overbury did, in a 'full and significant action of body', this chapter explores what happens at the interfaces between texts, actors' bodies, and observing audiences when 'magic' is brought to bear on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Macbeth*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

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The term 'magic' encompassed many kinds of activity in early modern England, with magical practices ranging from the amateur healing and divinations of village 'Wisemen, or Wise-women' to the scholarly research in alchemy and mystical geometry conducted by men like John Dee.<sup>10</sup> Magical conjuration was punishable by imprisonment, confiscation of goods, and (depending on the seriousness of the charm attempted) death.<sup>11</sup> While Robert Greene's Vandermast attempted to distinguish between scholarly magic and the 'grosse and earthly' practices of 'Iuglers, Witches, and vild sorcerers', George

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<sup>9</sup> Overbury, sig. M5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: 1608), p. 175. Dee lived from 1527 to 1609 and was for a time associated with the court of Queen Elizabeth. For a full study of the execution of 'magical' practices – illusions, special effects, ventriloquism, puppetry, etc. – on the early modern English stage, see Philip Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See acts 5. Eliz I c. 16 (1563) and 1 Jas. I c. 12 (1604), in *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*, ed. Marion Gibson (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 3-7.

Gifford's 1587 *Discourse of the subtile Practises of Deuilles* designated all practitioners of magic, however defined, as witches:

A Witch is one that woorketh by the Deuill, or by some deuclish or curious art, either hurting or healing, reuealing thinges secrete, or foretelling thinges to come, which the deuill hath deuised to entangle and snare mens soules withal vnto damnation. The coniuurer, the enchaunter, the sorcerer, the deuiner, and whatsoever other sort there is, are indeede compassed within this circle.<sup>12</sup>

As this passage demonstrates, early moderns placed practitioners of magic into categories at once distinct and highly collapsible. Male practitioners were more usually represented as scholars dabbling in the dark arts, highly educated men working at the limits of knowledge; see for example Greene's satirical representation of 'Frier Bacon, [...] a braue scholler[,] a braue Nigromancer, that he can make women of deuils, and hee can iuggle cats into Costermongers', and Marlowe's tragically over-reaching academic, Doctor Faustus.<sup>13</sup> Female magicians were easily subsumed under the umbrella of 'witch'. 'Witch', as we will see, was conflated with 'wise woman', 'healer', 'prophetess', and even 'bawd' across early modern literature and drama. The suspected witch was typically an old woman (past her sixtieth year), often widowed or impoverished and living on the edges of society: the anonymous *A Rehearsall Both Straung and True* (1579) describes the case of the accused 'Elizabeth Stile [...] widowe, of the age of lxx. yeres, or there aboute', and the anonymous *Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches* tells of 'Joan Cunny [...] widowe, of the age of fourescore yeeres, or ther-about'.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps remembering such

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Greene, *The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay* (London: 1594), sig. E4<sup>r</sup>; George Gifford, *A Discourse of the subtile Practises of Deuilles by Witches and Sorcerers* (London: 1587), sig. B2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Greene, *[F]rier Bacon and Frier Bongay*, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>; Christopher Marlowe, *The tragicall History of D. Faustus* (London: 1604).

<sup>14</sup> Anon., *A Rehearsall Both Straung and True* (London: 1579), sig. A4<sup>r</sup>; Anon., *The Apprehension and Confession of Three Notorious Witches* (London: 1589), sig. A3<sup>r</sup>; see also John Phillips, *The Examination and Confession of certaine Wytches* (London: 1566) which describes 'Mother waterhouse [...] of the age of

cases, Samuel Harsnett defines his ‘true *Idaea* of a Witch’ as ‘an olde weather-beaten Croane’; Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, entirely sceptical in tone, describes ‘One sort of such as are said to bee witches’ as ‘women which be commonly old, lame, blear-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists’.<sup>15</sup> Whether the witch was to be understood as a much-maligned and abused vulnerable old woman, or as a criminal engaged in threatening supernatural acts, was a debate conducted in printed dialogues, scholarly expositions, and pamphlets.<sup>16</sup> This dispute found a further outlet on the stage.<sup>17</sup>

The performed early modern witch was a special case of the staging of an old woman. In an incident discussed further below, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*’s Falstaff recalls how ‘counterfeiting the action of an old woman’ saved him from being ‘set i’ th’stocks, i’ th’common stocks, for a witch’ at the hands of ‘the knave constable’ (4.5.99-100).<sup>18</sup> Falstaff distinguishes between ‘witch’ and ‘old woman’, suggesting that while the

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.lxiiii. yeares’ (sig. A8<sup>v</sup>); and the less specific Anon., *A Detection of Damnable Driftes* (London: 1579) which tells of a witch who is mother to ‘a yong woman of the age of .xxviii. yeres’ (sig. B1<sup>v</sup>). Among the many useful accounts of early modern English witch-beliefs are *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, ed. Barbara Rosen, 2nd edn (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1991); *Witchcraft and Society*; Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996); and James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Harsnett, sig. S4<sup>v</sup>; Scot, sig. C4<sup>r</sup>. There is a wide range of early modern material from which one may gather a sense of the individuals most likely to be accused of, or to claim themselves as culpable in, witchcraft: in addition to those sources already named here and above, see George Gifford, *A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (London: 1593) and James I and VI, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh: 1597). Rosen’s *Witchcraft in England* and Gibson’s *Witchcraft and Society* reproduce many of the existing original documents on early modern witch-trials.

<sup>16</sup> Examples of the debate may be found in James I and VI’s *Daemonologie*; Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*; Gifford’s *Dialogue concerning Witches*; and Burton, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> For a broad range of early modern stage witches, see among others *The Witch of Edmonton*; John Lyly, *Endimion, The Man in the Moone* (London: 1591); John Lyly, *Mother Bombie* (London: 1594); William Shakespeare, *The second Part of Henry the Sixt* (in F); John Marston, *The Wonder of Women or The Tragedie of Sophonisba* (London: 1606); Philip Massinger and John Fletcher, *The Prophetess* (1622) in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies* (London: 1647); Thomas Heywood, *The Wise-woman of Hogsdon* (London: 1638); and Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, *The Late Lancashire Witches* (London: 1634).

<sup>18</sup> *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in *The Norton Shakespeare. Merry Wives* has come to us in two states, Q – *A Most pleasaunt and excellent conceited Comedie, of Syr Iohn Falstaffe, and the merrie Wiues of Windsor* (London: 1602) – and that in the First Folio, *The Merry Wiues of Windsor*, in *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: 1623). The First Folio is hereafter referred to as F. It is suspected

two categories easily collapsed, they remained distinct in their ‘counterfeiting’ or performance. To signify ‘witch’ on stage required more than the performance of aged femininity: it demanded the staging of something wild and entirely unruly, something which approached inhumanity. Complementing the thought of scholars such as Reginald Scot, who wrote of the ‘weaknesse both of bodie and braine’ and the ‘corrupt phantasie’ of those women who claimed supernatural powers, many early modern stage witches were mad or dishevelled: *Endimion*’s Dipsas, for example, is ‘toothlesse, her fingers fatte and short, adorned with long nayles’, *Mother Bombie* is ‘weather-beate[n]’, muttering ‘doggrell rimes and obscure words’, and Elizabeth Sawyer is accused of witchcraft ‘‘Cause I am poor, deform’d and ignorant, / And like a Bow buckl’d and bent together’.<sup>19</sup> In their first stagings, Shakespeare’s witches performed an existence at the extremes of humanity, testing the boundaries of the knowable and intelligible. His witches are physically expansive, uncontained in speech and appearance, and they possess a knowledge beyond general apprehension; in signifying extremity and the unknowable, they are rendered legible as witches.

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by many that *Q Merry Wives* is a memorial reconstruction, possibly of a text altered from its original to suit performance on the London stage as opposed to the court performance often believed to underlie F. This second element, court vs. theatre performance, emerges from arguments about the dating of the play’s first performance which take aspects of the play present in F but missing in Q, including the ‘Latin lesson’ of 4.1, references to Windsor and the Order of the Garter at 5.5.56-73, and the first twenty lines of 1.1 which make jokes out of matters of heraldry, to indicate a first performance of F at the Garter celebrations at Westminster 23 April 1597. See Kathleen O. Irace, *Reforming the “Bad” Quartos: Performance and Provenance of Six Shakespearean First Editions* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1994); Laurie E. Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The “bad” quartos and their contexts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. David Crane, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 1-5, pp. 151-9; but see also *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. Melchiori, who argues (problematically) for a later date, ‘if for no better reason than that [April 1597] assumes the audience’s familiarity with characters that made their first appearances on the stage only one or two years later’ (p. 25). Melchiori suggests that the play cannot be adequately read or appreciated in performance in the absence of an awareness of *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, a claim with which I disagree; see also John Jowett, ‘Book Review: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52: 1 (2001), 138-41. See Jeanne Addison Roberts, ‘*The Merry Wives Q and F: The Vagaries of Progress*’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 8 (1975), 143-75 for an older overview of the history of editorial approaches to the two plays.

<sup>19</sup> *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, sigs. F3<sup>v</sup>, F5<sup>v</sup>. See also Burton, who wrote on the subject of madness that witches ‘doe no such wonders at all, onely their Braines are crazed’ (p. 79). Lyly, *Endimion*, sigs. E2<sup>r-v</sup>; Lyly, *Mother Bombie*, sig. E1<sup>r</sup>; Dekker, Rowley and Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, p. 13.

Shakespeare's most explicit and sustained representation of witchcraft comes in *Macbeth*. Responding to the play's source material in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which recalled 'a strange and vncouth wonder' of 'three women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of elder world', *Macbeth*'s Banquo describes the witches as 'So withered, and so wild in their attire, / That [they] look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth' (1.3.38-40).<sup>20</sup> Banquo's description suggests the witches' dress to be close to the limits of recognisability, such that they exceed understanding, placing them in the realm of the wonderful or 'strange'.<sup>21</sup> Wild, disorderly attire was also a feature of the lecherous Falstaff's old woman/witch disguise in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a man whose efforts to seduce Mistresses Ford and Page are punished across a series of capers. Attempting to escape the jealous Ford, Falstaff dresses as an elderly female visitor, 'the old woman of Brentford' (4.2.71). Unknown to him, Ford 'swears she's a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her' (4.2.71-3) if discovered on the premises. I study the events of the ensuing scene more closely below; for now, Falstaff's disguise, taken as evidence that 'the 'oman is a witch indeed' (4.2.167), may shed some light on what a supposed witch wore on Shakespeare's first stages:

*Mist. Page* [...] there is no woman's gown big enough for him; otherwise he might put on a hat, a muffler, and a kerchief, and so escape. [...]

*Mist. Ford* My maid's aunt, the fat woman of Brentford, has a gown above.

*Mist. Page* On my word, it will serve him; she's as big as he is; and there's her thrummed hat, and her muffler too. – Run up, Sir John.

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<sup>20</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *The Historie of Scotland*, sig. P1<sup>v</sup>, in *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: 1587).

<sup>21</sup> *Macbeth*'s witches signify their strangeness through an assortment of props, costumes, songs, and dances. For similar representations of strangeness see also the stage directions in Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queenes* (London: 1609), sig. A4r, and see Hecate in 1.2, in Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, ed. Marion O'Connor, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, pp. 1129-64.

*Mist. Ford* Go, go, sweet Sir John. Mistress Page and I will look some linen for your head.

*Mist. Page* Quick, quick! We'll come dress you straight. Put on the gown the while.

*Mist. Page* [...] let's go dress him like the witch of Brentford.

(4.2.54-83)

Falstaff is afforded just one hundred and seven lines in which to change costume and gender: the ensuing rush may have contributed to a dishevelled, topsy-turvy appearance. The composites of Falstaff's old woman/suspected witch costume include a fringed hat, a muffler, and linen for the head, to cover the hair and scalp. Disguised in the clothes of the suspected 'witch of Brentford', Falstaff's costume also includes a gown belonging to a woman which is yet like 'no woman's gown'. The supposed witch, in her absence, exceeds the limits of normal female clothing. In her bodily and sartorial excess she signifies witchcraft to Master Ford; existing at a physical extreme as 'the fat woman of Brentford', she makes her identity available for appropriation by the corpulent Falstaff.

This farcical scene of physical and sartorial extremes is of further interest in terms of the stage witch's performance at the limits of knowledge and indeed gender due to Falstaff's visible beard: 'I spy a great peard under his muffler' (4.2.168-9). For Evans, reacting to a glimpse of the man's beard beneath 'his' muffler, the sight is confirmation of witch-status: 'By Jeshu, I think the o'man is a witch indeed. I like not when a o'man has a great peard' (4.2.167-8). On the stage, the appearance of the beard does not disrupt Falstaff's disguise; rather, it adds to it. Bridget Escolme recently has noted that '[m]ost disguises in the early modern theatres simply work'.<sup>22</sup> The technology of early modern theatre was such that to 'put on' costume was to 'put on' character; within the play, Falstaff

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<sup>22</sup> Bridget Escolme, 'Costume, Disguise, and Self-Display', in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, eds. Karim-Cooper and Stern, pp. 118-40 (p. 119).

‘becomes’ the old woman of Brentford by donning her clothes. For Escolme, ‘[a] theatre audience willing to accept that one might don another’s set of clothes and instantly be taken for that other, is an audience that has different expectations about theatrical representation from a modern one’.<sup>23</sup> The disguised Falstaff, signifying for an early modern audience (as for Evans) at once man, woman, and witch, slides between gender categories in a performance of instability to which I return below; for now it is worth remembering that the masculinisation of a woman, signified here by the beard, was in early modern England a symptom of both old age and witchcraft. Scholars of the female body associated such masculinisation with the effects of menopause discussed in the Introduction.<sup>24</sup> Shakespeare writes beards into both *Merry Wives* and *Macbeth*; Banquo’s reaction to *Macbeth*’s witches’ beards suggests that their hairiness marked them out as evading gender:

You should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so.  
(1.3.42-4)

*Macbeth*’s witches cannot be contained by a gendered knowledge-system; on stage, their beards signify their ‘supernatural’ (1.3.129) status, figuring their capacity to exceed gender limitations. While a beard was not necessarily typical of the early modern stage witch, in Shakespeare’s dramaturgy it seems to have aided in the staging of strange wonder and

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<sup>23</sup> Escolme, ‘Costume, Disguise and Self-Display’, p. 119.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Read wrote that ‘in women their courses being stopped, vapors ascend to the chin, from whence a beard doth bud out’. Alexander Read, *The Chirurgicall Lectures of Tumors and Vicers* (London: 1635), sig. R7r. Early modern physiology understood beards, like hair, as ‘excrement’ (Cuffe, p. 118) produced by an excess of bodily humours demanding evacuation; see Will Fisher, ‘Staging the beard: masculinity in early modern English culture’, in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, eds. Jonathan Gill Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp. 230-57 (p. 234). For more on beards generally see Fisher, ‘Staging the beard’; Mark Albert Johnston, ‘Bearded Women in Early Modern England’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 47: 1 (2007), 1-28 and Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006).

excess and the testing of physical limits which transformed an old woman into a witch in the theatre.

Falstaff's beard bears meanings which contextualise the events unfolding on stage into evidence of witchcraft. Will Fisher has described how the early modern stage beard, whether prosthetic or naturally grown, falls between 'costume' and 'prop'.<sup>25</sup> Wigs used to 'produce femininity' similarly served at once as stage props with their own inherent meanings, and as elements of a more broadly-conceived costume.<sup>26</sup> Such wigs may have contributed to the performance of the early modern stage witch. A witch's costume may have included a particularly wild-haired wig: disorderly and unkempt hair was a stage signifier of the mental disturbance associated with witchcraft in early modern England, and Barnabe Rich, as we saw above, has described 'artificiall deformed *Periwigs*' as fit for 'her that in a *Stage play* should represent some Hag of Hel'.<sup>27</sup> Further add-ons or props may have completed the signification of witchcraft; *Macbeth*'s witches, famously, huddle about a stage 'cauldron' (4.1.122), proclaiming the gruesome ingredients to go in the pot. The early modern staging of witchcraft, then, was a performance of excess and the extreme. Each element of the Shakespearean witch's sign-system conveyed a spectacle of strangeness, signifying witchcraft as other potential signifiers ('you should be women') collapsed.

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<sup>25</sup> Fisher, 'Staging the beard', p. 232.

<sup>26</sup> Fisher, 'Staging the beard', p. 231.

<sup>27</sup> The particular mental disturbance represented by unkempt hair on the early modern stage is typically a maddening grief: *Richard III*'s devastated Queen Elizabeth enters 'with her hair about her ears' (2.2.34), and France encourages *King John*'s distraught Constance to 'Bind up your hairs' (3.4.68) after she 'tore them from their bonds' (3.4.70). While no mention is made of Shakespeare's witches' hair (Falstaff's is swaddled in linen, kept carefully under wraps), Lyly's Dipsas tells of her 'horie heares', perhaps indicating her actor wore a disorderly wig (*Endimion*, sig. C2<sup>r</sup>).

The woman accused of witchcraft in early modern drama was often unruly, uncontrolled, unrestrained in her words and behaviours, and (as typically an elderly woman) excessive in her years.<sup>28</sup> The early modern old woman was, as we saw in the previous chapter, a potentially uncontrollable entity; for the old witch-woman the possible failure of bodily containment was confirmed and extended into an excessive, insatiable consumption, one associated with wordy rhetorical excess.<sup>29</sup> Later in the thesis we will encounter two excessively speaking and powerful old female characters, Paulina and Margaret, who find themselves named and often staged as witches. Beginning now instead with a reading of a performance-within-a-performance (the staging of a male ‘actor’ impersonating an absent old woman), I seek to prioritise the performative nature of each instance of aged femininity the thesis will explore. These performances seem to demand careful management: my first reading, of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, finds excessive, uncontrolled, performed and performing bodies, sometimes silent and sometimes authoritatively voiced, to be contained through the deployment of ideas of magic.

The figure of an expansively hungry, ever-eating, and all-consuming old woman shadows many early modern stage witches, including Shakespeare’s.<sup>30</sup> *The Comedy of Errors* names the unseen Nell as ‘a witch’; she is ‘a wondrous fat marriage’, who is ‘No longer from head to foot than from hip to hip’.<sup>31</sup> *The Merry Wives of Windsor* explores

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<sup>28</sup> See Marcus, p. 81; David Schalkwyk, “‘A Lady’s ‘Verily’ is as Potent as a Lord’s’”: Women, Word and Witchcraft in *The Winter’s Tale*”, *English Literary Renaissance*, 22: 2 (1992), 242-72; Shirley Carr Mason, “‘Foul Wrinkled Witch’”: Superstition, Scepticism, and Margaret of Anjou in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*”, *Cahiers Elisabéthains*, 52 (1997), 25-37.

<sup>29</sup> Patricia Parker has discussed the association between the body of the fat woman and a sense of female unruliness, wordiness, and rhetorical excess in *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1987). The early modern witch-body manifested a unique case of the failure of corporeal containment identified among old women in the Introduction: witches were thought to suckle ‘familiar’ spirits or demons on their blood from a hidden nipple. See Purkiss, pp. 133-5, and Willis.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Marston, *Sophonisba*, sig. E4<sup>r</sup>, and Lyly, *Endimion*, sig. E2<sup>v</sup>, for Erichtho and Dipsas.

<sup>31</sup> *The Comedy of Errors*, 3.2.142, 3.2.92, 3.2.112-3.

excessive (large and multiple) bodies across two scenes in which magic is suspected and performed. The first, the Folio's 4.2, sees Falstaff's attempted seduction of Mistress Ford end in his being beaten 'most pitifully' (4.2.174) by her husband due to his unintentional performance as 'the witch of Brentford'. Ford's beating polices both the unruly flesh of the 'whale' (2.1.56) Falstaff and the uncontained, excessive body of the 'old fat woman' (4.5.19) who haunts the fourth act.

Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern have written of early modern acting that what made a 'master' performer was 'a magical capacity for self-erasure in the interests of becoming another'.<sup>32</sup> I am unconvinced that the body of the actor ever disappeared from an audience's view, seeing it instead as bringing its own meaning to bear on the character performed, serving as a medium through which character is established and shaped.<sup>33</sup> Understanding the actor's body in this way allows us to appreciate both the triple-seeing undertaken by audience members watching *Merry Wives* 4.2 and the multiple, excessive presences signified by the actor's body in one moment. Audiences watching 4.2 see across three bodies – the actor's, Falstaff's, and the performed old woman's – to an imagined fourth body, that of 'the witch of Brentford'. The suspicious size of the 'maid's aunt' is repeatedly emphasised and seems to mediate both the comedy and the anxiety generated by the event: 'she's as big as he is'; 'There's an old woman, a fat woman, gone up into his chamber' (4.5.9-10); 'Ha? A fat woman? The knight may be robbed' (4.5.12). Before her

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<sup>32</sup> Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> On this see Barbara Hodgdon, 'Replicating Richard: Body Doubles, Body Politics', *Theatre Journal*, 50: 2 (1998), 207-25; Jeremy Lopez, 'Imagining the Actor's Body on the Early Modern Stage', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 20 (2007), 187-203; Andrew James Hartley, 'Character, Agency and the Familiar Actor', in *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*, eds. Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 158-76; Peter Holland, 'Shakespeare's Two Bodies', in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, pp. 36-56; Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and representation on Shakespeare's stage* (London: Routledge, 2001); Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, p. 24. Aleksandra Wolska ('Rabbits, Machines, and the Ontology of Performance', *Theatre Journal*, 57: 1 [2005], 83-95) approaches the body of the actor from a different direction, describing how character lives on in the signification of the actor's body after a performance has ended.

uncontained and all-consuming body can be controlled under the force of Ford's 'cudgel' (4.2.177), however, an excuse must be found. Magic proves amenable, associating Ford's imagined fat witch with Nell's unrestrained consumption. 'Magic' works at two levels in this scene, then: it indicates the witch whose signified body proves highly effective, making things happen even in her absence, and it describes the theatrical magic at work in the audience's perception of the actor's Falstaff, Falstaff's old woman, and Ford's witch, signified in a single acting body. The conflict of performed persons allows for comedy: the transfer of meaning between the characters signified in one body calls insistent attention to the performativity of the scene, slackening the tensions likely to have been raised on an early modern stage by the presence of a bearded, oddly-dressed, physically expansive old woman named as a witch.

Ford's assertion that his wife's 'maid's aunt, the fat woman of Brentford' is a witch is a Shakespearean innovation, evolving from a piece of early modern cultural history. Audiences hearing the repeated references to Brainford were reminded of 'Jyl of Breynthford', a long-dead 'widow of a homly sort' whose supposed 'testament', in which she 'bequeth[s] a farte' to all and sundry, was printed in verse by Robert Copland in 1562.<sup>34</sup> Gillian of Brainford is twice referred to in Q ('*Gillian of Brainford*, hath a gowne aboute'; 'my maidens Ant, *Gillia[n] of Brainford*'), strengthening the association.<sup>35</sup> The legend of the woman and her will is mentioned in a letter by Thomas Nashe to William Cotton – 'Gillian a Braynfords [wi]ll in which she bequeathed a score of farts amo[n]gst her frendes' – suggesting that she was a well-known figure of fun; she featured in a now

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Copland, *Jyl of breynthfords testament. Newly compiled* (London: 1562), sigs. A2<sup>r</sup>, A4<sup>r</sup>. See also T. F. Thistleton-Dyer, *Folk-lore of Shakespeare* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1884), p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Q *Merry Wives*, sigs. F1<sup>v</sup>, F2<sup>r</sup>.

lost play, *Fryer Fox and Gyllen of Branforde*.<sup>36</sup> ‘Jyl of Breyntford’, like *Merry Wives*’s ‘old woman’, was a woman of physical excess and incontinence, her flatulence and generous dispensation of ‘a score of farts’ speaking to the bulk of Shakespeare’s eventual ‘old fat woman’. The claim of witchcraft, however, is a Shakespearean innovation, inserted into a pre-existing literary and cultural history in order to provide an opportunity for, on one level, Falstaff’s punishment and, on another, the beating-back of the body of an excessive old woman.<sup>37</sup> The *Merry Wives* addition of witchcraft to the ‘Jyl of Breyntford’ narrative proved durable: a later mention of the character in Thomas Dekker and John Webster’s *West-ward hoe* describes her as a witch – ‘that olde Hag *Gillian of Braineфорд* has bewicht me’.<sup>38</sup>

Following his dismissal upstairs, Falstaff re-enters ‘*disguised like an old woman*’ (4.2.155). He has no awareness of what awaits, being absent as Mistresses Ford and Page discuss Ford’s distaste for the ‘old woman of Brentford. He swears she’s a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her’. The wives, themselves standing accused of bodily indiscretion and lack of restraint, are culpable in what follows, these middle-aged women utilising the convenient fat body of the imagined old witch-woman as a means of disciplining a truly incontinent philanderer. Across *Merry Wives*, as we will see, the reformation of Falstaff is conducted by two middle-aged women, themselves past the ‘holiday time of [their] beauty’ (2.1.1-2), and through women, the magical elderly woman proving the ultimate cipher for containment and resolution in the play.

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<sup>36</sup> London, British Library, MS Jul C III, fol. 280 <<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/nashletr.jpg>>. Henslowe’s diary has ‘Lent vnto Thomas downton & samwell Redly the 10 of february 1598 to bye A boocke called fryer fox & gyllen of branforde the some of v<sup>li</sup> x<sup>s</sup>’: *Henslowe’s Diary*, p. 104.

<sup>37</sup> The early modern practice of ‘witch scratching’ encouraged violence to be done to a suspected witch in order to reverse her spells. As Diane Purkiss has explained, ‘[v]iolence could break through the witch’s hardness [thought to be an effect of age’s dessications], or contain her formlessness. [...] Such violence might seem explicable in the light of the witch’s power, but it also seems excessive when offered to the frail body of an old woman by one or more large men’. Purkiss, pp. 129-30.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Dekker and John Webster, *West-ward hoe* (London: 1607), sig. G4<sup>v</sup>.

On learning of the presence of the ‘old woman’ Ford reacts with a speech which converts the fat woman’s bodily excess into a threatening excess of dangerous knowledge lying beyond the reach of ‘simple men’ (4.2.151), a magical knowledge which speaks its secrets in a language not available to Ford. The woman is:

A witch, a quean, an old cozening quean. Have I not forbid her my house? She comes of errands, does she? We are simple men; we do not know what’s brought to pass under the profession of fortune-telling. She works by charms, by spells, by th’figure, and such daubery as this is, beyond our element. We know nothing. – Come down, you witch, you hag, you! Come down, I say!

(4.2.149-155)

Ford’s conversion of problematic physicality into the supernatural knowledge which signifies witchcraft mirrors Shakespeare’s insertion of witchcraft into the ‘Jyl of Breynthford’ narrative; it also figures what Patricia Parker has identified as the literary use of the early modern fat woman’s body to represent excessive, ‘dilatatory’ texts and rhetoric in the period.<sup>39</sup> Ford’s concern is with an excess of knowledge that cannot be contained or made subject to ‘simple men’; he provides no evidence for his witchcraft-accusation, yet the ease with which dubious ‘fatness’ becomes evidence of magical knowledge here and in 4.5 – ‘Ha? A fat woman?’; ‘was’t not the wise woman of Brentford?’ (4.5.21) – suggests that for Ford, as for Banquo and Dromio of Syracuse, excessive physicality and the uncontained body is a marker of the supernatural. By violently redefining the ‘fat woman’ as a witch Ford justifies his beating, silences her ‘fortune-telling’, ‘charms’, and ‘spells’ (the disguised Falstaff does not speak), and disables her inaccessible knowledge.

The scene of Falstaff’s re-entry in an old woman’s clothing stages a performance of age, gender, and violence. The text, as we have seen, offers some guidance as to Falstaff’s

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<sup>39</sup> Parker, pp. 8-35.

female incarnation; actors of the role today typically enter dressed in a jumble of eccentric clothing which recalls the weird and ‘wild attire’ of *Macbeth*’s witches. Gregory Doran’s *Merry Wives: The Musical* adaptation staged at Stratford in 2006 had Simon Callow as Falstaff enter dressed in a long, loose white gown embroidered with navy stars over a dark brown underskirt, a white muffler, and a bright green hat. Chris Luscombe’s 2008 *Merry Wives* at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre featured a similarly jumbled costume: Christopher Benjamin’s Falstaff wore a red underskirt, green gown, yellow hat, white veil, and orange shawl with black edging.<sup>40</sup> The more eccentric costumes, coupled with occasional glimpses of beard, prove amusing in today’s performances. For the early modern playgoer, fractures in Falstaff’s disguise which disturbed his performance of gender – mismatched costuming, a visible beard – threatened the appearance of the witch on stage in a moment of triple-seeing; today, however, such slips prove relieving and generate comedy. By firmly calling to attention the performativity of the moment and the artifice of the ‘old woman’, the scene’s pantomime erases the excessive ageing female body from view. The supernaturally knowledgeable old woman character evading the control of Ford and his fellow ‘simple men’ vanishes from today’s stage, her potential threat negated by the unignorably male actor wearing the costume.

Falstaff’s entrance as an old woman is a highly performative moment, made much of in present-day productions of *Merry Wives*. Actors playing the role frequently adopt a swaggering, hip-swinging walk as they enter in disguise, signalling a performance of femininity while, in their exaggeration, firmly indicating their underlying masculinity. Both Leslie Phillips and Christopher Benjamin curtsied on entrance; Benjamin pranced about the stage for a moment, while Richard Cordery’s wartime old woman daintily shook

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<sup>40</sup> *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, dir. Chris Luscombe (London: Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2008).

hands with Michael Gardiner's Evans.<sup>41</sup> Ford responds to Falstaff's performance of gender with an act of violence on which F is silent; Q notes only that Falstaff enters, '*misteris Page with him, Ford beates him, and he runnes away*'.<sup>42</sup> Today's directors therefore have scope to use their imagination when staging the violence, and have risen to the challenge in various ways. Judge's *Merry Wives* had Edward Petherbridge as Ford hit Falstaff four times with a large stick and poke him in the ribs once. In Kavanaugh's production Tom Mannion's Ford conflated domesticity and violence by using a broom to deliver six blows to Falstaff; each blow was sufficiently strong to cause Cordery to stumble. Doran's musical had Falstaff-as-old-woman beaten with a leather strap and kicked; Luscombe's *Merry Wives* succeeded Christopher Benjamin's curtsey by having Andrew Havill's Ford deliver him a blow to the stomach with a steel poker. The prolonged violence of Havill's beating which, disconcertingly, included Falstaff's being bent over Mistress Ford's linen basket 'facing [upstage] with his bum out' and receiving strikes on the back with the poker, was relieved only when Ford was pulled away by the other men present.<sup>43</sup> The press night audience's laughter, full-flowing until the point at which Ford had grabbed the poker, became noticeably subdued.<sup>44</sup> The movement between violence and comedy in the scene is subtle; on press night, Havill's escalation of the beating disturbed the scene's comedy and threatened the failure of the displacement of tension which it stages today.

In depicting the taming of Falstaff's body by referencing the body of an absent old woman, invoking magic and the supernatural as it unfolds, *Merry Wives* 4.2 at once mirrors and inverts the play's final scene, 5.5. This scene stages Falstaff's last punishment, pinched and burned by 'fairies' having been lured to 'Windsor Forest' at 'still midnight' for a

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<sup>41</sup> *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, dir. Ian Judge (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1996); *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, dir. Rachel Kavanaugh (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> sig. F2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Prompt book marginal note; prompt book archived at SGLA.

<sup>44</sup> DVD of the press-night performance archived at SGLA.

rendezvous with Mistresses Page and Ford (4.4.27-48). Again, the retribution is instigated by women, and at the heart of the magic and violence is Mistress Quickly, matchmaker and self-described old woman – ‘old folks, you know, have discretion, as they say’ (2.2.116-7). Disguised as ‘*the Fairy Queen*’ in order to orchestrate a mass ‘pinching’ of Falstaff at the hands of her attendants, Quickly subjects his ‘corrupted heart’ (5.5.83) to a magical trial by fire: ‘If he be chaste, the flame will back descend’ (5.5.83).<sup>45</sup> In this scene, Falstaff’s earlier beating as a witch is turned upside-down as a magical old woman inflicts a punishment upon a transgressive man. The play finds its resolution in this final night-time disciplining of Falstaff (and the simultaneous off-stage marriage of Fenton and Anne Page); a warmly restorative comic ending – ‘Just what the doctor ordered’ – is brought about by magic.<sup>46</sup>

Quickly’s performance of her role as Queen of Fairies is a carefully planned and executed piece of stage business, prepared for as for the staging of a play. Costumes and props are assembled in advance:

Nan Page my daughter, and my little son,  
And three or four more of their growth, we’ll dress  
Like urchins, oafs, and fairies, green and white  
(4.4.46-8);

‘I’ll go buy them vizors (4.4.67); ‘That silk will I go buy’ (4.4.70). The action is scripted:

We two in great amazedness will fly.  
Then let them all encircle him about,  
And, fairy-like, to pinch the unclean knight  
(4.4.54-6)

<sup>45</sup> The stage direction is taken from Q, sig. G2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Coveney, ‘Just what the doctor ordered’, *Daily Mail*, 1 November 2002. Coveney was reviewing Rachel Kavanaugh’s 2002 *Merry Wives*.

Preparations are made for a rehearsal: ‘The children must / Be practised well to this’ (4.4.63-4). The final scene resembles a play-within-the-play, Mistress Quickly and the disguised Evans and Pistol speaking in the verse of their characters rather than their accustomed prose: ‘About him, fairies; sing a scornful rhyme; / And, as you trip, still pinch him to your time’ (5.5.88-9). Quickly directs the action of this play-within-the-play, orchestrating the unfolding magical punishment; in a brief moment of empowerment for an otherwise largely subordinate character, the enactment of the fairy ‘pinching’ flows through her. Shakespeare here begins a sense of the ageing woman as becoming, through magic, the director, instigator, or facilitator of a scene’s meaning, a move which we will follow through recent stagings of *Macbeth* to its tense fruition in *The Winter’s Tale*.

As in 4.2, the actors’ bodies do not, while performing their new roles, lose their earlier characters; Evans, for example, remains ‘that Welsh fairy’ (5.5.79). Audiences again find themselves engaged in an act of triple-seeing, looking between actor, character, and assumed fairy role at once. It is significant that Mistress Quickly, as an older woman character, takes the part of the ‘*Fairy Queen*’. Among the many identities of Elizabeth I circulating in early modern literature was that of the Fairy Queen, most famously in Spenser’s allegorical *Faerie Queene*.<sup>47</sup> *Merry Wives* was performed ‘before her Maiestie’, possibly in 1597.<sup>48</sup> The body of an actor playing the role of an old woman was used to perform an echo of an ageing Elizabethan identity in Shakespeare’s play; as in 4.2, four personages were indicated in one – the actor, Quickly, the ‘*Fairy Queen*’, and, off-stage,

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<sup>47</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene Disposed into Twelue Books* (London: 1590, 1596). For Elizabeth as Fairy Queen see also Thomas Dekker, *The Whore of Babylon* (London: 1607). See also Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977); Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power*; Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> Q *Merry Wives*, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

Elizabeth herself.<sup>49</sup> The staging calls potentially challenging attention to the implied old age of Elizabeth I; the purposefulness of the reference is made clear by the shift in the play's original plans for the 'pinching'.<sup>50</sup> A part first intended for Anne Page – 'My Nan shall be the Queen of all the Fairies' (4.4.68) – is given to Mistress Quickly; an old woman, in the play's imaginary, was best suited to this role of magical power.

As is the case earlier in the play, the body of a performed old woman serves to mediate a vision of multiple, excessive staged bodies, and a discourse of magic – 'They are fairies. He that speaks to them shall die' (5.5.44) – enables another body's punishment: 'Pinch him, and burn him, and turn him about, / Till candles and starlight and moonshine be out' (5.5.98-9). A 2006 RSC version of the play further complicated the palimpsest of bodies conjured by Quickly's actor in 5.5. Casting Judi Dench as Mistress Quickly, Greg Doran's staging brought the 5.5 costuming of his actors – described as belonging to a 'more Elizabeth II' era in the earlier stages of the play – firmly into Tudor England.<sup>51</sup> Doran referenced Elizabeth I by dressing Dench in a white, high-ruffed, regal gown, the suggestion aided by the 'frizz of red hair' sported by Quickly throughout the production.<sup>52</sup> Dench's costuming spoke to the early modern effect of having an older woman play the 'Fairy Queen' by staging an Elizabeth-echo, yet it also carried a weight of meaning legible only to more recent audiences. In establishing the Elizabeth reference, Doran's production played with performative memory across the body of the seventy-two-year-old actor; Dench's turn as Elizabeth I in John Madden's 1998 *Shakespeare in Love* was the Oscar-winning performance which established her as a 'national treasure', and the 2006 *Merry*

<sup>49</sup> On Quickly's performance as Elizabeth, see Purkiss, pp. 193-4. Elizabeth was sixty-four in 1597.

<sup>50</sup> Purkiss argues for class as providing a sufficient buffer in *Merry Wives* between monarchy and the 'middling sort' (p. 194) to neutralise any potential threat to Elizabeth's image; see also her discussion of *Endimion's* Dipsas, pp. 187-8.

<sup>51</sup> David Benedict, 'Merry Wives – The Musical', *Variety*, 14 December 2006 <[www.variety.com/review/VE1117932306?refCatID=1265](http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117932306?refCatID=1265)>.

<sup>52</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Merry Wives – The Musical', *The Times*, 13 December 2006 <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/article752967.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/article752967.ece)> [Accessed 1 September 2011].

*Wives* revelled in the echo.<sup>53</sup> *Shakespeare in Love*, like *Merry Wives* 5.5, was highly metatheatrical; reviewers of the film referred to its demonstration of ‘the magic of theatre’.<sup>54</sup> Performing Quickly-as-Fairy-Queen in 2006, then, Dench was placed at the meeting-point of two sets of interrelated early modern and present-day meanings of magic and the ageing woman.<sup>55</sup> Referencing Elizabeth, the performing Dench became inevitably self-referential; returning the scene to an iteration of the national treasure, Doran’s staging contained the power of both the performed older female character and the performing older woman.

Across early modern and present-day performances of 4.2 and 5.5 of *Merry Wives*, ‘magic’ proves a multifaceted concept with the power to transform, to discipline, to contain, and to conjure the imagined presence of absent bodies. 5.5 reads the old woman as a magically empowered Queen of the Fairies in order to exact a punishment on Falstaff’s ageing, lecherous, excessive body (‘a hodge-pudding, a bag of flax? [...] Old, cold, withered, and of intolerable entrails?’ [5.5.142-4]). 4.2, however, intervenes in the pre-existing narrative of ‘Jyl of Breynthford’ with an accusation of witchcraft which enables a double retribution: the beating of Falstaff’s disguised ‘exteriors’ (1.3.56) exercised as a violent response to the signified body of an old woman. A sense of excess haunts both scenes: excessive flesh, excessive knowledge, excessive violence, and excessive, multiple,

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<sup>53</sup> *Shakespeare in Love*, dir. John Madden (New York, NY: Miramax Films, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> James Christopher, ‘Shakespeare in Love’, *The Times*, 28 January 1999 <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/film/film\\_reviews/article3358623.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/film/film_reviews/article3358623.ece)>.

<sup>55</sup> Over the past decade Judi Dench has come to embody the present-day idea of Elizabeth I, an Elizabeth closely associated with Shakespeare in the modern mind. Hall’s 2010 production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* saw Dench take the role of Titania. This Titania was framed by a silent induction in which Dench, clearly recognisable as Elizabeth I because ‘be-ruffed and red-wigged’, chose to play the role in a court performance. The reception of Hall’s innovation was ‘somewhat mixed’ yet the allusion, both to Elizabeth and to Dench’s own performance history as an actor, passed nobody by: ‘She won an Oscar for her appearance as Elizabeth I in *Shakespeare in Love*, after all’. For Judi Dench in a Shakespearean role of magical power – ‘it is Dame Judi who supplies the necessary magic’ – the signification of multiple personages (Dench, the character, Elizabeth I) now seems inevitable. Michael Billington, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, *Guardian*, 16 February 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/feb/16/a-midsummer-nights-dream-review>>; Leo Benedictus, ‘What to Say About... Judi Dench in A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, *Guardian*, 17 February 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/feb/17/a-midsummer-nights-dream>>.

imagined and performed bodies negotiated by a watching audience. This trope of excess underpinning magic in performance may also be traced in *Macbeth*.

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*Macbeth*'s 'three witches' (1.1.0) are Shakespeare's best-known representation of witchcraft, yet they embody mystery and inaccessibility.<sup>56</sup> As Diane Purkiss has noted, a key function of the three witches is their demonstration of 'unreadability', the 'weird sisters' (3.4.132) serving as 'signifiers of impenetrability and strangeness'.<sup>57</sup> The witches exceed knowledge and language, refusing definition. Dodging the rules of conversation in 1.3, they avoid Macbeth and Banquo's questions: 'Live you, or are you aught / That man may question?' (1.3.40-41); 'Speak, if you can. What are you?' (1.3.45); 'Are ye fantastical or that indeed / Which outwardly ye show?' (1.3.51-2). The witches remain 'imperfect speakers' (1.3.68) with a 'strange intelligence' (1.3.74) unavailable, like the witch of Brainford's, to 'simple men'. Banquo's description of three witches who 'looke not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth' (1.3.39) is an attempt to know the unknowable.

Macbeth's report that 'they have more in them than mortal knowledge' (1.5.2-3) speaks to

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<sup>56</sup> This is as true in a bibliographical sense as it is in a dramatic sense. The 'wither'd' hags which come to us through the Folio *Macbeth* may not be entirely those of the play's first performances; it is believed by many that it is a revised text, based in large part on the apparent interpolation in 3.5 and 4.1 of songs also present in Middleton's *The Witch* (c. 1615). Diane Purkiss notes that 'the version of *Macbeth* which survives is the product of later revision; attempts to bring the text back to the putative purity of its first staging can only be conjectural' (p. 206). I am convinced by arguments for a Middletonian intervention, and will, like the productions I study, disregard the problematic episodes of 3.5 and 4.1.39-58. See also *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: OUP, 1990), pp. 35-6, pp. 49-55, pp. 64-6; *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, The Arden Shakespeare: Second Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2004), pp. xxxii-v; *Three Jacobean witchcraft plays: The Tragedy of Sophonisba, The Witch, The Witch of Edmonton*, eds. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 3-4; Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'The Tragedy of Macbeth: A Genetic Text', in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, pp. 1165-9. For an argument against Middletonian revisions, see Brian Vickers, 'Disintegrated: Did Thomas Middleton really adapt *Macbeth*?', *TLS*, 28 May 2010, pp. 14-5.

<sup>57</sup> *The Witch in History*, p. 208.

the sense at work across the play that the witches escape apprehension, are ‘secret’ (4.1.64), that their work is ‘A deed without a name’ (4.1.65), and that they, like *Merry Wives*’s ‘witch of Brentford’, know too much.

As in *Merry Wives*, the representation of excessive knowledge is closely linked to a sense of the witches as surpassing the bounds of normal physicality. Where *Merry Wives*’s fat woman was excessively human and grossly physical, the bodies of *Macbeth*’s witches go further, melting fluidly from one state into another and signifying their magic by exceeding human limits: ‘The earth hath bubbles, as the water has, / And these are of them’ (1.3.77-8); ‘what seemed corporal / Melted as breath into the wind’ (1.3.79-80). The shock of Banquo and Macbeth at their vanishing demonstrates that the witches’ strangeness is rooted in the behaviour of their bodies (what they ‘outwardly show’). Their magic is deeply physical: ‘By the pricking of my thumbs, / Something wicked this way comes’ (4.1.61-2); ‘Finger of birth-strangled babe, / Ditch-delivered by a drab’ (4.1.30-1). Their ‘beards’ serve for Banquo as a bodily indication of their supernatural state: as stage properties, whether false, naturally-grown, or merely described and imagined presences, the beards bridge the impulses at work in the scene towards legible, excessive physicality and supernatural unknowability, figuring the association of superfluous flesh and knowledge we saw at work in *Merry Wives*. The beards forbid interpretation (1.3.44), refusing for their wearers a gendered definition. Like the beard of the performed Falstaff, they indicate at once the body of the male actor, the masculinised body of the ‘withered’ old woman, and the uncontainable body of the magical being.

The beards mediate a play of gender across *Macbeth*’s witches’ bodies, one which couples the performing male with the performed should-be female. Concurrently, they call our attention to the suggested body of a post-pubescent adult male actor, the performed body of an elderly female character, and the expected body of the younger male actor we

seek for on the early modern stage. In doing so, the beards initiate a theatrical exchange between youth and age which I find at work across early modern and present-day stagings of *Macbeth*, an exchange which I follow into *The Winter's Tale* later in the chapter.

Recent work on *Macbeth* has explored the role of the child in the play.<sup>58</sup> A cinematic 'trailer' for the RSC's 2011 *Macbeth* presented a series of images of children, unmoving, glassy-eyed, and yet wakefully conscious as Jonathan Slinger's Macbeth voiced lines from the 'Sleep no more' passages of 2.2.33-41.<sup>59</sup> The child today has become a focal point for society's worst fears about itself and its future; directors working on *Macbeth* have found children dead, alive, and absent to embody 'the innocent sleep' Macbeth 'does murder' (2.2.34). The text names four children: Fleance (2.1, 3.3), Macduff's anonymous 'Son' (4.2), the second 'apparition: a bloody child' (4.1.92), and the third 'apparition: a child crowned' (4.1.102). Recent productions have seized on the idea of the child as being at the heart of the play's meaning, having Fleance present in scenes in which he is not scripted, the child observing and learning from the actions of the play's adult world.<sup>60</sup> Fleance is referred to in the text as 'boy' (2.1.1) and today is invariably played by a boy; we tend to assume that the player of his part on the early modern stage was a young, perhaps prepubescent male actor, one of those who specialised in youthful or female roles. Historians of the stage have demonstrated that early modern acting companies typically had four young male actors available to them at a given time; disregarding for a moment

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<sup>58</sup> See Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing lost boys on stage and screen* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> *Macbeth*, dir. Michael Boyd (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2011). Trailer available at <<http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/macbeth>> [Accessed 1 September 2011].

<sup>60</sup> The silent but visible Fleance was a trope of *Macbeth*, dir. Boyd; *Macbeth*, dir. Lucy Bailey (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2010); *Macbeth*, dir. Dominic Cooke (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2004); *Macbeth*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 1999). See Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, pp. 171-204, and see also Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?', *Shakespeare Survey*, 57 (2004), 38-53. The absent child has long been considered a way in to understanding the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and is discussed further below.

the question of the witches' beards, the ten roles of *Macbeth* potentially requiring such actors, then, would have necessitated some doubling.<sup>61</sup>

A study of the order of appearance of *Macbeth*'s young and female roles reveals that a potential doubling which may have been found convenient was that of Fleance with one of the witches. Many other doubling-formulae are also possible; however this doubling of Fleance and a witch seems attractive given the significant breadth of time elapsing between the characters' entrances. I have argued above that the body of the actor did not disappear from the early modern stage even as he took on varying roles. The body of an actor doubling a witch and Fleance, having first appeared onstage in the witch-role, has a triple impact: the witch is found to haunt scenes in which she is not written as being present (Fleance's 2.1 and 3.3); the physicalities of witchy old woman and boy are asked to speak together; and the performed age of the staged old woman is tempered by youth. Addressing the second effect first (returning to the others below), in early modern terms the bodies of the male child and the old woman were similarly unstable: boys are imagined to teeter on the edge of a masculinising transformation, occupying a liminal state between effeminate male infancy and developed manhood; old women, as we have seen, were believed subject to the masculinising influence of an accumulation of noxious humours and postmenopausal toxins.<sup>62</sup> The bodies of the young male Fleance and the old female witch indicated together in the performing body of the child actor, then, figured instability and

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<sup>61</sup> Discounting Hecate and the further three witches associated with her, these roles are the three witches, two child-apparitions, Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff, Lady Macduff's son, the Gentlewoman, and Fleance. On the quantity of young actors typically available in the early modern theatre, see Alan C. Dessen, 'Conceptual Casting in the Age of Shakespeare: Evidence from *Mucedorus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43: 1 (1992), 67-70; Wells, 'Boys Should be Girls'; T. J. King, *Casting Shakespeare's Plays: London actors and their roles, 1590-1642* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992); and William A. Ringler, Jr., 'The Number of Actors in Shakespeare's Early Plays (1967)', in *The Seventeenth-Century Stage: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gerald Eades Bentley (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 110-34.

<sup>62</sup> Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, especially pp. 1-42; Gina Bloom, "'Thy Voice Squeaks": Listening for Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage', *Renaissance Drama*, 29 (1998), 39-71; Chedgzoy, 'Playing with Cupid'. For Levinus Lemnius 'Adolescency' is 'wylfull and slypperye', 'subiecte to sondry casualtyes & mutations': Lemnius, fol. 29<sup>v</sup>.

unpredictability, the actor indicating multiple, excessive states of gender and age as he moved between roles.

The search for the body of the young actor on *Macbeth*'s earliest stages, however, is complicated by the question of the witches' beards. The perplexingly hairy faces invoked to signify the defamiliarising masculinity of the old witches trouble our sense of the doubled Fleance as 'boy', problematise associations of the physicalities of old womanhood and young boyhood, and add a further referenced body to the performative mix: that of the adult male. If the beard is an indicator that the witches were performed by older male actors, the doubling of a 'withered' witch with the boyish Fleance is disrupted. This disruption only occurs if Fleance is as youthful on *Macbeth*'s first stages as he tends to be today: there is an argument to be made for Fleance as being older than we have traditionally thought. While Banquo names him as 'boy', this title is lent him on only one occasion. Fleance is old enough to hold both Banquo's sword and the unknown 'that too' (2.1.5) at once; Macbeth seems remarkably concerned that he should die, given his supposed youth, and the murderers express no hesitation at his killing.<sup>63</sup> Shakespeare's source, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, does not indicate Fleance to be a child. He need not be one: a Fleance late in adolescence or in his young manhood played by an actor in his early twenties is easily imagined and may be at once a 'boy' and the double of a bearded witch. Such a Fleance would fit the argument of David Kathman, who has indicated the presence of 'boy' actors aged up to twenty-two on the Shakespearean stage.

The bearded witches, then, need not disrupt an early modern doubling of a witch and Fleance; on present-day stages, however, which look for a childlike Fleance, we might expect the doubling to be undermined. Nonetheless, the sense of an association between

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<sup>63</sup> This is in contrast to 4.2, in which a messenger appears to Lady Macduff and her son to warn them of the murderers' approach.

Fleance and the witches continues today. The significance of the child to the meaning of *Macbeth* as found in recent productions is mirrored in the heightened significance lent by present-day performance to the play's witches; as I show below, the witches, like *Merry Wives*'s Mistress Quickly, are found on today's stages to orchestrate the unfolding of much of *Macbeth*'s action. The work the witches and Fleance are asked to carry out in today's performances establishes a kind of doubling of their roles which does not depend on the anchor of the actor's body but rather on the capacity of performances to establish a play's meaning across multiple productions.

In productions of *Macbeth* today the witches, like the child, are found to be at the heart of the play's meaning. Reviewers of the play search the witches in the hope of finding in them the source of *Macbeth*'s – and Macbeth's – wickedness, the consensus being that 'The witches [...] ought to be emanations of evil, fate or the diabolical'.<sup>64</sup> Benedict Nightingale was approving of Conall Morrison's 2007 witches: 'these scraggy hissing women [...] are what they should be: evil'.<sup>65</sup> A perceived failure to achieve the expected level of evil or other-worldliness results in disappointment: '(the witches are hopeless) [...] [t]hey scrabble around with a total lack of weirdness'; 'The witches [...] are out of a school production, devoid of menace'; 'the witches [have been] reduced to joke magicians [...] with all the supernatural menace of Tommy Cooper'.<sup>66</sup> Despite their paucity of lines (one hundred and forty-nine lines across the three characters), reviewers are deeply interested in the witches and highly opinionated as to how they ought to be performed: 'The overall effect is to make these suitcase carrying weird sisters absurd rather than

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<sup>64</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, 'Toil and trouble for this bizarre black-tie *Macbeth*', *Evening Standard*, 6 June 2001.

<sup>65</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Macbeth', *The Times*, 19 April 2007

<[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/stage/theatre/article1672468.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/theatre/article1672468.ece)>. *Macbeth*, dir. Conall Morrison (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> John Gross, 'Evil vertical take-off', *Sunday Telegraph*, 21 November 1999; Hal Jensen, 'Shakespeare: *Macbeth*', *TLS*, 26 March 2004; Kate Bassett, 'The Scottish play is ruined – just like that!', *Independent on Sunday*, 15 June 2001.

chilling’; ‘the witches, indulging in theatre tricks, aren’t nearly as creepy as they might be’.<sup>67</sup>

Directors, too, are interested in the witches: their treatments of the ‘weird sisters’ (1.3.30) in recent productions mirrors or doubles their treatments of Fleance, the witches frequently appearing in scenes in which they are not scripted as being present. Gregory Doran’s 1999 production hid them unseen beneath the dinner table in 3.4 while Banquo’s ghost walked the stage; the character of Hecate was cut and 4.1 moved forward to succeed Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s exit at the end of 3.4. The witches were illuminated and silhouetted beneath the still-laid table as they cast their spell – ‘Double, double, toil and trouble’ (4.1.35) – overturning it suddenly to reveal themselves at ‘Open, locks, who ever knocks’ (4.1.63). The result was to have Macbeth, returning to the dining room shortly after his 3.4 exit, repulsed and horrified to find the witches lurking unseen within his own home, lending new weight to his subsequent description of them as ‘secret, black, and midnight hags’ (4.1.64). The effect of their untimely presence was repeated at the scene of Macbeth’s death (5.7), as they appeared silhouetted, motionlessly observing (and, the production insinuated, directing) his demise.<sup>68</sup> Dominic Cooke’s 2004 revival generated similar effects: the witches again hid beneath the 3.4 dinner table, and Hecate was cut and 4.1 moved as in Doran’s production. Cooke’s production went further, however, in having the witches invisibly present on the stage throughout. As Macbeth begins to deliver his first long aside in 1.3 – ‘Two truths are told’ (1.3.126) – a prompt book note has the witches, still silently present on the stage though ‘invisible’ to all, ‘start to close in on Mac[beth]’; at ‘I thank you, gentlemen’ (1.3.128) Cooke’s ‘witches close right in on

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<sup>67</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, ‘Witches take over the show’, *Evening Standard*, 18 April 2007 <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/review-23393081-witches-take-over-the-show.do>>; Charles Spencer, ‘The deadly intent cannot make up for a lack of evil’, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 March 2004.

<sup>68</sup> There are links here with the present-day performance of *Richard III*’s elderly Queen Margaret, many recent productions using her silent, unscripted appearance in scenes as a means of demonstrating her apparently supernatural power. For more, see Chapter Five.

Mac[beth]'.<sup>69</sup> These witches, then, were understood wordlessly to act upon Macbeth even in his private moments, the production locating all power, agency, and culpability in them. Cooke's production furthermore played up an association between Fleance and the witches. Following the mass exit of Malcolm and his new court 'to see us crowned at Scone' (5.11.41), Cooke had the witches emerge from the stage trap-door 'in shadow', looming over the lingering Fleance.<sup>70</sup> The final image of the play as the lights fell was of Fleance standing stationary surrounded by the three witches, 'an excellent twist' according to Hal Jensen.<sup>71</sup> Establishing Fleance as the witches' next potential victim, the production made the boy the locus of the play's fears for its future and the witches the source of the play's evil. Boy and witches in this final scene became two sides of a single coin.

The pernicious presence of the witches at unlooked-for moments has featured strongly across productions of *Macbeth* in recent years. Tim Carroll's 2001 *Macbeth* staged three self-consciously 'atypical' witches, First Witch Paul Chahidi having stated his intention to avoid stereotypes of 'cackling crones'.<sup>72</sup> These witches were nonetheless typical in haunting the stage: they played the roles of the murderers and were always present in the background, melting in and out of the court crowd in the evening-dress worn by all in this production. Conall Morrison's production featured witches who 'substitute[d] as servants, messengers, assistant assassins and even the Porter', their evil infecting the play world.<sup>73</sup> Rupert Goold's 2007 production staged a war-torn landscape, the witches ever-present as military hospital 'nurses' and, later, maids serving dinner in 3.4.<sup>74</sup> Lucy Bailey's 2010 Globe *Macbeth* also leaned heavily on the power of the witches, their early

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<sup>69</sup> Prompt book archived at SCLA, catalogue number RSC/SM/1/2004/MAC1.

<sup>70</sup> Prompt book note.

<sup>71</sup> Jensen, 'Shakespeare: Macbeth'.

<sup>72</sup> *Macbeth*, dir. Tim Carroll (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2001). Paul Chahidi, 'Rehearsal Notes: 1', *Rehearsal Notes for Macbeth (Witch and the Porter)* (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2001) <<http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/education/discovery-space/adopt-an-actor/archive/seyton-weird-sister-porter-played-by-paul-chahidi>>.

<sup>73</sup> Nightingale, 'Macbeth'.

<sup>74</sup> *Macbeth*, dir. Rupert Goold (London: The Gielgud Theatre, 2007).

audience interaction succeeded by their near-constant stage presence throughout. These three witches held Macbeth's 'dagger of the mind' (2.1.38) before him; they snarled at Lady Macbeth as she invoked the 'spirits, / That tend on mortal thoughts' (1.5.38-9); they raided the bodies of the murdered guardsmen and, eventually, the body of Lady Macbeth herself; they voiced the apparitions' proclamations in 4.1. Like other recent productions, Bailey's *Macbeth* demonstrates the increasing levels of power and meaning we choose to invest in the witches; by frequently calling attention to Fleance's presence (Laura Rogers's Lady Macbeth, for instance, ruffling his hair affectionately) this production continued the doubling at the level of theatrical meaning which many recent productions have established between the play's children and its witches.

There is another child haunting productions and readings of *Macbeth*: the Macbeths' absent child. Carol Chillington Rutter has explored the critical history of searching for, and denying, the Macbeths' child (the baby to whom Lady Macbeth has 'given suck' [1.7.54]).<sup>75</sup> The text makes much of the absence of the Macbeths' child – 'He has no children [...]' (4.3.217); 'Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown, / And put a barren sceptre in my grip' (3.1.62-3) – yet offers no clear explanation for the absence nor any certain signpost as to whether the child lives or has died. Recent productions have placed a heavy burden of emphasis on this absence, locating much of the play's meaning in it. Laura Rogers's Lady Macbeth was, as we have seen, warmly maternal towards Fleance at the Globe in 2010. Harriet Walter has said of her role as Lady Macbeth opposite Antony Sher that 'the core of both our performances was this question of childbirth, whether or not they'd had a child, how many they'd had, whose they were, what had gone on'.<sup>76</sup> Walter found childlessness to underlie the character's impulse to regicide: 'Since she can't bring

<sup>75</sup> *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, pp. 166-71.

<sup>76</sup> 2002 platform recording held at the National Theatre archive. Walter played Lady Macbeth in Doran's 1999 production.

up children she's going to fix it for [Macbeth] to become king'.<sup>77</sup> Productions of the play have searched the absent child for a way into understanding the ambition driving the Macbeths and, particularly, for insight into the character of Lady Macbeth. One opening which has been overlooked is a textual suggestion at 1.5.39-52, Lady Macbeth's famous 'unsex me here' (1.5.39) speech. Addressing herself to 'you spirits, / That tend on mortal thoughts' (1.5.38-9), Lady Macbeth engages with the early modern English vocabulary of menopause and female ageing, seeming to call down infertility upon herself. 'Make thick my blood' (1.5.41) suggests the stagnation and curdling of menstrual blood which we know was thought to take place as a woman entered menopause. Her request that the spirits 'Stop up th'access and passage to remorse' to keep her from the 'visitings of nature' (1.5.42-3) moves between ideas of ruthless cruelty and the believed bodily effects of menopause. Lady Macbeth goes so far as to associate herself, through her prayer that the spirits will 'take my milk for gall' (1.5.46), with the demon-suckling old witches of contemporary thought; her urge that 'gall' take the place of 'milk' is a further hint of the corruptions of menopause, breast milk being believed at the time to be comprised of purified menstrual blood.<sup>78</sup> A menopausal Lady Macbeth, then, is a real option for performance. Despite the significance recent productions have found in the absence of the Macbeths' child, however, directors have shied away from exploring the menopausal implications of Lady Macbeth's speech. In present-day performance Lady Macbeths are typically youthful, Harriet Walter and Siân Thomas notwithstanding. Directors, one suspects, are hesitant to explore the experience and meaning of a woman's menopause on stage, preferring to presume an infertile childlessness or the death of an earlier child.

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<sup>77</sup> Platform recording with Harriet Walter, 2002. On Walter's views of Macbeth's absent child, see Harriet Walter, *Macbeth, Actors on Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2002), pp. 27-33.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Vicary writes that 'the fleshe of a womans paps turne[s] the menstrual blood into mylke'; expanding, he later claims that 'in women there commeth from the Matrix into their Brestes manye Ueines which bring into them menstrual blood, the whiche is turned through the digestiue vertue from red colour into white'. Thomas Vicary, *A Profitable Treatise of the Anatomie of Mans Body* (London: 1577), sigs. B4<sup>v</sup>, H4<sup>r</sup>.

Responding to the witches' language of infancy ('Finger of birth-strangled babe, / Ditch-delivered by a drab') and their conjured visions of childhood inscribed in the text ('apparition: a child crowned'), directors have involved witchcraft in the Macbeths' childlessness; in doing so, they have extended the sense of the play's staging a conversation between childlike youth and supernatural old womanhood. Lucy Bailey's production staged the bloody 4.1 enactment of a birth by the eldest of the three witches. Held aloft, the ventriloquised foetus delivered the prophecy of the second apparition. The witches taunted Macbeth with the inanimate baby; in an interview recorded in the programme, Bailey explained that once Macbeth decided to follow the witches' lead and murder Duncan, 'it's part of the deal that he will have no children. Banquo's issue will become the future kings. From this moment onwards, the Macbeths' marriage bed is sterile'.<sup>79</sup> Bailey here associates the power and meaning she finds in her variously-aged witches with the failure of the Macbeths to have a child of their own. The omnipresence of the witches in Rupert Goold and Tim Carroll's productions similarly seemed to counteract any chance of their youthful Macbeths' reproduction, the witches silently damning their unborn families.

The work carried out by *Macbeth* in associating the figure of the child with that of the witch – initiating a conversation of theatrical meaning between youth and old age – begins with the potential doubling of Fleance and a witch on the early modern stage and is carried forward in the associations found between youth and age in present-day performances of the play. Young children and aged witches have served as the doubled locus of meaning in recent productions of *Macbeth*, a conversation about the causes and effects of evil and corruption taking place across their characters in the theatres. The theatrical exchange between youth and age conducted across productions of *Macbeth*

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<sup>79</sup> Heather Neill, 'Interview with Lucy Bailey', programme for *Macbeth*, pp. 4-6 (p. 6). Programme on archive at SGLA.

continues in the casting of the witches' roles: many recent stagings have preferred younger witches. While, as we saw above, it is likely that the first performances of *Macbeth* had the witches played as old women, the witches of Doran's production were ragged, dirty asylum-escapees in their thirties. Conall Morrison's production had three refugee women, also in their thirties, as witches, a 2002 production by Edward Hall featured 'seductive, red-haired Gaelic sirens rather than crones', and Dominic Cooke's production emphasised the power held by the youngest of his three witches at the expense of her two elders.<sup>80</sup> Rupert Goold's production featured two younger witches and one older; Tim Carroll's production entirely disrupted tradition in its casting of two male witches and a third, young female witch. Lucy Bailey's witches ranged in years from Janet Fullerlove's ageing First Witch to Simone Kirby's young Second Witch. Karen Anderson played the Third Witch. Termed in the production programme as a 'little person', Anderson was childlike, leaping onto Banquo's shoulders at 'Thou shalt get kings' (1.3.65), her head frequently popping up out of trapdoors in the stage.<sup>81</sup> Michael Boyd's recent *Macbeth* for the RSC had the witches played by three child actors, two little boys and a young girl. Critics were mixed in their responses to Boyd's choice of casting: Michael Billington and Susannah Clapp both bemoaned what they felt to be the damage done to 'the best ever Shakespearean opening' of a play by Boyd's reworking, while Charles Spencer named the casting as Boyd's 'most striking device'.<sup>82</sup> Despite this critical ambivalence, by juxtaposing youth with witchcraft Boyd was working in what has emerged as a clear theatrical tradition. While present-day

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<sup>80</sup> *Macbeth*, dir. Edward Hall (London: The Albery Theatre, 2002), recorded by Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2002', *Shakespeare Survey*, 56 (2003), 256-86 (p. 281). Cooke's production here echoed a trope of Trevor Nunn's earlier 1976 production which also featured a more powerful younger witch on whom two older witches depended.

<sup>81</sup> Anderson has a dwarfism condition.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Billington, 'Macbeth', *Guardian*, 27 April 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/apr/27/macbeth-review>>; Susannah Clapp, 'Tender Napalm; All's Well That Ends Well; Macbeth', *Observer*, 8 May 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/may/08/tender-napalm-southwark-playhouse-review>>; Charles Spencer, 'Macbeth', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 April 2011 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8475694/Macbeth-RSC-Stratford-upon-Avon-review.html>>.

performances of *Macbeth* find the witches to instigate and control much of the action of the play (remembering Mistress Quickly as they do), this extra-textual empowerment of the magical old woman is carried out today at the expense of her age. Later in the thesis, looking at *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet*, we will observe a present-day hesitation at portraying both age and sexual desire/desirability together in a single female character. In today's stagings of *Macbeth* we witness something similar at work as directors shy away from affording the old woman the full extent of the witchy power they have found in the text. Recent directors of *Macbeth*, like Ford, have found youth to be a more convincing anchor for evil, bringing present-day social anxieties to bear on their interpretations of the play.

Across *Macbeth*, multiple and excess bodies signal magic at work. Like *The Merry Wives of Windsor*'s 'old fat woman', *Macbeth*'s witches are physically uncontained, problematically bodied, overly knowledgeable, and unknowable, and like Mistress Quickly they are, through the performance of magic, invested with meaning and power. A conversation of meaning is conducted between the aged women of *Macbeth* and its actual, ghostly, absent, and doubled children which establishes an association of youth and age originating on the early modern stage and lasting into the performed anxieties of twenty-first-century Britain. If today *Macbeth* is a horror story about witches and children, *The Winter's Tale* is an old wives' tale told by a child and a witch. Tracing the dynamic of exchange between youth and age into *The Winter's Tale*, I will argue in what remains of the chapter for the use of 'magic' as a sanitising mechanism in today's productions of this problematically necromantic play.

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*The Winter's Tale* is deeply concerned with matters of youth and age, most immediately in the love story which unfolds between sixteen-year-old Perdita, abandoned daughter of Leontes, and the somewhat older Florizel, son of Polixenes.<sup>83</sup> Many other children ghost *The Winter's Tale*: Leontes's son Mamillius dies shortly after his father proclaims the adultery of his mother, Hermione, and Paulina, waiting-woman to Hermione and wife of the elderly 'dotard' (2.3.75) Antigonus, has 'three daughters: the eldest is eleven; / The second and the third nine and some five' (2.1.146-7).<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, this play is as much about ageing as it is about childhood. Two adult women, Hermione and Paulina, age sixteen years across the course of the play, Hermione magically returning from the dead in the final scene in a piece of stage business orchestrated by Paulina. My reading of the play will find early modern ideas of magic and witchcraft at work in the representation of Paulina, a representation which looks back to *Macbeth* in its association of the child and the old woman, and in its depiction of a potential witch's power. This dark magic of the early modern theatre is sanitised by present-day performances which choose to highlight what Charles Spencer has called the 'shift towards the transcendent' in the scene of Hermione's return to life.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Florizel, prince of Bohemia, is already a presence as Polixenes's 'exercise, my mirth, my matter' (1.2.167) at the opening of the play; later, we learn he is the same age as Mamillius (5.1.115-8). The play is available only in its F printing. It is not believed to have been printed in quarto form: no quartos are extant, and the play is first entered in the Stationers' Register on 8 November 1623 alongside fifteen other previously unentered plays prior to the printing of the Folio. Date of composition is believed by most to fall in 1610 or early 1611 (*The Winter's Tale*, ed. John Pitcher, *The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series* [London: Thomson Learning, 2010], pp. 86-90; *The Winter's Tale*, eds. Susan Snyder and Deborah T. Curren-Aquino, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* [Cambridge: CUP, 2007], p. 62; *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel, *The Oxford Shakespeare* [Oxford: OUP, 1996], pp. 79-80).

<sup>84</sup> On children in *The Winter's Tale*, see Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, pp. 96-153, and *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Pitcher, pp. 26-38.

<sup>85</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Sumptuous but slight', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 2005  
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3643854/Sumptuous-but-slight.html>>.

Like *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale* has made much of childhood in its recent performances; indeed, this play can be read as Mamillius's 'sad tale' (2.1.27) to tell.<sup>86</sup> The action of the play originates in Leontes's fear of cuckoldry, stirred by the pregnant body of his wife and the growing body of his son: 'Art thou my calf?' (1.2.129). Mamillius has a tale 'of sprites and goblins' (2.1.28), which he tells 'softly' (2.1.32) in his mother's ear, so softly that the opening of his tale – 'There was a man [...] Dwelt by a churchyard' (2.1.31-2) – becomes his last line. Mamillius's voice fades as he whispers in Hermione's ear; the boy exits, perhaps, at Leontes's 'Bear the boy hence' (2.1.62), not to speak again in the play.<sup>87</sup> Mamillius's disappearance following 2.1 has encouraged scholars to believe that his was a role which would have been doubled with a second part; a Mamillius-Perdita double has been thought to be particularly plausible, the actor returning as his sixteen-year-old sister later in the play.<sup>88</sup> As in *Macbeth*, however, an alternative possibility presents itself; the doubling of Mamillius and Paulina proves a plausible choice which speaks to the hypothesised doubling of Fleance and a witch.<sup>89</sup> Shortly after Mamillius disappears from the play, Paulina enters. F does not specify the moment of Mamillius's exit; if he has

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<sup>86</sup> Rutter has collated productions foregrounding the role of Mamillius in *Shakespeare and Child's Play*. See also Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Shakespeare Performances in England 2009', *Shakespeare Survey*, 63 (2010), 338-75 (p. 351). Staged after Rutter's book was published, David Farr's 2009 *Winter's Tale* followed the trend she identified by making Mamillius a focal point of the play's first act. *The Winter's Tale*, dir. David Farr (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Courtyard Theatre, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Mamillius's exit is not defined in F: Snyder and Curren-Aquino's Cambridge edition places the exit at 2.1.59. Orgel's Oxford edition places the exit at 2.1.62, as does the Norton collected edition (with lineation as 2.1.64), following Leontes's 'Ha's made thee swell thus'; Arden also follows this same potential exit, with the lineation as 2.1.62.

<sup>88</sup> Gregory Doran's *Winter's Tale* had Emily Bruni play both Perdita and Mamillius; Sam Mendes's production had Morven Christie play both roles; David Freeman's *Winter's Tale* had Anna-Livia Ryan as Mamillius and Perdita. *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1999); *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Sam Mendes (London: The Old Vic Theatre, 2009); *The Winter's Tale*, dir. David Freeman (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 1997). On this doubling see *The Winter's Tale*, eds. Snyder and Curren-Aquino, pp. 266-7.

<sup>89</sup> Mamillius and Paulina were doubled by Kathryn Hunter (also playing Time and the Shepherd) in a 1992 touring production. *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Annabel Arden with Annie Castledine (Théâtre de Complicité: 1992). This is the only production I know of in which Paulina and Mamillius were doubled. See *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Pitcher, pp. 28-9, p. 120. *Mucedorus*, a play thought to have links with *The Winter's Tale*, featured as we have seen a single actor doubling the roles of 'a boy' and 'an ould woman'; a Paulina-Mamillius double would have developed further interesting lines of association between the two plays. See *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Volume VIII Romances: Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest*, 8 vols, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 127-8.

departed by 2.1.64, as editors have believed, an actor playing the role has at least one hundred and thirty-seven lines to prepare himself to perform as Paulina, who first enters at 2.2.1.<sup>90</sup> Returning to the play as Paulina, a young actor playing both Mamillius and the woman's role conflated in his body both masculine childhood and the female old age which Paulina is said to occupy. While the corresponding power invested in *Macbeth's* now omnipresent witches is largely an effect of present-day performance, the text of the later *Winter's Tale* establishes a witchy Paulina as prime mover and director of the play's action, placing her 'in secret cahoots with the playwright'.<sup>91</sup> It does so through an appropriation of Mamillius's 'sad tale [...] for winter' (2.1.27), putting the language of the child into the mouth of a woman soon constituted as excessive in speech, years, and power.

Paulina begins the play ambiguously aged. As the mother of three children aged between eleven and five, it is surprising to find her termed at 2.3.77 as a 'crone'; although she is married to the ageing Antigonus, there is little evidence in the first half of the play that she herself is aged. Leontes nonetheless describes her as old, seeming to find in Paulina something of his idea of an aged woman. It is in Paulina's excessive speech – 'When I have said, cry woe!' (3.2.198) – that Leontes finds his evidence of age, constituting her sharp tongue as symptomatic of a late stage of life and receiving her speeches as indicative of age and witchcraft. On hearing of Leontes's 2.1 imprisonment of Hermione, Paulina determines to talk him down using 'that tongue I have' (2.2.55): 'If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister' (2.2.36). For Leontes in 2.3 Paulina is 'that audacious lady' (2.3.42), unashamed to speak; he responds to her as 'A callat / Of boundless tongue' (2.3.91-2). Her 'words [...] medicinal' (2.3.37) are for Leontes sufficient

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<sup>90</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter has collated the 'off-stage time' given Shakespearean actors to change costume (and hence role and gender), ranging from sixteen to three hundred and twenty-nine lines; as she notes, 'cross-dressers don't get significantly more time to change [...] their gender'. Rutter, 'Unpinning Desdemona (Again)', p. 116.

<sup>91</sup> Paul Taylor, 'The Winter's Tale', *Independent*, 17 June 2005 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/the-winters-tale-shakespeares-globe-london-494425.html>> [Accessed 1 September 2011].

to define her as an old woman and witch, her excess in language generating an imagined excessive physicality: Paulina ‘late hath beat her husband, / And now baits me’ (2.3.92-3) Her capacious words are figured as having bodily effects on herself and others: ‘thou art woman-tired, unroosted / By thy Dame Partlet here’ (2.3.75-6); the loud-speaking Paulina is ‘A gross hag’ (2.3.108), like Falstaff a fat witch, her tongue ‘boundless’.<sup>92</sup> For Leontes, excess in speech means excess in years; the ageing woman is plentiful in words and must, as I show below, be silenced. Leontes is jealous and fearful like Ford, and in his enraged response to the presence of a figure he imagines as an old woman and witch he echoes *Merry Wives*’s foolish husband:

Out!

A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o’ door –

A most intelligencing bawd.

(2.3.67-9)

In her over-speaking, Paulina becomes for Leontes a threateningly masculinised (‘mankind’) old witch-woman, breaching boundaries of body, gender, and words. While Ford reacted violently to the imagined, off-stage language of ‘charms’, ‘spells’, and ‘th’figure’, with the disguised Falstaff remaining silent, Leontes’s rage is a fearful reaction to Paulina’s loud and uncompromising speech.

Paulina constitutes her speaking as an act of healing, and attempts to define herself as a medicine-woman: she refers to herself as the King’s ‘physician’ (2.3.54). Her self-definition in these terms comes after an exchange with a servant of Leontes in which the sense of Paulina as medicine-woman is developed:

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<sup>92</sup> On the association of Paulina’s speech and Leontes’s witchcraft-accusation, see Schalkwyk.

*Servant* Madam, he hath not slept tonight, commanded

None should come at him.

*Paulina*

Not so hot, good sir.

I come to bring him sleep. 'Tis such as you

[...] Nourish the cause of his awaking. I

Do come with words as medicinal as true,

Honest as either, to purge him of that humour

That presses him from sleep.

(2.3.31-9)

Paulina's dispensation of purgative medication is a further association of plentiful speech with physicality, one which speaks to the illicit figure of the early modern female physician. Margaret Pelling has published evidence of women in London between 1550 and 1640 practising medicine without the approval of the College of Physicians; she estimates the ratio of female practitioners to population in the period to have been 1:650.<sup>93</sup> Paulina's diagnosis of 'dangerous, unsafe lunes i'th'King' (2.2.33), her suggestion of a talking cure ('He must be told on't' [2.2.34]), and her decision that the role of word-doctor 'Becomes a woman best' (2.2.35), aligns her with these women. The association is unfortunate, given the ease with which the female healer (or 'wise woman') could find herself categorised as a witch in early modern England.<sup>94</sup> Dispensing healing words, Paulina is quickly named as a 'witch'; this witch-identity haunts her into the final scene, as we will see.

It is speech which first sees Paulina imagined as old and as a witch, and it is a speech-act which most firmly 'doubles' Mamillius and Paulina. When told by Mamillius, *The Winter's Tale* is a child's bedtime story; when delivered by Paulina, its stewardship

<sup>93</sup> Pelling, pp. 67-71. See also Mary Abbott, *Life Cycles in England 1560-1720: Cradle to Grave* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 143.

<sup>94</sup> On wise women, see Roberts, 'Types of Crone'.

claimed by her following Mamillius's exit and the conclusion of it staged and narrated by her in 5.3, the play is 'Like an old [wives'] tale', one which 'should be hooted at' (5.3.117-8). Shakespeare's identified source, Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, features no Paulina-figure; as in *Richard III*, discussed in Chapter Five, *The Winter's Tale* finds an old woman to be particularly appropriate for a role of loudly speaking narrative power.<sup>95</sup> A 'winter's tale' in early modern England was, as Catherine Belsey has shown, the product of an elderly female voice, a fireside story told in winter by old women.<sup>96</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb, too, has written on an early modern English 'oral tradition' of tales told by old women, finding such stories to have provided an alternative, unsanctioned education for children.<sup>97</sup> *The Winter's Tale* in its very title proclaims itself as an old woman's yarn, a tale 'of sprites and goblins' told by an ageing woman to children. Such women, as Thomas Nashe's *The Terrors of the Night* shows, could easily be received as witches: describing the tale-telling 'aged mumping beldams' of his childhood, Nashe writes that 'I was a great auditor of theirs, and had all their witchcrafts at my fingers endes'.<sup>98</sup> For Nashe the old wives' tale was a quasi-magical exchange of narrative between the old woman and the child: the women 'would bid yong folks beware on what day they par'd their nayles, tell what luck euerie one should haue by the day of the weeke he was borne on'.<sup>99</sup> An old wives' winter's tale, then, is a piece of narrative delivered by an old woman to an imagined child-auditor; telling tales of Leontes, Paulina has appropriated Mamillius's story, doubling his role through language and, potentially, in body. For Leontes, Paulina's wordy witchcraft proves more threatening than the yarns of Nashe's aged beldams; the tales she tells are of

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<sup>95</sup> Paulina's vociferous speech also associates her strongly with the old mothers of Chapter Three. Robert Greene, *Pandosto* (London: 1588).

<sup>96</sup> Catherine Belsey, 'Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 61: 1 (2010), 1-27.

<sup>97</sup> Mary Ellen Lamb, 'Engendering the Narrative Act: Old Wives' Tales in *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*', *Criticism*, 40: 4 (1998), 529-53 (p. 529). For an early modern dramatisation of such a tale-telling, see George Peele, *The Old Wives Tale* (London: 1595).

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Nashe, *The Terrors of the night Or, A Discourse of Apparitions* (London: 1594), sig. E4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> *The Terrors of the night*, sig. E4<sup>r</sup>.

accusation – ‘I’ll not call you tyrant’ (2.3.116) – of condemnation – ‘a fool, inconstant, / And damnable ingrateful’ (3.2.184-5) – and eventually, as we will see, of magical recovery. Her tales signify to Leontes a witchcraft which deserves execution for heresy: ‘I’ll ha’ thee burnt’ (2.3.114).

Sixteen years pass between the reported death of Hermione in 3.2 and the scene of her revivification in 5.3. The passage of years takes place offstage; the earlier half of the play concludes with the death of Antigonus at the hands of a bear and the newborn baby Perdita’s being left for dead and found by passing shepherds: ‘Mercy on’s, a bairn!’ (3.3.67). Following the speech of ‘*Time, the Chorus*’ (4.1.0) which ‘o’erthrow[s] law’ to ‘slide / O’er sixteen years’ (4.1.5-8), the adolescent Perdita meet Polixenes’s son Florizel, with whom she falls in love. Together they travel, unaware of Perdita’s origins, to Leontes’s Sicilian court. The revelation of Perdita’s identity and her reunion with her father takes place offstage; the ‘news’ of the event is twice reported to be ‘like an old tale’ (5.2.26, 5.2.55), the ‘king being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter’ (5.2.44-5). The play insists on both the wonder of the event (‘such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour, that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it’ [5.2.21-3]) and on its suspect provenance and questionable truth (‘This news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion’ [5.2.25-6]). Repeated invocations of the ‘old tale’ ask an early modern audience to recall the highly popular *Pandosto* source which shadows the play; having made Paulina central to what unfolds in the final scenes, *The Winter’s Tale* seems to insist that some special significance be located in the old woman’s unexpected presence.<sup>100</sup> By juxtaposing the carefully-constructed visibility of Paulina with the dubious quality of the wonderful ‘old tale’, the play establishes a dynamic

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<sup>100</sup> Orgel notes that ‘Greene’s novel [...] had gone through five editions by the time *The Winter’s Tale* was written’. *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. Orgel, p. 234.

of tension which prefigures the ways in which present-day and early modern performances of the final scene speak together.

In the final act Paulina is still telling tales. By 5.1 the power of her words is so great that she holds Leontes in her sway, manipulating his sense of guilt and grief for his past treatment of Hermione in order to ensure that he never remarries: ‘she you killed / Would be unparalleled’ (5.1.15-6); ‘Thou speak’st truth. / No more such wives, therefore no wife’ (5.1.55-6). His courtiers are unimpressed at her liberal tale-telling – ‘You might have spoke a thousand things that would / Have done the time more benefit’ (5.1.21-2) – yet she continues, relentless in speech: ‘Had our prince, / Jewel of children, seen this hour, he had paired / Well with this lord’ (5.1.115-7). Paulina’s pitiless re-telling of the tale of Hermione’s murder (‘Killed? / She I killed? I did so’ [5.1.16-7]) and Mamillius’s death (‘Thou know’st / He dies to me again when talked of’ [5.1.118-9]) affords her absolute power over Leontes while extending the correspondence between her character and that of the dead child. Having been named in 2.3 as excessive in words and hence as a ‘crone’, ‘hag’, and ‘witch’, sixteen years later Paulina has developed her speaking to such a degree that she exercises a near-magical power over the King.

In a manner similar to the way in which *The Merry Wives of Windsor* presents Mistress Quickly towards the end of that play, *The Winter’s Tale* imagines Paulina as the director and narrator of its final scene; in doing so, it echoes the meanings which recent productions of *Macbeth* have found in that play’s witches. As in *Macbeth* and *Merry Wives*, in *The Winter’s Tale* the old woman’s power is achieved through an insinuation of magic; Paulina’s vocal, well-worded empowerment is qualified by witchcraft. Having allowed her a platform from which to tell her tale and dispense her ‘words [...] medicinal’, the play insists on Paulina’s witchcraft: in 5.3 she fears her work of ‘great comfort’ (5.3.1) will be identified as ‘unlawful business’ (5.3.96). Throughout the scene of Hermione’s

presentment to the court as a statue and her subsequent awakening, Paulina repeatedly protests the innocence of her work:

you'll think –  
Which I protest against – I am assisted  
By wicked powers.  
(5.3.89-91)

and ‘my spell is lawful’ (5.3.105). Paulina’s concerns are telling: necromancy or the raising or possession of the dead in spirit form was believed to be among the most typical and most damnable of witches’ practices in early modern England: by the time of writing of *The Winter’s Tale* it was an offence punishable by death to ‘take up any dead man woman or child out of his her or their grave, or any other place where the dead bodie resteth’.<sup>101</sup> Thomas Blount’s 1656 *Glossographia* described ‘Necromancy: whereby men attain to the knowledge of things by the assistance of evil spirites’ as ‘Diabolical, superstitious and unlawful’, and earlier John Stubbes’s 1579 *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* had described papal control of national rulers as similar to the methods whereby ‘Necromancers are sayde to cary about a dead body by the motion of some vncleane spirit’.<sup>102</sup> It is such dark practices – the ‘unlawful [...] knowledge of things’, such as raising the dead Hermione ‘by the assistance of evil spirits’ – that Paulina fears being accused of.

The play strongly signals to an early modern audience that they should think of Paulina as engaged in witchcraft in the final scene. Hermione’s claim to have ‘preserved / Myself’ (5.3.128-9), as though having acted independent of Paulina, feels strained; Paulina herself seems hesitant to discuss Hermione’s previous sixteen years or her apparent

<sup>101</sup> 1 Jas. I c. 12, ‘An Act against Conjuratiō, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked Spirits’, in *Witchcraft and Society*, p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Blount, *Glossographia: Or a Dictionary* (London: 1656), sig. 2A3<sup>v</sup> under ‘Magick Art’; John Stubbes, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf Whereinto England is Like to be Swallowed* (London: 1579), sig. B4<sup>v</sup>.

resurrection at all: ‘There’s time enough for that’ (5.3.129). Polixenes’s quiet suspicions (‘make it manifest where she has lived, / Or how stol’n from the dead’ [5.3.115-6]) in the face of Leontes’s perhaps blind joy (‘If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating’ [5.3.110-1]) suggest that the sense of Paulina as necromancer-witch clung to her self-description as a speaking ‘physician’. Leontes’s choice of metaphor – ‘Lawful as eating’ – subtly extends this impression of witchcraft, returning us to the fat body and worryingly limitless physicality of the witches of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Macbeth* even as he names Paulina’s practice as ‘magic’. If in the early scenes, then, there have been opportunities to understand Paulina as benevolent medicine-woman, by the play’s end *The Winter’s Tale* is using magic to insist on the threat posed by the now undoubtedly old woman.

Hermione’s revival is from the first constructed as a magical event. Leontes believes ‘magic’ (5.3.39) to be the only plausible explanation for a piece of art as lifelike as Paulina’s statue: ‘What fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath?’ (5.3.77-8). The statue of Hermione is a superhuman work, a woman’s work, beyond ‘what ever yet [...] / [...] hand of man hath done’ (5.3.16-7), and in announcing her capacity to wake it – ‘I’ll make the statue move indeed, descend, / And take you by the hand’ (5.3.88-9) – Paulina is established as conjurer of the events to come. Her protest that she ought not to be thought to be ‘assisted / By wicked powers’ is followed by her demand that ‘those that think it is unlawful business / I am about, let them depart’ (5.3.96-7). Eight requests are made of the supposedly sentient Hermione to ‘stir’ and ‘descend’ before, at last, ‘you perceive she stirs’ (5.3.103); the assembled court are shocked, fearful, and perhaps suspicious, necessitating Paulina’s ‘Start not. Her actions shall be holy’ (5.3.104-5). Neither Camillo nor Polixenes seem convinced by Paulina’s protested lawfulness: Camillo’s ‘If she pertain to life, let her speak’ (5.3.114), like Polixenes’s ‘stol’n from the dead’, suggest that the vivified statue is an animated

corpse.<sup>103</sup> Paulina's 'I'll fill your grave up [...] / Bequeath to death your numbness'  
(5.3.101-2) does not reassure; Leontes's

But how is to be questioned, for I saw her,  
As I thought, dead, and have in vain said many  
A prayer upon her grave.  
(5.3.140-2)

suggests that Paulina will yet face some interrogation following Hermione's strange recuperation; she will have to answer for '[her] part / Performed' (5.3.154-5). There is much for an early modern audience to be suspicious of in this scene.

Themes of magic, youth, and age(ing) speak together in complex ways across the first performances of *The Winter's Tale*. The doubling of Mamillius and Paulina, whether actual or figured in the transformation of a child's yarn into a woman's 'old tale', sheds new light on the dynamic of age at work in a play which declares itself to be concerned with old women's 'winter's tales'; excessive speaking becomes excessive physicality as ageing bodies slip out of control. Magic, inevitably, is brought to bear: while affording Paulina a powerful platform as speaker, story-teller and eventually director, the play insists on her threatening witchcraft. In the final scene, the speech of both women is controlled and suppressed, as we will see; the sense of control exercised over both Hermione and Paulina is made clear on present-day stages which utilise the idea of the 'magical' to sanitise, and muffle, the voices of two ageing women.

In the public discourse of theatre criticism, performances and performers are frequently, as in Charles Spencer's account of Judi Dench's abilities, termed as 'magic' or

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<sup>103</sup> On *The Winter's Tale* as demonstrating early modern beliefs in revival after apparent death, see Kaara L. Peterson, 'Shakespearean Revivifications: Early Modern Undead', *Shakespeare Studies*, 32 (2004), 240-66.

‘magical’.<sup>104</sup> Delivered in this way the word is disarmingly reassuring, serving (like ‘national treasure’) to dispel the political charge of a performance and to neutralise its potential to challenge. One of the challenges offered up by *The Winter’s Tale* is the silencing of two strong female characters, Paulina and Hermione. *The Winter’s Tale* may be Paulina’s tale, yet prior to her death Hermione too is a highly articulate speaker. Her great speeches in 3.2 in which she defends her innocence are preceded by two earlier scenes in which language proves her downfall: 1.2, in which she addresses Polixenes in the terms proposed by Leontes – ‘Tongue-tied, our queen? Speak you’ (1.2.27) – and 2.1, in which her request for a story (‘Pray you sit by us, / And tell’s a tale’ [2.1.23-4]) ushers in disaster. *The Winter’s Tale* stages the taming of Hermione’s tongue over sixteen years, transforming the laughing, lively mother and wife and passionate defender of truth of the early scenes into the silent statue and near-silent submissive reincarnation of 5.3.<sup>105</sup> The revived Hermione speaks only eight lines, all addressed to her daughter; the play requires directors to decide on the tone of her reunion with Leontes.

This final scene of the return of the now older and quieter Hermione is often described as magically ‘miraculous’.<sup>106</sup> For many audiences and readers today, *The Winter’s Tale*, far from the sad story of sprites and goblins proposed by Mamillius,

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<sup>104</sup> See for example Charles Spencer, ‘Magical tale where all ends well’, *Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2009. See also Nicholas de Jongh, ‘All’s too well in this bland and gentle fairy-tale’, *Evening Standard*, 1 July 1992, which describes ‘[m]agic, but of a most unconvincing sort’ at the close of *All’s Well That Ends Well*, dir. Peter Hall (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 1992) and Pete Kirwan, ‘The Winter’s Tale (RSC) @ The Courtyard Theatre’, *The Bardathon*, 4 May 2009 <[http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/pkirwan/entry/the\\_winters\\_tale\\_1\\_2/](http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/pkirwan/entry/the_winters_tale_1_2/)>, who writes of ‘a communal magic’ at the close of Farr’s 2009 *Winter’s Tale*.

<sup>105</sup> See Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 1992); Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 163-5; Sarah Dewar-Watson, ‘The *Alcestis* and the Statue Scene in *The Winter’s Tale*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 60: 1 (2009), 73-80.

<sup>106</sup> ‘[T]he play’s miracle of resurrection happens – the statue lives!’: Robert Gore-Langton, ‘Honour in the midst of insanity’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 April 2009; ‘the miraculous reunion [...] works because that scene always works’: Robert Gore-Langton, ‘Winter’s Tale keeps its cool’, *Daily Express*, 25 May 2001; ‘the emotional difficulty of the miraculous reunions is deftly stressed’: Paul Taylor ‘Just another time and emotion stud’, *Independent*, 26 May 2001.

provides a moving narrative of redemption and reconciliation, offering hope of life beyond the apparent finality of death – ‘an Easter message’.<sup>107</sup> Critics have long noted the religious resonances of the final scene, and views such as those expressed by Phebe Jensen, who finds Hermione’s return to be ‘saturated with Marian iconography’, have proved influential in the theatre.<sup>108</sup> Present-day performance frequently uses ideas of a heart-warming, redemptive reconciliation in order to explain the silence of Hermione, filling the text’s emptiness with forgiveness. The magic as it is usually performed today is sanitised because it is sanctified, carrying in the present day none of the threat which a performed Catholicism would have borne in early modern stagings.<sup>109</sup> Doran’s production had Hermione appear in statue form as a Virgin Mary-figure, sporting a veil, her eyes downcast, hands clasped, and her head surrounded by halo-like gold.<sup>110</sup> Matthew Warchus’s production had Anastasia Hille as Hermione stand on a plinth beneath a chandelier of candles, rendering her angelic.<sup>111</sup> Candles also were used in John Dove’s Globe production: the ‘discovery space’ in which the statue Hermione was revealed was framed by two tall arrangements of lit candles.<sup>112</sup> Kelly Hunter’s 2009 Hermione was bathed in a pale light as she stood on her plinth, literally whitewashed clean; her gown, sixteen years later, was bleached free of the bloody birth-stains which had articulated Leontes’s cruelty in 3.2. Staging the scene in this way is a choice which occludes the threat which was visible in the earliest performances, replacing the troubling acts of an old witch with an easily digested spirituality. In this way, the impact of both Paulina’s performance of necromancy and Leontes’s history of destructive violence is neutralised. Recalling her performance of

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<sup>107</sup> Michael Coveney, ‘This latest Tale lacks some sting’, *Independent*, 14 April 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare’s Festive World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), p. 225. See also David N. Beauregard, *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2008); *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. Orgel, pp. 59-60; *The Winter’s Tale*, ed. Pitcher, pp. 66-9.

<sup>109</sup> Phebe Jensen pertinently has noted that ‘witchcraft was identified with devil-worship, idolatry, and Roman Catholicism in English Protestant discourse’. Jensen, *Religion and Revelry*, p. 226.

<sup>110</sup> For Gilbreath’s performance, see Figure 2.

<sup>111</sup> *The Winter’s Tale*, dir. Matthew Warchus (London: The Roundhouse, 2002).

<sup>112</sup> *The Winter’s Tale*, dir. John Dove (London: Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2005).



*Figure 2:* Alexandra Gilbreath as Hermione in the final scene of Gregory Doran's 1999 *The Winter's Tale* at Stratford-upon-Avon. Photograph by Donald Cooper. Image from <<http://www.ahds.rhul.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/shakespeare/imagedetails.do?imageI>

d=14133>.

Hermione in David Freeman's 1997 production, Belinda Davison suggested that '[the production] feels as if something else speaks through it at a very deep level, and you communicate with people's souls'.<sup>113</sup> Davison's undefined 'something else', speaking through the performance, threatens silently to obscure the violence and cruelty of the play's early acts.

In present-day performance Hermione's return to life is sanctified using the 'magic' of theatre; the magical practice inscribed in the text is itself sanitised and the taming of both Hermione and Paulina is whitewashed. Fudging the question of Hermione's near-silence in 5.3, Alexandra Gilbreath, who played the role in 1999, remarked that 'Shakespeare gives Hermione and Leontes no dialogue – how could you possibly put into words what they must be feeling? And leaving all that unsaid, of course speaks volumes'.<sup>114</sup> The volumes Gilbreath insinuates tell of a near-biblical forgiveness; both Gilbreath and Gemma Jones, who played the role in 1981, quote the Bible in their discussions of the character.<sup>115</sup> The magic of today's performed *Winter's Tale* instead is of the 'holy' sort Paulina attempts to claim as insurance against witchcraft-accusations, an implausible proposition in the early modern period yet one which today rinses the play clean of danger: for Lyn Gardner, Hermione's awakening is 'the equivalent of the second coming'.<sup>116</sup> Such sanctification strips both Paulina and Hermione of agency in 5.3, insisting on the oblivion of an all-forgiving 'Grace' and in the process legitimising the ageing women's silencing.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Chantal Miller-Schütz, 'Shakespeare's Globe Research Bulletin [...] *The Winter's Tale*' (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 1998) <[http://www.globelink.org/docs/The\\_Winters\\_Tale\\_1997.pdf](http://www.globelink.org/docs/The_Winters_Tale_1997.pdf)>, p. 30.

<sup>114</sup> Alexandra Gilbreath, 'Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*', in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 74-90 (p. 90).

<sup>115</sup> Gilbreath cites *1 Corinthians* 13: 4-7 (p. 90); Jones, writing on Hermione, draws on the early sense of her as vociferous speaker by noting that '[i]n the beginning was the word'. Gemma Jones, 'Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*', in *Players of Shakespeare: Essays in Shakespearean Performance by Twelve Players with the Royal Shakespeare Company*, ed. Philip Brockbank (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 153-65 (p. 153).

<sup>116</sup> Lyn Gardner, 'The Winter's Tale', *Guardian*, 20 June 2005 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/jun/20/theatre>>.

<sup>117</sup> Gilbreath claims that 'the challenge of [Hermione] is her simplicity, her immovable dignity, her state of grace'; she quotes Gregory Doran as describing the play as having a 'special Grace' (p. 90).

Evidencing the paralysing impact of this loss of agency on today's theatre critics is Michael Coveney's glowing response to '[Kelly] Hunter's wonderfully immobile reincarnation' in Michael Boyd's 2009 production: 'Magic returns'.<sup>118</sup>

The playtext and its present-day stagings come together to ensure the silencing of the aged Paulina at the play's close. The power first afforded her as tale-teller and Leontes's 'counsellor' (2.3.55) has been dramatised as witchcraft; finally, in an awkward piece of stage business, the physically and verbally excessive Paulina is contained through marriage. The announcement of the marriage comes as Paulina is telling her last tale:

<i>Paulina</i>	[...] I, an old turtle, Will wing me to some withered bough, and there My mate, that's never to be found again, Lament till I am lost.
<i>Leontes</i> (5.3.133-6)	O peace, Paulina!

Leontes silences Paulina at last, and she never speaks again. His wife returned, apparently conveniently forgiving – 'The supreme insight of both actress and director is that Hermione feels sorrow rather than rancour for her diseased husband' – Leontes has regained his power; marrying Paulina off seems to ensure that it will never be threatened again.<sup>119</sup> Directors have collaborated with Leontes in what proves to be Paulina's silencing: Doran and Farr's Paulinas were by 5.3 sobbing with emotion in the shadows at the stage's edge, purposely tangential to the action, their tale-telling muffled by tears. Dominic Cooke's production made a point of the character's isolation, having her hesitate alone, surrounded

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<sup>118</sup> Coveney, 'This latest tale'.

<sup>119</sup> Michael Billington, 'It's all in the mind', *Guardian*, 9 January 1999.

by embracing couples, at the centre of the playing space before rushing offstage at the close; her attempted exit, a last effort at agency, was denied by ‘peace, Paulina!’.<sup>120</sup>

Leontes’s solution to the problems posed by the speaking, witchy, tale-telling Paulina is clumsy; the tensions of 5.3 never wholly dissipate and cannot be excised entirely even in today’s ‘magical’ performances. Alongside witchcraft age itself continues to speak, articulating what has passed and what cannot be recovered. Named as old due to her excessive speech in 2.3, by the play’s end Paulina can refer to herself as an ‘old turtle’; Hermione, we are told, has visibly aged: ‘Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing / So aged as this seems’ (5.3.28-9). In the first stagings, actors playing Paulina and Hermione may have used wigs and hair powders, altered their movements, and perhaps changed their costumes to make clear the passage of sixteen years; while wrinkles may have been drawn on cosmetically, Leontes’s pronouncement of Hermione’s crumpled skin may have rendered this unnecessary. One recent ‘original practices’ production, Dove’s 2005 *Winter’s Tale*, aged Penelope Beaumont’s Paulina across the course of the play by whitening her hair between scenes; the skin tone of Yolanda Vazquez as Hermione was paler and waxier when ‘older’, although her hair went unchanged.<sup>121</sup> Today’s productions vary in the efforts they expend on ageing Paulina and Hermione. David Farr and Matthew Warchus did not noticeably age either character; Nicholas Hytner left Hermione unchanged by sixteen years of grief and seclusion while Deborah Findlay as Paulina

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<sup>120</sup> *The Winter’s Tale*, dir. Dominic Cooke (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2006).

<sup>121</sup> Dove’s production also used ‘changes in fashion’ or shifts in the female characters’ costume details across the sixteen-year gap to illustrate the passage of time: see Penelope Beaumont, ‘Rehearsal Note Five’, *Rehearsal Notes for The Winter’s Tale (Paulina)* (London: Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2005) <<http://www.globe-education.org/discovery-space/adopt-an-actor/the-winter039s-tale-2005/186/1266?page=1>> [Accessed 1 September 2011], and Yolanda Vazquez, ‘Rehearsal Note Four’, *Rehearsal Notes for The Winter’s Tale (Hermione)* (London: Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2005) <<http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/education/discovery-space/adopt-an-actor/archive/hermione-played-by-yolanda-vazquez>>.

greyed her hair and spoke in a calmer, more steadfast vocal tone in her later scenes.<sup>122</sup> Only one production I consulted, David Freeman's, fully explored the ageing of both women: Belinda Davidson's Hermione used a walking stick and was bent with grey hair in 5.3, with Joy Richardson's Paulina, as I discuss below, performed as an aged witch. Gregory Doran's production attempted to suppress ageing by transforming Hermione into a piece of religious iconography; Doran's script cut Leontes's lines on Hermione's wrinkles and Polixenes's enthusiastic agreement (5.3.27-9), retaining only a forgettable 'Hermione was not so aged as this seems'. Such glossing-over of age is necessary if the play is to forget its own violent past and the early modern history of threatening aged female magic inscribed therein. As I stated above, however, such an effort is inevitably unsuccessful. Haunting the stage alongside the silenced ageing women is the 'poor dead Mamillius' whom 'nothing can bring back'.<sup>123</sup> Hytner's production made the struggles of the play's ending clear; despite leaving Hermione unaged, his 5.1 featured a large portrait of Mamillius hanging on the stage wall alongside a similar one of his mother. Mamillius's absence troubles the 'magic' of the final scenes. Interestingly, and despite her paucity of lines, Kate Bassett found this Hermione's excessive voice still to disturb 5.3 – in this instance, her overly youthful voice: 'her babyish voice detracts from [...] the magic of her ultimate resurrection from the dead'.<sup>124</sup> For Bassett, the perfectly magical final scene performance is one which renders Hermione entirely silent. Matthew Warchus's production remembered Paulina's 'doubling' of Mamillius at its close by infantilising the (in this production unaged) old woman into silence. The performance transformed Paulina into a ridiculous figure of fun, shouting instructions at Hermione from the stage's edge and squealing her delight at the prospect of marriage. The prompt book margins have been

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<sup>122</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, dir. Nicholas Hytner (London: The National Theatre [Olivier], 2001). Findlay's altered vocalicity as the older Paulina speaks to the effects of performed age and the female voice discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>123</sup> Charles Spencer, 'The Winter's Tale', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 2009.

<sup>124</sup> Kate Bassett, 'School of life sorts the men from the boys', *Independent on Sunday*, 27 May 2001.

decorated with a childish, pencilled-in love heart and a note of ‘squeal!’ at Leontes’s ‘Come, Camillo, / And take her by the hand’ (5.3.144-5).<sup>125</sup>

Youth, age, and the absent presence of Mamillius continue to worry the deployment of ‘magic’ in recent stagings of *The Winter’s Tale*, then; Paulina herself still troubles certain productions. Doran’s staging performed the courtiers as clearly frightened of Paulina’s power in the statue scene, a number of them attempting to leave at her ‘those that think it is unlawful business / I am about, let them depart’; in Cooke’s production Michelle Terry’s Perdita screamed and others started as Hermione moved. While, as we saw above, the ageing of Paulina in present-day performance is typically conducted subtly, some Paulinas (such as Estelle Kohler in Doran’s production) age using techniques of dishevelment and disarray which speak to the early modern costuming of stage witches and which invoke their threat.<sup>126</sup> David Freeman’s 1997 production for the Globe was one such staging. Richly dressed in the earlier play, Joy Richardson’s Paulina entered 5.1 with a cloak over her shoulders, impoverished, bent, and wielding a stick; used in the first instance as a walking aid, this stick became a magical staff in 5.3. Richardson’s awakening of Hermione was slow and pained, performed as a struggle with magical forces; Belinda Davidson’s Hermione returned to life suddenly, gasping, after Richardson took a mouthful of something secret from her pouch and spat it out onto the ‘statue’. Freeman’s production did not consciously seek to imitate early modern practices, yet its insistence on Paulina as

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<sup>125</sup> Prompt book archived at SCLA, catalogue number RSC/SM/1/2002/WIN2.

<sup>126</sup> Entering as the older Paulina, Estelle Kohler wore a long cardigan which has been described by Barbara Hodgdon as ‘rat-coloured [...] with deep pockets, an everyday sort of garment, an index of practicality’. This cardigan was also an index of another performance of female old age, having been worn by Peggy Ashcroft in her final Shakespearean stage role as *All’s Well That Ends Well*’s Countess of Rousillon in 1982. This cardigan, as Hodgdon describes, has recently developed into a marker of worrying womanhood, a freight of unruly female performance memory now remembered alongside staged female age, having been worn again by Alexandra Gilbreath (Doran’s Hermione) when she played Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* in 2003. All three characters represent an instance of uncontrolled, anxiety-inducing female power which demands containment: the silencing of *All’s Well*’s old Countess will be discussed in the following chapter. Barbara Hodgdon, ‘Shopping in the archives: material memories’, in *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 135-67 (pp. 160-2).

aged witch-doctor ('[Paulina] is a shaman, [a] holder of magic powers') refused the more usual, sanitised present-day performance of *The Winter's Tale*'s magic and spoke to the likely first meanings generated by the play in performance.<sup>127</sup>

A failure sufficiently to sanitise the magic of 5.3 into a warmly forgiving performance of reunion makes today's reviewers uneasy: Nicholas de Jongh described Antony Sher's Leontes as 'oddly chilled' in the final scene, while Charles Spencer remarked that 'The final act [...] isn't quite as spine-tingling as usual, largely because Sher, despite the outward trappings of repentance, isn't a sufficiently inward actor to convey Leontes's spiritual journey'.<sup>128</sup> Hytner's production for the National was another *Winter's Tale* which wanted 'magic'; playing Hermione's resurrection as more Perdita-focused, Claire Skinner's 'reunion' with Leontes was brief and tense. Judith Flanders noted that 'In this contemporary production, there is [...] no question of a purely magical resurrection'; Paul Taylor described the 'grave tableau' of the final scene in which '[Hermione and Perdita] [c]lutch[ed] each other like shipwreck survivors'.<sup>129</sup> A properly 'magical' *Winter's Tale* for today's reviewers, then, is one in which Leontes's absolution is complete. An insufficiently sanitised production allows Paulina and Hermione, in their silence, to continue to 'speak volumes', potentially offering up a challenge to the play's urge towards resolution. Freeman's production, for instance, was rare in performing his witchy Paulina as receiving the news of her impending marriage with shock and dismay. The seriousness of the magic proves paramount to critics; John Dove's production evoked a different atmosphere, with laughter, rather than reverence, being the audience's primary response to the statue scene. A wave of mirth greeted Leontes's 'not so much wrinkled', resurging at

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<sup>127</sup> Miller-Schütz, p. 14.

<sup>128</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, 'Jealous man who exudes the danger of a very loose cannon', *Evening Standard*, 7 January 1999; Charles Spencer, 'RSC sets the stage ablaze', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 1999.

<sup>129</sup> Judith Flanders, 'Time's corporate whirligig', *TLS*, 8 June 2001; Taylor, 'Just another time and emotion stud'.

‘the colour’s / Not dry’ (5.3.47-8) and ‘I could afflict you farther’ (5.3.74). Low laughter rumbled throughout the scene, in a production variously described by disappointed critics as ‘efficient but soulless’, ‘short on magic’ and ‘lack[ing] a magical, moving aura’.<sup>130</sup>

Magic performs many roles in *The Winter’s Tale*. It is likely that early modern audiences understood the play as a piece of theatre with old and ageing women at its centre, an exchange of narrative and tale being conducted between youth and age, perhaps with the aid of some doubling. *The Winter’s Tale* afforded the tale-telling, excessively speaking old woman a position of witchy power which subsequently necessitated her control and containment. Forgetting witchcraft and the old woman, today we find the child to be key to the play’s meaning, yet we continue to deploy ‘magic’ as a means to help us articulate what happens to ageing women in the final scenes. In doing so, we collaborate with the play to silence and sideline the older Hermione and Paulina, our stagings registering the lasting tensions of the early modern text even as they attempt a magical whitewashing of a highly problematic ending.

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I began this chapter by thinking about Judi Dench and the conservative, neutering concept of the ‘national treasure’. Dench’s performance as *All’s Well That Ends Well*’s old Countess of Rousillon in 2003, itself in part a subject of the following chapter, was received in similar terms to those often proposed for the final scene of *The Winter’s Tale*,

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<sup>130</sup> Charles Spencer, ‘Sumptuous but slight’; Anon., ‘The Winter’s Tale’, *Sunday Times: Culture*, 26 June 2005; Ian Johns, ‘Summer touches a winter’s sadness’, *The Times*, 17 June 2005.

one of Shakespeare's 'most moving'.<sup>131</sup> Both the performing Dench and the performed *Winter's Tale* have been subject to the nullifying impact of being the object of national affections, a 'mysterious magic' blunting the woman's threat and cleansing the problematic endings of both *All's Well* and *The Winter's Tale*. The sanitisation of *The Winter's Tale* is not achieved without struggle, however, and *Macbeth* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* similarly register tension in their deployment of magic and the magical on the bodies of old women. In *Merry Wives* witchcraft provides an explanation for an excessive body and a language unintelligible to 'simple men'; inserted into a pre-existing narrative, magic allows the brutal punishment of two transgressive ageing bodies, Falstaff's and the absent old woman of Brainford's. No act of imagination or reference to absent presence is required in *Macbeth*, which is furnished with three pre-existing old witches: today's performances afford them a power and influence over the events of the play akin to that of a director, yet this is done at the expense of those witches' ages. A conversation begins between youth and age, old woman and child, which we will follow into the third chapter on ageing mothers of adult children; the doubling of meaning in *The Winter's Tale* finds a child's story become an old wives' yarn, and sees an old woman witch-director married into silence. Magic in the early modern performances of Shakespeare's drama was the inevitable, threatening effect of the staging of an excessively bodied, overly talkative old woman; today, as in Shakespeare's time, it provides a means of containment, control, and jolly comic punishment of the older woman who pushes at the bounds of physicality and speech.

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<sup>131</sup> Spencer, 'The Winter's Tale'.

## *Chapter Three*

### *Be Not So Loud: Motherhood and the Ageing Woman*

As the curtain falls on productions of *The Winter's Tale* audiences are left to reflect on the 'grave tableau' of a mother and daughter reunited in speechlessness.<sup>1</sup> By the play's final moments, *The Winter's Tale's* women have been brought to silence by the actions of a husband: Hermione has no words for Leontes, Perdita does not speak at her mother's revival, and Paulina, as we have seen, is hushed into a new marriage. Other old female characters elsewhere in Shakespeare, however, are liberated from marriage into a tensely staged position of vocal power, speaking events to the perturbation of onlookers. Provoked by this fact, my third chapter looks more closely at the question of the old woman's speech. What did a speaking old woman on the early modern stage sound like, and how does her voice function to create meaning today? Rachel Kavanaugh's 2002 *Merry Wives* played with these questions in staging the disguised Falstaff's beating. On re-entering as Gillian of Brainford, Richard Cordery's Falstaff was beaten with a broom by Tom Mannion's Ford. The violence was short-lived: six whacks after his entrance, Cordery rushed offstage into the wings of the Swan Theatre. The enraged Ford threw the broom after him, seeming to catch the offstage Falstaff as he departed: impact was indicated by Cordery's deep, bass 'Ow!' delivered unseen from the wings and received with interest by the characters remaining onstage, who turned to stare in his wake.

The moment was delivered to comic effect; the audience laughed at the vocally-suggested presence of the male, while the actors remaining on stage collected themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, 'Just another time and emotion stud'.

The deep-voiced exclamation did not function to discover Falstaff to his fellow characters; rather, Evans's 'I think the 'oman is a witch indeed' seemed to confirm the voice heard to be that of an elderly woman, and Ford immediately proposed searching the house again for the still-hidden Falstaff (4.2.170-2). This recent performance of an (un)remarkably deep-voiced old woman on a Shakespearean stage demonstrates the layers of meaning a vocalisation can create in the performance space. Here, the bass voice indicated to a present-day audience the comic masculinity of the almost-rumbled Falstaff, while for the performed characters onstage (Mistresses Page and Ford excluded) the voice served as further proof of the worryingly androgynous old woman's probable witch-status. Perhaps unbeknownst to Cordery and Kavanaugh, the performance of a deep-voiced exclamation originating in the body of a supposed old witch-woman spoke directly in this 2002 production to early modern expectations and performances of the elderly female voice.

In order fully to explore the dynamics of speech, voice, and sound at work across Shakespeare's older female characters, this third chapter takes as its point of departure the insistently speaking old mothers of *Coriolanus*, *King John*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. The first two plays feature old woman characters depicted wholly absent of a husband, dead or alive. Volumnia and Eleanor are characters for whom marriage plays no part: their roles as elderly mothers, rather than as wives or widows, provide them with dramatic purpose. These characters are furnished with a maternal prerogative to speak, advise, and truth-tell, an entitlement which finds its origin in early modern English culture. Entirely uncontained and powerfully influential in the play-world as Eleanor and Volumnia prove themselves to be, the plays and their recent performances have reacted with anxiety to the freedoms they have proposed, working as we will see to silence these old women. The third play to be considered, *All's Well That Ends Well*, features an ambiguously aged woman named in her first speech as a widow and represented as the play unfolds as an

increasingly elderly mother. Unlike *Coriolanus* and *King John*, *All's Well* works from the play's earliest scenes to contain the Countess of Rousillon's voice, managing this widowed mother into a warmly-received position of Hermione-like speechlessness. Beginning with *King John* and *Coriolanus*, then, I study in the first half of the chapter the noisily articulate old mother of Shakespeare's drama, how her lines were voiced on the early modern stage, and how she makes meaning through sound today; my reading of *All's Well That Ends Well* in the second half considers what happens when an ageing mother's voice falls silent.

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*As You Like It's* Jaques's exposition of the phases of a man's life tells a famously performative story, providing a brief account of seven theatrically familiar, age-distinct characters: 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players' (2.7.138-9). The speech is in part a narrative of a progress through the stages of the male voice, the 'one man in his time' first 'Mewling', then 'whining', 'Sighing', 'Full of strange oaths' and, eventually, 'Full of wise saws' (2.7.141-55).<sup>2</sup> Jaques is at his most expressive regarding the sound of life's stages when he defines his sixth stage, the old age of 'the lean and slippered pantaloon' (2.7.157). The voice of such a man is carefully described:

his big, manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes

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<sup>2</sup> For full explications of sound and voice in early modern English theatre and culture, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), and Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

And whistles in his sound.

(2.7.160-2)

The old man's voice, for Jaques, is at once 'childish' and effeminate, returning to the treble tones of the pre-pubescent boy, no longer suggesting a man but rather 'a thing that hath beene a man in his dayes'.<sup>3</sup> Early modern physiology understood the voice to be a function of the body's temperature and constitution. The high-pitched voice of the 'pantaloon' was blamed on age-related shifts in the body's constitution:

because drynesse feedeth vppon, & wasteth al theyr humour, they be thinne hayred & waxe soone balde, crooke nayled, their voyce feble and slender, and sometyme squeakinge (by meanes [that] drynes exasperateth their vocall artery) [...].<sup>4</sup>

Early modern thought on age-related vocal shifts has been borne out by twentieth-century research in psychoacoustics, with John Laver and Peter Trudgill explaining that 'The senescent voice of extreme old age derives from a complex of endocrinal, anatomical and physiological changes'.<sup>5</sup> Hede Helfrich's meta-analysis has found a strong trend across a series of studies for the male voice to undergo a rise in average pitch from the age of sixty-five years onwards, the stage at which an early modern man was thought to enter true old

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<sup>3</sup> Overbury, 'An Olde Man', in *New and Choise Characters*, sig. C8<sup>r</sup>. *The Comedy of Errors*'s old Egeon too speaks in a 'feeble key' (5.1.311).

<sup>4</sup> Lemnius, fol. 69<sup>v</sup>. For a reading of *King Lear* which has the old man take on the voice of a female child – Cordelia – in the play's final acts, see Michael Holahan, "'Look, her lips": Softness of Voice, Construction of Character in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48: 4 (1997), 406-31. On the physicality of the early modern voice, Lemnius further wrote that '[t]he thing that maketh the voice bigge, is partly the widness of the brest, and vocal Artery, and partly the inward or internal heate'; those who 'haue hoat bodies' (unlike cold-blooded old men) have 'a voice [...] not squekinge and slender, but streinable, comly and audible'. Lemnius, fol. 45<sup>v</sup>; see also Smith, *The Acoustic World*, p. 227. Gina Bloom and Bruce R. Smith, however, both emphasise the early modern appreciation of the impact of the voice's journey beyond the body of the speaker to the brain of the hearer through the multiple media of larynx, air, and ear: Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, and Smith, *The Acoustic World*, especially Chapter Four, 'Re: Membering', pp. 96-129; and see also Bruce R. Smith, 'Within, Without, Withinwards: The Circulation of Sound in Shakespeare's Theatre', in *Shakespeare's Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, eds. Karim-Cooper and Stern, pp. 171-94.

<sup>5</sup> John Laver and Peter Trudgill, 'Phonetic and linguistic markers in speech', in *Social Markers in Speech*, eds. Klaus R. Scherer and Howard Giles, (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), pp. 1-32 (p. 10).

age.<sup>6</sup> The voice, like the body, shifted and changed with age. As the end of life approached, the early modern male underwent an alteration which effectively reversed the voice-breaking which had taken place at puberty, his voice returning to a higher-pitched and effeminate state. For the performed old woman, as I will demonstrate, the effect of age was the opposite.<sup>7</sup>

If the staged old man spoke with ‘pipes / And whistles in his sound’, how did a character like Paulina sound when she stood to conjure Hermione back to life? Dympna Callaghan has described the early modern theatre as a ‘material economy of males’, reminding her readers that staged femininity ‘was *defined in and as a relation to masculinity*’.<sup>8</sup> Voice, we know, was understood to be body-dependent, and in the early modern theatre, following Callaghan, was gendered in accordance with its position on a spectrum of male voices. A return to the body of the performing male actor is therefore helpful in order to understand what an early modern audience heard, or expected to hear, when the lines of an old female character were voiced.

In Chapter One I reviewed conflicting theories of the likely ages of the actors who performed female roles in the early modern period, demonstrating a lack of scholarly consensus: the term ‘boy actor’ is understood by some to refer to a definitively pre-pubescent boy, to others a range of male ages from childhood to young adulthood. For some scholars, it is likely that older female roles in particular were performed by fully-developed adult males. The uncertainty surrounding the developmental states of the

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<sup>6</sup> Hede Helfrich, ‘Age markers in speech’, in *Social markers in Speech*, pp. 63-107 (pp. 80-3).

<sup>7</sup> Helfrich’s research finds the female voice to experience a levelling-out in pitch from the age of sixteen, there being little change in mean pitch between the ages of twenty and seventy-five. Helfrich, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Dympna Callaghan, ‘The Castrator’s Song: Female Impersonation on the Early Modern Stage’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 26: 2 (1996), 321-53 (p. 323), italics in the original. See also Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 2000). On the insistent presence of women’s voices in the early modern theatre more broadly, see Marion Wynne-Davies, ‘Orange-Women, Female Spectators, and Roaring Girls: Women and Theater in Early Modern England’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 22 (2009), 19-26.

performing actors impacts on our understanding of voice in the early modern theatre, yet with regard to understanding the performance of the ageing woman the effect is not as serious as might initially be suspected. I wish to argue that disorderly instability was a defining vocal feature of the performed older woman: this instability was manifested across states of uncertainty and emergent masculinity associated with the early modern understanding of the ageing woman's body.

Three conditions of the performed older woman are possible: actors who spanned a range of ages playing the roles; young or pubescent actors alone playing the roles; or fully developed adult males playing all of the old female roles. If old and ageing women's roles were played by males who spanned a range of pre-pubescent, pubescent, and post-pubescent ages, the primary aural effect of the performance of such roles was unpredictability: an audience would not be aurally prepared for what to expect when a male player began to speak as an old woman, timbre, pitch, and volume being unpredictable in advance. If the older woman's role was more usually performed by a young or pubescent boy, however, this unpredictability hardened into precariousness, with the voice liable to waver in pitch, cracking and squeaking as puberty approached.<sup>9</sup> The unreliability and instability of the voiced older woman on the early modern stage spoke directly to the theorised effects of the female ageing process reviewed in the Introduction: the loss of femininity, emergence of masculinity, and frightening uncontrollability and uncontainability of the post-menopausal female body.<sup>10</sup> Such associations would of course have proved inevitable should old or ageing women's roles have been most usually played by adult males. Under each of the three potential vocal conditions of the performed older

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<sup>9</sup> On the threats posed to masculinity of the boy player's potentially squeaking voice, see Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, pp. 21-65, and Bloom, "Thy Voice Squeaks" (an earlier version of the *Voice in Motion* chapter); Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, pp. 17-42.

<sup>10</sup> On this, see Jennie Votava's readings of two plays, *Epicene* and *The Roaring Girl*, which associate 'the specter of feminine noise and a cross-dressed figure' in "The Voice That Will Drown All the City": Un-Gendering Noise in *The Roaring Girl*, *Renaissance Drama*, 39 (2010), 69-95 (p. 76).

woman on the early modern stage, then, the unruly instability and attendant aged masculinity of her body was indicated by the voice; the speaking old woman always threatened to become, like Paulina, ‘mankind’. When the old woman character begins to speak the audience is braced for a performance of uncertainty, an orality which tests divisions of gender.

Bruce R. Smith’s work on the acoustics of early modern England neglects, in its study of the physics of performing voices, to account for the liminal, unstable, unpredictable pubescent male voices suggested by Gina Bloom and others to have been of great concern in the staging of early modern drama.<sup>11</sup> Smith identifies the modal pitch of prepubescent boys’ and adult women’s voices to cohere around 261.6 Hz, or ‘middle C’, indicating these voices’ interchangeability; the primary distinction he locates between the two categories of voice is that of timbre (audible quantity of harmonics resonating with the fundamental frequency, the lowest frequency present in a sound).<sup>12</sup> The boy’s voice, he notes, generates fewer harmonics above the fundamental frequency than that of an adult woman. Smith therefore concludes that ‘what audiences at the Blackfriars and the Globe heard [when a boy played the part of a woman] would have been sounds in the same pitch range as an adult female voice, but more carrying and penetrating’ due to the boys’ concentration of tones around the fundamental frequency.<sup>13</sup> Smith then discusses the differences in pitch and timbre between boys’ (understood by him to be the performers of girls’ and women’s roles) voices and men’s voices, concluding that ‘speech sounds gendered as male would pervade the wooden O [of the theatre], filling it from side to side’; this is due to the greater travelling capacity of low-frequency sound waves, the modal pitch

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<sup>11</sup> For the material covered in the following discussion, see Smith, *The Acoustic World*, pp. 222-9. On voice and characterisation in Shakespeare’s drama, see also Jonathan Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), pp. 216-21.

<sup>12</sup> See also Helfrich, pp. 80-3.

<sup>13</sup> Lower-frequency sound waves are more penetrative as they travel further without being dispersed.

of an adult male voice being 130.8 Hz, an octave below the middle C mode of boys and adult women. For Smith, therefore, ‘speech sounds gendered as female [on the early modern stage] would be heard as isolated effects within this male matrix’.

Smith’s work is convincing and exciting. My interest, however, is in those voices which could be comfortably gendered as neither male nor female, voices which threatened or vocalised masculinity while originating in a body performing aged femininity. The older woman manifesting a voice which threatened to spill over into adult masculinity – an unstable and pubertal or even fully developed adult male voice – established an aural space of power and agency, character making itself heard via the psychoacoustics of pervasive male sound described by Smith. The performance of a female character by an actor whose voice was either wholly deep or deepening shrugged off the aural ‘isolation effect’ experienced by those female characters played by young boys.<sup>14</sup> The older woman spoke loudly due to the actor’s ‘large respiratory volume’ and hence was heard clearly on stage and by the listening audience.<sup>15</sup> Her voice was unpredictably unstable, calling attention to itself, or else thoroughly broken, occupying a broad range of harmonics and ‘filling the ambient space’.<sup>16</sup> It staked its claim to be heard by reaching towards the vocal state most associated with authority in early modern England.

Later in the chapter I will return to the implications of the older female character’s occupation, through the performing voice, of a position of power. First, however, I would like to establish the parallels between the figure of the speaking, loudly audible, and worryingly masculine-voiced ageing woman on the early modern stage, and the corresponding cultural position of the old mother of adult children in early modern

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<sup>14</sup> On this, see also Votava, pp. 86-7.

<sup>15</sup> On the adult male voice as articulating itself more loudly than that of younger males or of females of any age, see Laver and Trudgill, pp. 7-9.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *The Acoustic World*, p. 229.

England. Establishing first the licence in speech afforded the older mother in early modern culture, I will subsequently explore the dynamics of voice, motherhood, power, and silence across three sometimes noisy Shakespearean mothers: *King John*'s Eleanor, *Coriolanus*'s Volumnia, and *All's Well That Ends Well*'s Countess of Rousillon.

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Motherhood and age are separate entities in Shakespeare's plays: mothers and mothers-to-be range from the 'young gentlewoman' Helen of *All's Well That Ends Well*, to *Richard III*'s elderly Duchess of York, who has seen 'Eighty odd years of sorrow'.<sup>17</sup> Despite the inevitable divergence of motherhood and chronological age (maternity being a state spanning life-phases) scholars have often conflated the two by approaching motherhood as a distinct female life-stage (typically imagined as youthful).<sup>18</sup> My work finds a reading of early modern motherhood to benefit from being approached *through* age, rather than mistaking motherhood *as* an age. While a good deal of historical scholarship has analysed the earlier stages of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century motherhood, comparatively little sustained work has been carried out on the figure of the older mother of adult children.<sup>19</sup> What work has been done on the role of the older mother in early modern

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<sup>17</sup> *All's Well, that Ends Well* 1.1.16. *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, 4.1.95.

<sup>18</sup> See Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History* (London: The Phoenix Press, 1996); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: OUP, 1997); Mendelson and Crawford; Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480-1750* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1998); Chris Laoutaris, *Shakespearean Maternities: Crises of Conception in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, ed. Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990); *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, eds. Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); and *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the early modern period*, eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 156.

England suggests that a woman tended to retain an educational or advisory function in the lives of her children as she aged, guiding them in matters of marriage and land and assisting with childbirth.<sup>20</sup> To do anything less would be, as Dorothy Leigh explains, unnatural:

Is it possible, that shee, which hath carried her child within her, so neere her hart, and brought it forth into this world with so much bitter paine, so many grones and cries, can forget it? nay rather [...] [w]ill shee not instruct it in the youth, and admonish it in the age, and pray for it continually?<sup>21</sup>

Juan Luis Vives distinguished between humanity and the animal world on the basis of a parent's lasting concern into old age for his or her child: 'they leaue the[m] not so, nor cast the[m] not of, nor depart not from them, as other beastes do, but defend them, embrace the[m], & after theyr possibilitie adourne the[m], nourishe them, & helpe the[m]'.<sup>22</sup>

Instructing parents on the raising of children young and old, William Gouge wrote that 'they who are growne in yeares, and of riper vnderstanding, [are] accordingly to be dealt withall'; for Gouge, parents of such adult children must still 'haue a care of their well doing', as '*Eli* did well in admonishing his children after they were married'.<sup>23</sup> Gouge's hope is that ageing parents will retain an educational, advisory role in their children's lives; similarly, Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman* encourages mothers with adult children to continue to 'giue [...] good counsaile and exhortation' as they age.<sup>24</sup>

Vives here draws on a vocabulary of speech, defining effective old motherhood as a vocal act; Elizabeth Grymeston described her posthumously printed book of advice addressed to her son as her 'last speeches'. Doing so, she not only asserted her mother's

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<sup>20</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, pp. 159-61.

<sup>21</sup> Dorothy Leigh, *The Mothers Blessing* (London: 1616), sigs. B2<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *The Office and Duetie of an Husband*, trans. Thomas Paynell (London: 1555), sig. B3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties Eight Treatises* (London: 1622), sig. 2N2<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *A verie Fruitfull and pleasant booke called the Instruction of a Christian Woman*, trans. Richard Hyrde (London: 1592), sig. 2B1<sup>v</sup>.

prerogative to speak but, indeed, her expectation that her exhortations would be attended to, ‘as euer the loue of a mother may challenge the performance of her demand of a dutifull childe’.<sup>25</sup> Valerie Wayne, reviewing such conduct-books as Grymeston’s, works written by women positioning (or performing) themselves as mothers providing advice for other women, has noted that ‘the writer’s role as mother offer[ed] her a position of authority from which to speak’.<sup>26</sup> Wayne’s suggestion of a locus of feminine power enacted through a speaking, articulate motherhood is bolstered by Gouge, Vives, Grymeston, and Leigh’s vocabularies of speech: for these early modern writers, late-life motherhood was a spoken act, voiced through admonition, prayer, exhortation, and counsel.

The ageing early modern mother achieved agency through her performance of a maternal voice. Her insistent speech associates her with the powerfully communicative, deep, or unstable voices of contemporary performed old women. In Shakespeare, the advisory, exhortatory capacity retained by the ageing mother manifests itself as a marked tendency among his older mother characters to speak unrestrainedly to their adult children, at length and in public. Two influential readings have dominated the study of the representation of mothers in Shakespeare: Mary Beth Rose’s ‘Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare?’ and Janet Adelman’s *Suffocating Mothers*.<sup>27</sup> Rose has found Shakespearean

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Grymeston, *Miscelanea. Meditations. Memoratiues* (London: 1604), sigs. A3<sup>v</sup>, B1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Valerie Wayne, ‘Advice for women from mothers and patriarchs’, in *Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 56-79 (p. 56). See also Kristen Poole, ‘“The fittest closet for all goodness”: Authorial Strategies of Jacobean Mothers’ Manuals’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 35: 1 (1995), 69-88; Edith Snook, ‘“His open side our book”: Meditation and Education in Elizabeth Grymeston’s *Miscelanea Meditations Memoratiues*’, in *Maternal Measures*, pp. 163-75; and Heather Dubrow, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss: Forms of Deprivation, Mourning, and Recuperation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 174-5. On maternity as performance, see *Performing Maternity*.

<sup>27</sup> Rose; Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays*, Hamlet to The Tempest (London: Routledge, 1992). Kathryn Schwarz, citing Adelman, has stated that in Shakespeare ‘[t]he ideal mother performs a kind of vanishing act, reduced to and displaced by the articulated subjectivity of her child’. Kathryn Schwarz, ‘A Tragedy of Good Intentions: Maternal Agency in *3 Henry VI* and *King John*’, *Renaissance Drama*, 32 (2003), 225-54 (p. 228). For a closely psychoanalytic reading of works including Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *The Winter’s Tale* which nonetheless seeks ‘new ways of making room for the paradoxes and variousness of mother-child relationships’ (p. 5), see Theresa M. Krier, *Birth Passages: Maternity and Nostalgia, Antiquity to Shakespeare* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

drama to prefer silent, domestically-bound mothers. Adelman's enormously influential psychoanalytic reading of the trajectory of Shakespearean motherhood interprets the mother-characters as products of a textually inscribed struggle to establish masculinity in the absence of the feminine; the son's battle to become, as it were, 'author of himself' by killing off the maternal.<sup>28</sup> The work of both Rose and Adelman remains helpful and will be bolstered by my readings of the eventual silences staged in *King John*, *Coriolanus*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. Nevertheless, my approach to motherhood through the lens of old age reveals these critics' dismissal of the often-articulate and loud-voiced older mothers of Shakespeare's drama to be premature. Beginning now with *Coriolanus*, I will trace across three plays the Shakespearean echo of the culturally-sanctioned early modern old mother, a mother who, speaking insistently in a male voice indicative of her own masculinised ageing body, claims for herself a force and agency which proves threatening and, inevitably, requires silencing.

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When writing *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, Shakespeare closely followed Plutarch's narrative of a warlike hero's conquests and eventual downfall set out in Thomas North's translation of *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*.<sup>29</sup> The most significant adjustments made by the playwright in working from Plutarch's history were his

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<sup>28</sup> *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, 5.3.36.

<sup>29</sup> Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. Thomas North (London: 1579), pp. 237-59; see also *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Volume V The Roman Plays: Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 453-563.

expansions of the roles of Volumnia, Menenius, Aufidius, and the tribunes.<sup>30</sup> Volumnia, mother of the protagonist, plays a leading role in *Coriolanus* while in Plutarch she is, until the later stages of the narrative, on the sidelines of the action. Shakespeare developed Plutarch's depiction of Volumnia petitioning her son, expanding the character into a loud-voiced, liberally speaking, early modern old mother who holds a great deal of power over her warrior son throughout the play, functioning independent of any husband- or father-figure. *Coriolanus* constitutes Volumnia in entirely maternal terms. She is repeatedly referred to as a mother by the play's other characters: 'My mother' (1.10.13); 'Look, sir, your mother' (2.1.154); 'Here comes his mother' (4.2.8). In rendering the play's interest in Volumnia primarily maternal, Shakespeare built a character who demonstrated the contemporary older mother's speech and counsel prerogatives; his representation of Volumnia's power, as we will see, proved fraught with anxiety. The performed Volumnia is described today as a 'blood-thirsty mother from hell' and 'the mother to end all mothers'.<sup>31</sup> My reading will explore Volumnia's expansive speech, its disconcerting strangeness as a register of maternity, and its aural effect in the early modern theatre; later, turning my attention to the cracks and instabilities in and around her voice, I will examine the final act's staging of Volumnia's eventual silence.

We first encounter Volumnia in a domestic setting: '*Enter Volumnia and Virgilia, mother and wife to Martius. They set them down on two low stools, and sew*' (1.3.0). The positioning of the women on '*two low stools*', both sewing, generates a mirror effect; Coriolanus's mother and his wife are visual and spatial equals. From her first line, however, the dominance of Volumnia's character emerges, a dominance which is built around her speaking voice. Advising the younger Virgilia to 'sing, or express yourself in a more

<sup>30</sup> *Coriolanus*, ed. Lee Bliss, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Sheridan Morley, 'A Roman epic where the crowd has a silver lining', *Daily Express*, 11 May 2006; Russ McDonald, *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry, and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 138.

comfortable sort' (1.3.1-2), and subsequently delivering a speech of her own of fifteen prose lines in length (1.3.1-15), Volumnia establishes herself as a product of the early modern template for older motherhood which prioritised speech and counsel. Virgilia, by contrast, is distinctly quieter, the younger mother delivering just four lines to Volumnia's thirty-seven prior to Valeria's entrance at 1.3.44; her silence in performance has been described by Benedict Nightingale as 'sullen' and blamed on Volumnia's overbearing speech.<sup>32</sup> Virgilia tends toward silence throughout the play, responding to the news of Valeria's approach with 'Beseech you give me leave to retire myself' (1.3.23-4); Volumnia prefers the 'better mirth' (1.3.99) of gossip with Valeria, denying Virgilia's request to retire ('Indeed you shall not' [1.3.25]) and launching into an eight-line speech on her absent son's military prowess: 'Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum [...]' (1.3.26-34). Volumnia's authority, like her will to speech, is quickly established: naming Virgilia twice in her first speech as her 'daughter' (1.3.1, 1.3.13), Volumnia claims maternal power for herself through her edicts: 'Hear me profess sincerely' (1.3.18).

As the mother of a married adult son, and as grandmother to a boy of schoolgoing age, Volumnia is thought of as an old woman and is typically played today by an older actor. Her declaration on Martius's victorious return from the wars that 'I have lived / To see inherited my very wishes' (2.1.184-5) suggests a venerable age, as does her close relationship with the 'old and true Menenius' (4.1.22). More significant than Volumnia's actual or intended age, defined in neither Shakespeare's play nor the source material upon which he drew, is the dramatic effect of her contextualisation as aged: with her authority as an older mother comes the play's expectation, and part-endorsement, of her copious

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<sup>32</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'A cheering sign that the Globe is in capable hands', *The Times*, 12 May 2006. Nightingale was reviewing *Coriolanus*, dir. Dominic Dromgoole (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2006).

speech.<sup>33</sup> Volumnia is described by her son as having ‘a charter to extol her blood’ (1.10.14), a special right to speech; she has, ‘I know, petitioned all the gods for my prosperity’ (2.1.156-7). In 3.2 the old mother’s role as counsellor and political adviser to her son comes powerfully to the fore; there we see a mother of strong political judgement and wise experience – ‘I would have had you put your power well on / Before you had worn it out’ (3.2.16-7) – admonish Coriolanus to a degree not dared by Menenius and Cominius: ‘You are too absolute’ (3.2.40); ‘Thy valiantness was mine, thou sucked’st it from me, / But owe thy pride thyself’ (3.2.149-50). Volumnia’s voice speaks the loudest in the scene of the nobles’ advising Coriolanus to ‘perform [the] part’ (3.2.109) of beggar for the consulship. Both Menenius and Coriolanus defer to her ‘good demand’ (3.2.46) when she announces her intention that her son ‘be counselled’ (3.2.27), allowing her five lengthy speeches and other shorter interjections.<sup>34</sup> Old Menenius endorses the mother’s counsel – ‘This but done / Even as she speaks, why, their hearts were yours’ (3.2.86-7) – and at one point proposes substituting Volumnia’s voice for Coriolanus’s in an interview with the citizens: ‘Noble Lady! / Come, go with us, speak fair’ (3.2.69-70).<sup>35</sup> Across 3.2 as in her earlier scenes, then, the old mother’s voice is clearly heard and respectfully attended.

The sense of Volumnia’s possessing a unique prerogative to speak truth to and, perhaps, verbally browbeat her son (‘Pray be content. / Mother, I am going to the market-place’ [3.2.130-1]) does not subside as the play proceeds. 4.2 sees her railing at Sicinius

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<sup>33</sup> My qualification of ‘part-endorsement’ is explained below. For a reading of Volumnia which associates her authority in the play with her ‘post-menopausal’ age, see Nina Taunton, ‘Time’s Whirligig: Images of Old Age in *Coriolanus*, Francis Bacon, and Thomas Newton’, in *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 21-38 (p. 37).

<sup>34</sup> See 3.2.40-6, 3.2.47-52, 3.2.53-70, 3.2.73-87, and 3.2.124-31.

<sup>35</sup> *Coriolanus*, ed. Bliss, follows editorial tradition in inserting a stage direction of ‘*To Coriolanus*’ after Menenius’s ‘Noble Lady’, suggesting the fair speech be her son’s rather than Volumnia’s. I see no reason to adjust the Folio’s structuring of the lines in this way: addressing the line to Volumnia makes sense in the context of Menenius’s flattery. See *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, ed. R. B. Parker, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1994); *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, ed. John Jowett, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986); and *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*.

and Brutus following Coriolanus's banishment, demanding she be heard: 'Nay, and you shall hear some' (4.2.16); 'I'll tell thee what' (4.2.24); 'Ere you go, hear this' (4.2.41). Finally, as we will explore below, Volumnia's skills as an orator, counsellor, and mother are put to the ultimate test in her lengthy 5.3 negotiation with a vengeful Coriolanus. Like the tale-telling old Paulina, Volumnia's speech is constituted as having a near-magical power, as her success subsequent to the following exchange reveals:

<i>Menenius</i>	See you yon coign o'th'Capitol, yon cornerstone?
<i>Sicinius</i>	Why what of that?
<i>Menenius</i>	If it be possible for you to displace it with your little finger, there is some hope the ladies of Rome, especially his mother, may prevail with him.

(5.4.1-5)

Despite Menenius's scepticism and that of the watchman who scorns 'the easy groans of old women' (5.2.42-3), Volumnia's active, speaking, counselling voice bears fruit in 5.3, persuading her son away from the destruction of Rome and confirming for the last time her authority as an articulate old mother.

Bruce Smith's study of the acoustics of the early modern theatre has shown that the voice of the adult male actor filled the performance space, saturating it with sound. If, as Carol Rutter has suggested, it is likely that Volumnia was a role played by an adult male actor, her voice would have travelled further and been perceived as louder by a listening audience than the voice of Virgilia, a younger mother liable to have been played by a young actor.<sup>36</sup> In such a scenario, the insistent speech of the older mother would have been supported by the depth and volume of her sound, her vocal acoustics ensuring that her

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<sup>36</sup> *Documents of the Rose Playhouse*, ed. Rutter, p. 124.

words were heard, carving out a space of aural dominance which reached into the back of the theatre. If, however, Volumnia was a role first performed by a ‘boy’ actor, perhaps an older adolescent or even a younger, pubertal player, the unpredictability and instability of voice discussed earlier in the chapter would have acted upon the character’s aural impact. A fluctuating voice, it has been argued, generated anxiety in the early modern theatre by calling attention to the believed flexibility of contemporary gender; when sounded by an ageing female character, as we have seen, a voice liable to crack and break indicated the threatening masculinity of the old woman. While we cannot be sure of the age of Volumnia’s first performers and hence can’t speak with certainty on the likely volume of her voice in its first staging, we may, by looking in a slightly different way at the vocality of certain moments in the play, come to an understanding of the aural effect of a performance of Coriolanus’s mother on the early modern stage.

Volumnia’s voice is constituted in opposition to the voices of others around her. As her noisy, problematic older motherhood is defined against the younger Virgilia’s silence in Coriolanus’s presence, so too does her speaking voice make itself heard, establishing itself against the voice of the performed younger woman. A comparison of Volumnia and Virgilia’s first words illustrates the point. Volumnia’s ‘I pray you, daughter, sing’ (1.3.1) generated quite a different aural effect in performance to that delivered by Virgilia’s ‘But had he died in the business’ (1.3.15). Smith provides a table of English phonemes and their comparative decibel (dB) intensities when voiced; studying the phonemic structure alongside the rhythm of the lines, one finds Volumnia’s first words naturally to emphasise the high-decibel ‘ay’ and ‘au’ phonemes, the iambic stress on ‘ing’ counteracting the lower-intensity nasal phoneme.<sup>37</sup> The effect is of a loud, booming first articulation, the character inevitably delivering her line (itself an exhortation) with force and volume. In

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<sup>37</sup> For Smith’s table of phoneme decibels, reproduced from Dennis Fry, *The Physics of Speech* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979), see *The Acoustic World*, p. 226, and see Appendix One.

comparison, Virgilia's first words are arrhythmic and staccato, her 'But had he' losing itself in the voiceless 'b' and 'h' sounds, the potentially high-decibel vowel sounds of 'But' and 'had' cut short by 't' and 'd'.<sup>38</sup> Virgilia's 'died' asserts itself, reaching the 26 dB of Volumnia's 'pray'; the sandwiching of the word between the hesitant 'But had he' and 'in the business', however, serves to dampen the aural effect of 'died', shrinking its impact in comparison to Volumnia's confidently rhythmic and loud proclamation.<sup>39</sup> I am arguing, then, that the phonemic structure and metre of Volumnia's first words afford her a powerful vocality, rendering her aurally dominant from her first moments on stage.

A second, key moment later in the play furthers this sense of the power of the older mother's words as being established through her voice, and in opposition to Virgilia's. 2.1 stages the scene of Coriolanus's return to Rome, Volumnia's son arriving victorious to the sound of 'trumpets' (2.1.143) and '*a sennet*' (2.1.147). Coriolanus's 'O' (2.1.155) on seeing his mother is succeeded six lines later by Volumnia's 'O', both sounds the loudest phoneme that the human body can produce at 29 dB. The visceral sound of 'O', as Smith has so carefully explored, fills the theatre space; in exchanging 'O's, an effect repeated at 2.1.166-7, son and mother compete for aural authority. Volumnia's 'O' comes as the second articulated sound in a four-syllable, high-volume line. 'But O, thy wife!' (2.1.161) averages 26.2 dB, an attention-grabbing vocalisation made still more evocative of the speech-facility of the ageing mother when compared to Virgilia's silence. Named by

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<sup>38</sup> Referring to Ophelia, Smith explains how 'a concentration of consonants' forces an actor to speak softly: *The Acoustic World*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>39</sup> There is some evidence from studies of early modern pronunciation that Virgilia's 'died' may have been softer in its original delivery than it proves today. Pronounced on the early modern stage in a manner closer to the 'oy' of today's 'toy', the 'ie' of 'died' may have exceeded 26dB slightly as the sound tended towards an 'O'. See David Crystal, *Pronouncing Shakespeare: The Globe Experiment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 86-8; Helge Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 217. In a personal communication, however, Crystal admitted that he 'didn't note any particular change in volume' of articulations when actors shifted between early modern and present-day pronunciation in experimental productions of *Romeo and Juliet* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Personal communication from David Crystal, 10 August 2011. For helpful illustrative recordings of Shakespearean lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and the sonnets pronounced according to what it is thought early modern English sounded like, see <<http://www.pronouncingshakespeare.com/op-recordings/>>.

Coriolanus as ‘My gracious silence’ (2.1.161), the wordlessness of the apparently weeping (2.1.163-4) younger mother, when established as it is here in immediate opposition to the space-filling voice of Volumnia, serves to isolate her aurally. In a scene saturated with sound – ‘*Flourish [of] cornetts*’ (2.1.190) – the older woman thrives.

I suggested above that *Coriolanus* only part-endorses Volumnia’s speech; while the play affords the older mother a vocal platform from which to speak and be heard, it does so strainedly. The play is anxious in response to her liberal speech and loud vocality, troubling the character’s motherhood with behaviours traditionally defined as masculine by representing her as bloodthirsty and militant. Readers and audiences are posed the problem of a mother who revels (loudly) in her son’s danger: ‘O, he is wounded, I thank the gods for’t!’ (2.1.108); ‘[blood] more becomes a man / Than gilt his trophy’ (1.3.36-7).

Demonstrating the resulting critical discomfort with Volumnia, Madelon Sprengnether has written of the ‘deep fantasy of maternal destructiveness’ at work in *Coriolanus*, Janet Adelman has read her as an unnatural mother who withholds food and love.<sup>40</sup> In an unpublished thesis, Catherine Loomis wrote of Volumnia’s ‘bad stewardship’ as the mother and queen of her family unit.<sup>41</sup> If Volumnia has tested critical sympathy by glorying in Coriolanus’s injuries (‘there will be large cicatrices to show the people’ [2.1.133-4]) her recollections of how she mothered his youth (‘To a cruel war I sent him’ [1.3.12]) have also provoked ire when performed. Rachel Halliburton wrote in 2002 of Alison Fiske’s Volumnia that she had ‘banished all maternal tenderness’; the character regularly is described as ‘flinty’ or cold-hearted, as in Christopher Hart and Nicholas de

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<sup>40</sup> Madelon Sprengnether, ‘Annihilating Intimacy in *Coriolanus*’, in *Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp. 89-111 (p. 89); Adelman, p. 147. Moncrief and McPherson have applied Judith Butler’s model of performative gender to maternity, in order to disturb ideas of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ maternal behaviour: *Performing Maternity*, p. 3; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Loomis, “‘And All the World Shall Mourn Her’: The Literary Response to the Death of Queen Elizabeth I’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Rochester, 1997), p. 147.

Jongh's accounts of Margot Leicester's performance.<sup>42</sup> Playing the role in Dromgoole's 2006 production, Leicester recorded her sense of the character as having 'no empathy at all', claiming Volumnia's treatment of her son to be 'abusive' in modern terms.<sup>43</sup> Studying the portrayal of Volumnia in the play, Kathryn Schwarz finds in the active, speaking old mother an unignorable threat, one rooted in 'the perils of a maternal agency that, at least for a time, evades patriarchal constraints'.<sup>44</sup> Schwarz here identifies the tension keenly felt across the play between 'maternal agency' and 'patriarchal constraints'; while culturally sanctioned, the speech-license allowed the older mother proves worrying in *Coriolanus*. Shakespeare problematises Volumnia's vocal freedom by having the character shrug off the early modern (and, perhaps, modern) insistence on a mother's primary role as nurturer and caregiver, instead vocalising her maternity in a register of violence.<sup>45</sup> The tensions at work in the text in the strained representation of Volumnia as mother were echoed in the play's first performances, her strange speech articulated in a disconcertingly loud and unstable voice.

We have already looked at the potential impact of the voice of an adult male emanating from the aged person of Volumnia. If we consider her voice to have originated in the body of an adolescent or pubertal male, the very authority generated by the volume and rhythm of her lines may have served as that young actor's undoing. The pressure placed on the larynx by the projection of such lines as 'I pray you daughter sing' and 'But

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<sup>42</sup> Rachel Halliburton, 'Hail to this Japanese conqueror', *Evening Standard*, 28 November 2002; Christopher Hart, 'Audience incrimination', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 14 May 2006; Nicholas de Jongh, 'Cake's missing layers', *Evening Standard*, 11 May 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Margot Leicester, 'Volumnia: Rehearsal Bulletins: Bulletin 2' (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2006) <<http://www.globelink.org/resourcecentre/coriolanus2006/volumnia/>> [Accessed 1 September 2011].

<sup>44</sup> Schwarz, p. 248.

<sup>45</sup> Dorothy Leigh uses motifs of feeding and nourishment throughout her writing to justify her undertaking to publish as a mother: see for example Leigh, sigs. A10<sup>r</sup>-A12<sup>r</sup>. Chris Laoutaris has discussed the importance of an early modern mother's public persona as being founded on caregiving and nurturing, describing the problems associated with failure in this arena: Laoutaris, pp. 161-2; Valerie Wayne writes that 'early modern mothers were taught that their own salvation depended on nurturing [their] children with educational and spiritual food': Wayne, p. 63. On early modern maternity as a spectrum of caregiving, see Naomi J. Miller, 'Mothering Others: Caregiving as Spectrum and Spectacle in the Early Modern Period', in *Maternal Measures*, pp. 1-25.

O, thy wife!' was liable to produce cracking or wavering in the voice: in such a moment, the anxiety inspired by the loudly-speaking older mother merges with contemporary anxieties of masculinisation in the body of the old woman, traced in the voice of the adolescent male actor.<sup>46</sup> Vocal cracking most firmly articulates itself in 1.3, its presence noted at an important moment in the play as a whole for *Coriolanus*'s production of masculinity. Valeria, Virgilia, and Volumnia discuss the development of Coriolanus and Virgilia's son, young Martius, Valeria recalling Martius's 'confirmed countenance' and how he recently 'mammocked' a 'gilded butterfly', tearing it with his teeth (1.3.56-61). The recollection is a violent one, the young boy seeming to follow in his father's footsteps: 'He had rather see the swords and hear a drum, than look upon his schoolmaster' (1.3.52-3). Each woman has a response to the evidence of young Martius's apparent development into the violent adult masculinity sanctioned by the play: for Volumnia, remembering Coriolanus's youth, the child was in 'One on's father's moods' (1.3.62), for Valeria he is 'a noble child' (1.3.64), and for his mother Virgilia the boy is 'A crack, Madam' (1.3.65). Gina Bloom has explored Virgilia's suggestive use of 'crack' at this point; as she and the *Oxford English Dictionary* note, the early modern 'crack' could indicate 'A lively lad; a rogue (playfully), a wag'.<sup>47</sup> It could also, as Bloom discusses, call attention to the cracking pubescent voice of the growing Martius, revealing Virgilia's 'apprehension about the broader significance of young Martius's precocious adult masculinity'.<sup>48</sup> Bloom's reading seeks to blur the distinctions between childlike play and adult warfare, Virgilia's 'crack' voicing the liminality of adolescence and revealing the child dormant in every adult male. Spoken by a woman to other women, each of whom is played by a male actor, 'crack' further strikes me (when articulated in the performance space) as signifying a still broader

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<sup>46</sup> We get a hint of a Shakespearean association of loudly speaking women and vocal cracks in *The Taming of the Shrew* when Petruchio tells us that he 'will board [Kate], though she chide as loud / As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack' (1.2.91-2).

<sup>47</sup> Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, p. 28, pp. 42-8; <<http://www.oed.com>>.

<sup>48</sup> Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, p. 46.

early modern anxiety about vocal liminality and the potential for bodies, like voices, to shift and change. This set of meanings is associated with ‘crack’ elsewhere in Shakespeare: the raving Timon links cracking, the deepening of the voice, and the changing of bodies when he succeeds his wish that ‘Consumptions’ would ‘strike’ the ‘hollow bones of man’ with one that ‘the lawyer’s voice’ would ‘Crack’ so ‘That he may never more [...] / [...] sound his quilllets shrilly’ (4.3.150-4). *The Comedy of Errors* makes a cracking voice an effect of male ageing when Egeon wonders whether ‘time’s extremity’ has ‘so cracked and splitted my poor tongue’ that ‘my only son / Knows not my feeble key of untuned cares?’ (5.1.308-11).<sup>49</sup> In the presence of the prolifically-speaking older mother Volumnia, Virgilia’s choice of word calls irresistible attention to the performed mother’s vocal unpredictability and, as an ageing woman, her bodily instability. Spoken at the heart of a women’s conversation on masculinity, Virgilia’s ‘crack’ troubles gender as well as age with the cracking voices and liminal bodies underlying the performed women’s roles. ‘[M]annish crack[s]’ and uncertainties haunt Volumnia’s voice in particular, despite its strength, due to her age.<sup>50</sup> The tensions between the license in speech afforded the older mother and the sheer quantity of her unrestrained words are mirrored in the friction between her loudly speaking voice and the problematic masculinity its tones imply and her age suggests.

The anxiety raised by the prolific speech of the early modern mother may be traced even in those works which encouraged that speech. Vives’s *Instruction*, which earlier encouraged the mother’s ‘good counsaile and exhortation’ of her adult children, is shortly afterward concerned to manage the old mother’s words, hoping that:

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<sup>49</sup> Given the attention Egeon calls to his ‘feeble key’ and ‘crack’d’ or cracking voice, one might wonder whether this old man role was originally played by a young, perhaps pubescent male.

<sup>50</sup> *Cymbeline, King of Britain*, 4.2.237.

when [a mother] is past the pleasure of her body, and hath done with bearing and bringing vp of children, then shall shee sauour and breath all heauenly, shee shall neither say nor do any thing that is not ful of holines.<sup>51</sup>

Within the genre of mothers' advice books there is manifested a clear and anxious urge to contain the very act of speaking which that genre promoted.<sup>52</sup> Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, too, demonstrates such a compulsion: the masculinity of voice which afforded the old mother such aural authority on the early modern stage served, in its threatened cracks, to trace uncertainty. The play brings the fear of the old mother's necessary voice to a shattering climax in the fifth act, in a moment which sees Volumnia voice herself into silence and speak her son towards inevitable death.

Visiting Coriolanus at the Volscian camp with Virgilia, her young grandson Martius, and Valeria, Volumnia expertly delivers a series of speeches designed to convince her son to stand down from his impending attack on Rome. Utilising a rhetoric of filial love and duty, Volumnia brings the 'mother, wife, and child' (5.3.102) to bear on Coriolanus's stated intention never to 'Dismiss my soldiers, or capitulate' (5.3.83). Beginning with the 'O' (5.3.52) that acoustically claims the theatre space as her own, the old mother fights a last battle through speech with her warrior son across one hundred and thirty lines. Fruitlessly demanding speech from others as though to confirm the primacy of her own ('Speak to me, son' [5.3.149]; 'Why dost not speak?' [5.3.154]; 'Daughter, speak you' [5.3.156]; 'Speak thou, boy' [5.3.156]), her voice dominates the scene, narrating and directing (like Paulina and Mistress Quickly) the stage action for the audience and reader: 'He turns away. / Down, ladies. Let us shame him with our knees' (5.3.169-70); 'This boy [...] / But kneels and holds up hands for fellowship' (5.3.175-6). Her speeches end, as all

<sup>51</sup> Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. 2B2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Christina Luckyj has studied the 'disciplining' of a mother's speech across two pamphlets in 'Disciplining the Mother in Seventeenth-Century English Puritanism', in *Performing Maternity*, pp. 101-14. On the dynamic between speech and containment of speech across mothers' advice books, see also Poole.

speaking must, in silence: 'I am hushed until our city be afire / And then I'll speak a little' (5.3.182-3). For Volumnia, however, the silence will prove permanent. Once successful in her aim, Coriolanus informing the Volscian Aufidius that 'I'll frame convenient peace' (5.3.192), the mother never speaks again in the play; her voice is extinguished in an extraordinary moment, indicated by the stage direction '[He] holds her by the hand, silent' (5.3.183).

In the text, as in performance, this scripted moment of wordlessness proves astonishing. The silence is transformative: when eventually it is broken by Coriolanus's devastating 'O mother, mother!' (5.3.183), it is to announce his submission ('You have won a happy victory to Rome' [5.3.187]) and, as he correctly predicts, his death. Considering the staging of the silence, Lois Potter has written that 'Shakespeare freezes the action and imposes silence, to ensure that, as far as possible, all eyes will be on the simple gesture that indicates Coriolanus's cosmic transformation'.<sup>53</sup> Volumnia too is transformed, 'All talked out' into her final silence.<sup>54</sup> Demonstrating the capacity of silence – a textual lacuna or absence – to serve as a moment of powerful activity when staged, the pair's mute performance teaches the audience a final lesson about the dangerousness of an old mother's speaking voice, as it is soon succeeded by the protagonist's murder at the hands of Aufidius's '*conspirators*' (5.6.8).<sup>55</sup>

The moment of silence generates an upheaval in the play, then, the mother's voice having prevailed 'Most dangerously' (5.3.189) upon Coriolanus to ensure his eventual capitulation in a wordless moment. The printed silence serves as a question mark in the

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<sup>53</sup> Lois Potter, 'Assisted Suicides: *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* in 2006-7', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58: 4 (2007), 509-29 (p. 522).

<sup>54</sup> Peter J. Smith, 'Play Reviews: UK Spring/Summer Season 2006: *Coriolanus*', *Cahiers Elisabethains*, 70 (2006), 47-9 (p. 48). Christina Luckyj, however, has described a critical tendency to refuse to recognise the implications of Volumnia's silence and the complexity of the moment for an understanding of her character: see Christina Luckyj, '*A Moving Rhetoricke*': *Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 110-3.

<sup>55</sup> On silence's capacity to serve as a rhetorically effective position, see Luckyj, '*A Moving Rhetoricke*'.

text: undefined in length or quality, the onus lies on actors, directors, and audiences to put the silence to work, finding the meaning in its emptiness. David Farr's 2002 production attempted to marshal and contain it, the prompt book defining it as 'at least 43 secs' in length; the 'at least' undid the effort made, however, re-opening the silence for negotiation in each performance of the production.<sup>56</sup> The tableau of Greg Hicks as Coriolanus noiselessly weeping in Alison Fiske's arms seemed in its positioning of the actors' bodies to prefigure what the *Sunday Times* in 2007 understood to be the mutual destruction of mother and child in the silent moment ('In their great final scene they destroy each other').<sup>57</sup> Demonstrating the fluidity of the silence's meaning, however, other critics have differed as to what they found in the moment even while watching and remembering the same performance. Michael Billington remarked of Janet Suzman and William Houston's performance that 'paradoxically in a play of such muscular rhetoric', the silence was the staging's 'best effect'; for Billington, no small measure of the pathos of the moment lay in the fact that 'Volumnia [knew] that she [had] effectively signed her son's death warrant'.<sup>58</sup> The silence, for Billington, was a response to Volumnia's 'I am hushed'; the older mother's agency lasted for him into and beyond silence, the unspeaking hand signing the 'death warrant' of her son. For Charles Spencer, by contrast, the moment was 'almost unbearably effecting – not least because it means that Coriolanus is signing his own death warrant and both mother and son know it'.<sup>59</sup> Spencer understood Volumnia's silence to be absolute, her influence over Coriolanus passing, and the blame for the son's eventual death to lie with the victim himself. Despite the mirroring seen in the language of their reviews, Billington and Spencer found the silence to do quite different performative work with

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<sup>56</sup> Prompt book on archive at SCLA, catalogue number RSC/SM/1/2002/COR1. *Coriolanus*, dir. David Farr (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> Anon., 'Coriolanus', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 11 March 2007. *Coriolanus*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Michael Billington, 'Coriolanus', *Guardian*, 7 March 2007 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2007/mar/07/theatre.rsc>>.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Fitting farewell to this home of the barnstormers', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 2007.

regards to the meaning of Coriolanus's death and the role of Volumnia. The critics demonstrated not only the flexibility of a silence's meaning but, furthermore, its potential to escape the control of actors and directors and to begin to speak the characters' voices anew.

Following 5.3's *'Exeunt'*, Volumnia has only one further, wordless appearance in *Coriolanus*. 5.5.0's stage direction, *'Enter [...] two senators with [the] ladies [...], passing over the stage'*, followed by the Senator's *'Behold our patroness, the life of Rome!'* (5.5.1), seems to indicate Volumnia's presence. In this short but noisy scene – *'Welcome, ladies, welcome!'*; *'A flourish with drums and trumpets'* (5.5.6) – Volumnia's lack of speech speaks loudly. Directors have responded to the potentially unruly and uncontrollable nature of silence in the play's final act by asking it to do a great deal of work in recent performances, attempting in 5.5 to transform a silence into an authorised, sanitised, wordless maternal communication. Remembering the 2007 Gregory Doran production, Lois Potter wrote that:

Volumnia returned to Rome in triumph, the boy at her side. As the crowds cheered, she advanced to the front of the stage; the cheering died down, and everyone waited to hear her speak. Her mouth opened, stayed open for a moment, and then closed with deadly finality. She turned and walked upstage [...].<sup>60</sup>

This Volumnia finds that after 5.3 words stick in her throat. Doran's production staged a thoroughly quelled old mother who seemed to make public confession of her speech-crimes through her performance of a 'deadly' silence: Michael Dobson understood her to be *'keenly aware that the effect of her intercession can only be to condemn her son to death'*.<sup>61</sup> For Michael Billington, too, Suzman's Volumnia was *'tearfully silent'*, thinking on the

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<sup>60</sup> Potter, p. 528.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Dobson, *'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2007'*, *Shakespeare Survey*, 61 (2008), 318-50 (p. 326).

‘death warrant’ she had signed and articulating her guilt without words.<sup>62</sup> Five years earlier, Alison Fiske’s *Volumnia* was also played as guilt-ridden. For Fiske, the effect of 5.3 was to strip her of words, reducing her previously fluent handling of language to a raw animal sound: ‘Under the fluttering confetti of the victory parade, she’s an incongruously exhausted, stricken figure who lets out a cry of greeting indistinguishable from a harrowing howl’.<sup>63</sup> Fiske’s voice is scarred, registering the impact of 5.3 in its loss of intelligibility. Stagings such as Farr’s and Doran’s seem to use the expansiveness of performance to allow the character to speak afresh, articulating an act of contrition through the silencing and warping of the voice. Such silent performances of guilt recuperate the play by allowing it to come to a close with the punishment and devastation of the formerly vociferous old mother still fresh in a departing audience’s mind.

*Volumnia*’s voice remains a locus of contest in today’s theatres. The voice produced by Alison Fiske as *Volumnia* in 2002 proved particularly problematic, critics arguing over its quality, its effectiveness, and its volume. For Benedict Nightingale, Fiske’s voice ‘could exude more majesty and maternal power. The odd climactic snarl isn’t enough’.<sup>64</sup> Rachel Halliburton, however, responded more warmly to Fiske, locating much of the strength of her performance in her voice: ‘Fiske manages to make her attitude seem compassionate as her voice ranges from impassioned growl to quivering desperation’.<sup>65</sup> A further pair of critics disagreed over Fiske’s voice, Ian Shuttleworth hearing ‘quiet nobility’ where Charles Spencer detected ‘the kind of fearsome old boot you used to see shouting at her offspring from the touchlines of public school rugby fields’.<sup>66</sup> A varied set of aural experiences emerged from a single press-night performance, then. In their reviews,

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<sup>62</sup> Billington, ‘*Coriolanus*’.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Taylor, ‘The profession of violence’, *Independent*, 4 December 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Benedict Nightingale, ‘By the samurai sword divided’, *The Times*, 28 November 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Halliburton, ‘Hail’.

<sup>66</sup> Ian Shuttleworth, ‘Problematic “chop-socky”’, *Financial Times*, 3 December 2002; Charles Spencer, ‘He was born to play this role’, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 2002.

Nightingale, Halliburton, Shuttleworth, and Spencer seem to indicate the performed voice's lasting capacity to stage multiplicity, whether that multiplicity is anchored in the speaking, gendered body of the performer or the receiving ear of audience members. The act of describing that voice in a printed review threatens to dampen its multivalence into a single certainty of sound; reading across reviews, we can recover something of the performed voice's challenge.

The voice of the aged mother in *Coriolanus* is as worryingly unstable as the body from which it speaks, requiring management and containment even as it carves out an aural space of authority. An earlier Shakespeare play, *King John*, conducts a still more brutal silencing of two vocal mothers, one an aged soldier-mother whose battles for aural dominance are, as we will now explore, fought against a formidable young opponent over the child-body of England's future.

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*King John* begins with the silencing of an awkwardly talkative old 'Mother-Queen' (2.1.62). Reacting to the early speech of the French ambassador to John's court, Eleanor's first remark is an interruption which establishes her as a narrator and interpreter of the play's action. For Eleanor the ambassador's comments make for 'A strange beginning' and his terming John's 'majesty' as 'borrowed' implies future strife (1.1.4-5). John's response – 'Silence, good mother, hear the embassy' (1.1.6) – is quick, yet his authority is qualified by the wheedling 'good mother'. This early stifling of Eleanor's speech proves the play's first and last directly-spoken silencing of the mother, the old queen proceeding to articulate

herself loudly and publicly across *King John*'s first three acts. It remains, however, an early indication of the anxieties the play will later express regarding the speech of this old woman and other powerfully-voiced women in *King John*.

In her article 'Where Are the Mothers in Shakespeare?', Mary Beth Rose chose not to consider the mothers of the history plays because 'the political and dynastic issues inherent in [them] raise unique problems and warrant special consideration'.<sup>67</sup> *King John*, I would counter-argue, speaks to and resonates with the maternity depicted in *Coriolanus* by staging a relentlessly speaking and eventually silenced old warrior-mother, a mother who like Volumnia is engaged in a vocal struggle against another, younger mother, Constance.<sup>68</sup> *King John* has proven less popular in performance over the last century than *Coriolanus*, however.<sup>69</sup> Since its 1963 foundation there have been no productions of *King John* at the National Theatre; Shakespeare's Globe Theatre also has yet to stage the play. The RSC has seen five productions since the 1960s, two in the past decade, and Northern Broadsides staged a well-received touring production in 2001.<sup>70</sup> The performed play tends to be

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<sup>67</sup> Rose, p. 292.

<sup>68</sup> Regarding the dating of *King John*, no pre-Restoration accounts have been found of the play's performance, nor are there any extant records of the ownership of the play's printing rights. *King John* is listed among Shakespeare's tragedies in Francis Meres's *Palladis tamia. Wits treasury* (London: 1598), sig. 202<sup>r</sup>, giving scholars a 1598 *terminus ad quem*. The use of the 1587 Holinshed's *Chronicles* as a source makes that year its earliest possible composition date; further arguments as to more precise dating rely on stylistic evidence and historical allusions, both necessarily somewhat speculative. A. R. Braunmuller's edition names the likely composition date as 'most probably 1595-6' (*King John*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller [Oxford: OUP, 1989], p. 15). The existence of the anonymous two-part *Troublesome Raigne of Iohn King of England*, first printed in 1591 and claiming in its second (1611) and third (1622) quarto editions to be written by 'W. Sh.' and 'W. Shakespeare', has led scholars to speculate as to potential Shakespearean involvement in its authorship and/or revision, however this study will assume the only Shakespeare-authored *King John* play to be the text printed in F in 1623, i.e. *The life and death of King John*. Anon., *The Troublesome Raigne of Iohn King of England* (London: 1591).

<sup>69</sup> Juliet Dusinberre writes that '[i]n the later twentieth century *King John* has not [...] shared notably in the revival of enthusiasm about Shakespeare's other history plays'. Juliet Dusinberre, 'King John and Embarrassing Women', *Shakespeare Survey*, 42 (1990), 37-52 (p. 37). The play was very popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however: see *King John*, ed. L. A. Beaurline, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp. 3-4; Eugene M. Waith, 'King John and the Drama of History', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29: 2 (1978), 192-211.

<sup>70</sup> The recent increase in frequency of *King John* productions perhaps signals a revival in the play's fortunes; this claim is blunted somewhat by the fact that the 2006 Josie Rourke production was commissioned for the Complete Works festival at Stratford. *King John*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2001); *King John*, dir. Josie Rourke (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2006); *King John*, dir. Buzz Goodbody (London: The Roundhouse, 1970); *King John*, dir. John Barton (Stratford-upon-Avon:

lukewarmly received by critics: Michael Billington has described its later acts as ‘wearying’, Susannah Clapp writing that *King John* is ‘steeped in political argument but skimpy in the human busyness which makes Shakespeare’s other histories so appealing’.<sup>71</sup> Damning with faint praise, Susan Irvine described Josie Rourke’s production as ‘History-play-lite but surprisingly enjoyable’.<sup>72</sup> The play nonetheless has proven attractive to female directors: three of the five RSC productions were female-directed.<sup>73</sup>

Across *King John*, Eleanor exhorts, counsels, accuses, and narrates. Speaking immediately after Chatillon, the French ambassador, exits, Eleanor reminds her son of past advice given and interprets what has just passed for king and audience:

What now, my son? Have I not ever said  
How that ambitious Constance would not cease  
Till she had kindled France and all the world  
Upon the right and party of her son?  
(1.1.31-4)

Her judgement and political savvy are clear – ‘This might have been prevented and made whole / With very easy arguments of love’ (1.1.35-6) – and her implicit criticism of John’s lacklustre politics goes unrebuked. Her license to speak painful truth is as permissive as

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The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1974); *King John*, dir. Deborah Warner (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Other Place, 1988); *King John*, dir. Barrie Rutter (Northern Broadsides: 2001). For a detailed account of productions staged between 1950 and 1989, see Geraldine Cousin, *King John*, *Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). Since the first submission of this thesis a further production of *King John* has been staged at Stratford: *King John*, dir. Maria Aberg (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Michael Billington, ‘King John’, *Guardian*, 4 August 2006 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/aug/04/theatre.rsc>>; Susannah Clapp, ‘Chamber of love and horrors’, *Observer*, 11 March 2001.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Irvine, ‘King John’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 August 2006.

<sup>73</sup> This unusual statistic is not necessarily due to any quality of the play or its characters, but may rather be attributable to RSC politics, with less popular plays having been assigned to female directors in smaller theatres. See Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 50-68. The most recent *King John*, staged in 2012, was also female-directed and was notable for featuring a female Bastard and Pandulph.

Volumnia's: flirting with treason she tells her son of his 'strong possessio[n]' of the crown 'much more than [his] right' to it (1.1.40). Later, reading the body of her grandson Philip Faulconbridge, she speaks his (illegitimate) heritage for John and the audience:

*Eleanor*        He hath a trick of Coeur-de-lion's face;  
                       The accent of his tongue affecteth him.  
                       Do you not read some tokens of my son  
                       In the large composition of this man?  
  
*John*             Mine eye hath well examined his parts,  
                       And finds them perfect Richard.

(1.1.85-90)

Her influence is obvious: without consulting the King, Eleanor offers Faulconbridge a position at court as her acknowledged grandson (1.1.148-9), declaring herself to be 'thy grandam, Richard; call me so' (1.1.168).

Announcing herself in her first scene to be, like Volumnia, a loudly speaking voice of authority, Eleanor's vocalisations continue to wield influence across the play. Her reputation as a speaker and an authority precedes her. Proclaiming the arrival of the English to the French camp at 'Angers' (2.1.0), Chatillon states that 'England [...] / Hath put himself in arms' (2.1.56-7); with John 'is come the Mother-Queen, / An Ate stirring him to blood and strife' (2.1.62-3). As an 'Ate' Eleanor is a goddess of destruction; for Shakespeare, 'Ate' implies a woman associated with excessive speech or voice. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice 'speaks poniards, and every word stabs' (2.1.216); she is 'the infernal Ate in good apparel' (2.1.222-3). In *Julius Caesar*, 'Ate' is 'come hot from hell' by the side of 'Caesar's spirit', a spirit whose 'monarch's voice' shall 'Cry 'havoc!'' (3.1.273-6). In *King John*, Chatillon's terming Eleanor as an 'Ate' is the first suggestion since the

early silencing of the old queen that Eleanor's speaking voice is likely to prove a source of anxiety in the play, promising chaos in speech.

Speech and agency are associated in *King John* as they are in *Coriolanus* and as they were in the plays of the previous chapter: the old woman's voice has the capacity to exert influence and to make things happen.<sup>74</sup> While in *Coriolanus* Volumnia's agency is expressed through her vocal encouragement of her son's militarism (and, eventually, her capacity to talk him into surrender), in *King John* we are presented with a speaking old woman who takes active soldiery upon herself. Earlier in the play Eleanor describes herself as 'a soldier and now bound to France' (1.1.150); Phyllis Rackin has characterised her as 'a soldier queen, a tough, Machiavellian dowager'.<sup>75</sup> An Ate and a soldier, Eleanor has also been termed a 'virago' and compared to later militant female characters such as the *Henry VI* plays' and *Richard III*'s Queen Margaret.<sup>76</sup> As a virago, the old queen would be 'man-like, vigorous, and heroic', 'an amazon'.<sup>77</sup> These ideas of 'man-like' viragoes and Amazons (mythical self-ruled female warriors) underpin the association between Eleanor's voice and her soldiery; for Eleanor as warrior-queen, Ate, and virago, a deeper and more masculine voice than those of the play's other three women was likely in her first performances to have distinguished her aurally and to have aided in establishing her character as

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<sup>74</sup> In *Coriolanus*, as we saw, Shakespeare developed his source material to make more of the old mother's role. Whatever the relationship between *King John* and *The Troublesome Raigne*, the Eleanors of both plays are significant roles and their characters are largely similar. Some small differences include Shakespeare's more ambiguous representation of Eleanor's knowledge of Arthur's intended doom at 3.3 in comparison to *The Troublesome Raigne*'s clear statement of malevolence ('Sonne John, soone shall we teach him to forget / These proud presumptions and to know himselfe' [sig. C3<sup>r</sup> ]), and the greater significance Shakespeare lends to the reported death of Eleanor. See also Dusinger, 'King John and Embarrassing Women', pp. 43-4.

<sup>75</sup> Phyllis Rackin, 'Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories', *Theatre Journal*, 37: 3 (1985), 329-44 (p. 338).

<sup>76</sup> Alison Thorne, "'O, lawful let it be / That I have room . . . to curse awhile": Voicing the Nation's Conscience in Female Complaint in *Richard III*, *King John*, and *Henry VIII*', in *This England, That Shakespeare: New Angles on Englishness and the Bard*, eds. Will Mayley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 105-24 (p. 106).

<sup>77</sup> <<http://www.oed.com>>.

authoritatively maternal.<sup>78</sup> Today, the performed Eleanor is described as a ‘gravel-voiced warrior queen’, suggesting a militant toughness.<sup>79</sup>

Eleanor may well have been first performed by a post-pubescent actor with a broken voice. The impact of this voice was such that it penetrated the theatre space and made itself heard in tone and volume. In terms of the constitution of Eleanor’s character as an authoritative early modern aged mother, the effect of voice may most clearly be heard in the 2.1 altercation between Constance and Eleanor. Across a total of forty-eight lines of exchange the two women argue loudly over the rights of John and Arthur to the throne, demonstrating the animosity which was hinted at in the first act (‘that ambitious Constance’) and which stretches into the third. The exchange begins with an interruption from Constance in reaction to Eleanor’s ‘Who is it thou dost call usurper, France?’ (2.1.120), the younger mother responding with ‘Let me make answer; thy usurping son’ (2.1.121). Affairs quickly escalate with Eleanor’s ‘Out, insolent! Thy bastard shall be king’ (2.1.122); arguing maternal voices remain solely in charge of the aural space until Austria cries for ‘Peace!’ (2.1.134). Across the exchange here and later in the scene (2.1.159-94), two effects of voice are noticeable. The first, emerging from the deeper, Ate-like virago voice of Eleanor, is that of the older mother’s superior impact in articulation. Eleanor’s lines, though fewer than those of Constance (nine across their 2.1 exchange, in comparison to Constance’s thirty-nine), were more clearly heard and more powerfully delivered in the first performance spaces. The second effect of the mothers’ speaking in 2.1 is the greater level of respect afforded to Eleanor’s words than to those of Constance: across the scene the old mother’s speech is deferred to while the younger mother’s is interrupted, cut off, and condemned. Four times in 2.1 Constance is asked by characters other than Eleanor to

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<sup>78</sup> On the Amazon, and the Amazon’s voice, see in particular Lamb, *Performing Childhood*, pp. 17-42, Bloom, “‘Thy Voice Squeaks’”, pp. 60-77, and Bloom, *Voice in Motion*, pp. 56-8.

<sup>79</sup> Russell Jackson, ‘Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon: The RSC’s 2001-2 Season’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53: 4 (2002), 536-48 (p. 546).

be silent: by France, her advocate ('Peace, lady; pause or be more temperate' [2.1.195]), by John ('Bedlam, have done' [2.1.183]), by Austria ('Peace!'), and even by her son Arthur ('Good my mother, peace' [2.1.163]). Yet, so excessive do her listeners consider Constance's speech ('Lady, you utter madness, and not sorrow' [3.4.43]) that France appears compelled to call repeated attention to her apparent greying hair, as though age might serve to explain her speaking:

Where but by chance a silver drop hath fallen,  
 Even to that drop ten thousand wiry friends  
 Do glue themselves in sociable grief.  
 (3.4.63-5)

Constance is the mother of a young son ('Hubert, throw thine eye / On yon young boy' [3.3.59-60]), yet in her passion her loud speaking and her hoary hair – and the rush to contain them both – are inseparable: 'O fair affliction, peace! / [...] Bind up those tresses' (3.4.36-61); 'wherefore will I do it? / I tore them from their bonds, and cried aloud' (3.4.69-70).

The disparity in quantity of lines does not serve as sufficient explanation for the difference in the characters' treatment of Constance and Eleanor: Eleanor's remarks, though few, are cuttingly effective ('His mother shames him so, poor boy, he weeps' [2.1.166]; 'There's a good mother, boy, that blots thy father' [2.1.132]). Despite the cruelty of her words, Eleanor receives no criticism for her speech and no attempt is made to silence her; Constance, for her part, is at once censured and declared ageing. The effect is to stage the (temporary) acknowledgement and acceptance of the speech of the old 'Mother-Queen' and the concurrent impatience with the voice of her younger counterpart, building the sense of the oldest mother's particular right of speech while suggesting Constance's unlooked-for

vocalisations to be a symptom of her increasing age. The anxiety raised in the play as a result of this deference to the aged mother's voice becomes clear later on.

The exchange of voices between the older and younger mother calls attention, as in *Coriolanus*, to uncertainties of bodies and gender. The multiplicity of tones and pitches at work across supposedly female bodies in 2.1 again serves to disturb certainties of femininity and masculinity, the emergent masculinity of the elderly female body making its presence clearly felt in the deep voice and supposed soldiery of the old woman. France's indication of Constance's incipient ageing in his seemingly unnecessary remark on the presence of a grey hair (3.4.63-5) reveals something of the play's tension regarding the woman's body, her ageing process, and her associated potential to displace fixities and absolutes of gender distinction. The text of the play reflects the anxiety generated by the bodily uncertainty vocalised across Eleanor and Constance's angry exchange; the argument itself becomes a language of uncertainty. The ability of legal documents to represent truth is undermined:

<i>Eleanor</i>	[...] I can produce A will that bars the title of thy son.
<i>Constance</i>	Ay, who doubts that? A will, a wicked will, A woman's will, a cankered grandam's will!

(2.1.191-4)

The meaning of bodies becomes uncertain in this exchange ('His grandam's wrongs, and not his mother's shames, / Draw those heaven-moving pearls from his poor eyes' [2.1.168-9]) and words themselves cannot be trusted: 'Thou monstrous slanderer of heaven and earth!' (2.1.173). The ultimate locus of uncertainty in the animosity between Eleanor and Constance lies in the body of the mother herself, however:

*Eleanor*        Out, insolent! Thy bastard shall be king  
                       That thou mayst be a queen and check the world.

*Constance*     My bed was ever to thy son as true  
                       As thine was to thy husband; and this boy  
                       Liker in feature to his father Geoffrey  
                       Than thou and John [...].  
                       My boy a bastard? By my soul I think  
                       His father never was so true begot.  
                       It cannot be, an if thou wert his mother.

(2.1.122-31)

That the bogeyman of maternal illegibility and potential paternal cuckoldry emerges to speak its name at this aurally strained point in the play demonstrates the degree to which the Eleanor-Constance exchange generates fears of bodily uncertainty and instability for an early modern theatregoer. Eleanor's dominance over the younger mother and her power of speech in John's court as a whole may be firmly established by the end of 2.1, by which point she has helped to engineer a peace between the English and the French (2.1.469-80), yet even as the play allows her agency it registers here the tensions which will lead, after 3.3, to the old woman's absolute silencing.

Both mothers disappear from *King John* in the play's fourth act: as Janet Adelman has written, '[Shakespeare] kills both of them off [...] with an abruptness that borders on the ludicrous'.<sup>80</sup> The focus of my reading is on Eleanor, as the only obviously elderly female character in the play, however the silence which is imposed on her is just one aspect of the larger exclusion of women from the second half of the play which takes place in *King John*. Ringfencing Eleanor, as I have done here, comes at the expense of a wider reading which

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<sup>80</sup> Adelman, p. 10.

might (among other things) consider the ways in which three generations of female characters, Blanche, Constance, and Eleanor, speak and are silenced together. What is gained by my approach is a sense of how the old woman, soldier, and mother in *King John* speaks, in her words, her silence, her performance, and her reception, to her counterparts in *Coriolanus* and elsewhere in Shakespeare's work.

Across her appearances in the third act (3.1 and 3.3) Eleanor is largely subdued, speaking only once in 3.1 to attempt to rein in the collapse of the accord she helped to arrange – 'Look'st thou pale, France? Do not let go thy hand' (3.1.121) – and three times in her final scene: 'Farewell, gentle cousin' (3.3.17), 'Come hither, little kinsman. Hark, a word' (3.3.18), and her last line, 'My blessing go with thee' (3.3.71). Constance, by contrast, speaks vociferously and at length across 3.1 and 3.4, in a performance of wrath and grief which generates discomfort within the play but sympathy for her character in performance. She is repeatedly censured for speech: 'By heaven, lady, you shall have no cause / To curse the fair proceedings of this day' (3.1.22-3); 'Lady Constance, peace' (3.1.38); 'The Lady Constance speaks not from her faith, / But from her need' (3.1.136-7); 'O fair affliction, peace!' (3.4.36). Today's responses to the play in performance have reproduced neither the impatience shown to Constance in the play, nor the deference to Eleanor's speaking: while Sam Marlowe termed the Eleanor-Constance 2.1 altercation as 'an undignified catfight', Juliet Dusinberre has claimed that the sympathies of an audience must inevitably lie with Constance over Eleanor: 'cathartic moment, go it, Constance'.<sup>81</sup> Despite the sympathetic responses of audiences and critics to Constance's speaking in performance – 'a tragic personification of maternal Grief'; 'The pain of the dead boy's

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<sup>81</sup> Sam Marlowe, 'Bard's rarity given life and not a little death', *The Times*, 5 August 2006; Dusinberre, p. 49. Alison Thorne has also referred to the 2.1 exchange as a 'cat-fight' which (at first) seems to '[pander] to clichés of female rivalry': Thorne, p. 111.

mother Constance – played by a blazingly good Kelly Hunter – is almost unbearable’ – the play moves to silence her insistent speech at the same time as it muzzles Eleanor’s:<sup>82</sup>

The first of April died  
Your noble mother. And as I hear, my lord,  
The Lady Constance in a frenzy died  
Three days before [...].  
(4.2.120-4)

Following the group exeunt at 3.3.73, the play imposes a silence on the powerful old mother it established in the early scenes by writing her out of the text; by 4.1 both mothers, the old and the ageing, have vanished.

The play’s attempt to silence maternity is awkwardly executed. The Messenger’s announcement of Eleanor’s death – ‘her ear / Is stopped with dust’ (4.2.119-20) – is a jarring note, an audience or reader having been given no reason to expect the old queen’s demise.<sup>83</sup> The lack of subtlety with which Eleanor is silenced is indicative of the tensions aroused in the play by her insistent, powerful speaking in the earlier scenes. A related tension may be detected in reviews of the play in its recent performance. Despite the centrality of her role in the practice of John’s kingship, the war against France, and the eventual forging of the marital accord between Blanche and the Dauphin, reviewers are largely silent regarding Eleanor, ignoring her loud speech rather than addressing it. Across six major national newspaper reviews of Doran’s 2001 production of *King John* no

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<sup>82</sup> Michael Dobson, ‘Shakespeare Performances in England, 2001’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 55 (2002), 285-321 (p. 291); Robert Gore-Langton, ‘King John’, *Daily Express*, 30 March 2001.

<sup>83</sup> Juliet Dusinberre has read the excision of Eleanor and Constance in the play’s latter half as an instance of textual ‘embarrassment’, the authority and speech of the women having proved unmanageable. For Dusinberre, ‘the play goes to pieces once the women leave the stage’. Dusinberre, p. 51.

mention was made of Alison Fiske's performance as Eleanor.<sup>84</sup> Reviewing Josie Rourke's 2006 production, Dominic Cavendish noted only that '[John] slumped, cowering and pathetic in his throne on learning that his mother Eleanor (Sorcha Cusack) [was] dead'; four further major national newspaper reviews failed to discuss Cusack's Eleanor.<sup>85</sup> Rhoda Koenig's claim that Sorcha Cusack was 'perfectly fine and perfectly unmemorable as the [K]ing's mother' in 2006 does not read as a sufficient explanation for such extensive neglect.<sup>86</sup> The silence surrounding Eleanor is not confined to the national media: Michael Dobson's scholarly review of Doran's production for *Shakespeare Survey* also made no comment on Fiske's Eleanor. Dobson's silence was particularly tense given the image of the production used in the review. A photograph simply titled 'Guy Henry as King John' had Henry in the foreground; Alison Fiske's very obvious, highly visible Eleanor as the sole figure in the background of the image warranted, it seems, neither a credit in the photograph itself nor a mention in the review despite demonstrating in her very presence her influence and power over her son.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Billington, 'King John', *Guardian*, 30 March 2001

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2001/mar/30/theatre.artsfeatures2>>; Gore-Langton, 'King John'; John Gross, 'King John', *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 April 2001; Patrick Marmion, 'King John', *Evening Standard*, 29 March 2001; Ian Shuttleworth, 'Bard's spin-doctors well-served by Doran', *Financial Times*, 30 March 2001; Charles Spencer, 'Laying bare the dark heart of the political process', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 2001.

<sup>85</sup> Dominic Cavendish, 'Guided with a manly swagger through Shakespeare's maze of shifting allegiances', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 August 2006 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3654312/Guided-with-a-manly-swagger-through-Shakespeares-maze-of-shifting-allegiances.html>>; Billington, 'King John', 2006; Irvine, 'King John'; Alastair Macaulay, 'King John', *Financial Times*, 7 August 2006; Fiona Mountford, 'The return of the king', *Evening Standard*, 4 August 2006.

<sup>86</sup> Rhoda Koenig, 'King John', *Independent*, 8 August 2006 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/king-john-swan-theatre-stratforduponavon--none-onestar-twostar-threestar-fourstar-fivestar-411044.html>>.

<sup>87</sup> Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2001'; for the image, see p. 290 of the article, and see also Figure 3. Dobson similarly had nothing to say about Sorcha Cusack's Eleanor in 2006: Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2006', *Shakespeare Survey*, 60 (2007), 284-319. Dobson is not the only scholarly reviewer to neglect the performed Eleanor, nor are male reviewers alone guilty: a long and detailed study of Warner's 1988 production by Alycia Howard-Smith lacked an account of the staging of the old queen yet dedicated half a page to Susan Engel's Constance; similarly, Geraldine Cousin's close analysis of Warner's production studied even Pembroke and Salisbury in detail, yet offered no account of Eleanor. Alycia Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 117-23; Cousin, pp. 101-40.

The character of Eleanor is no less memorable than those of the Cardinal, France, Hubert, or the Dauphin, each of whom receive regular appraisals in review. That the sole reviewer willing to describe a performance of Eleanor in detail chose to excoriate the character is revealing of the discomfort still generated by this forcefully speaking old mother:

the tone is largely set by Alison Fiske as John's mother Eleanor, a woman who takes grotesque glee in conflict, whether it's with Geoffrey Freshwater's befogged French king or with David Collins's sadistically manipulative cardinal. Think of a hearty schoolmistress organising killer-lacrosse and you've got her number. Imagine some powerful village matron walking a nervous, erratic and possibly rabid greyhound and you have her relationship with John.<sup>88</sup>

Nightingale's vitriol is articulated in response to Eleanor's power and agency, both over her son and at court. By circulating, and hence perpetuating, a series of stereotypes – 'hearty schoolmistress'; 'powerful village matron' – he invites ('Think of'; 'Imagine') the reader to reproduce both his interpretation of Eleanor and his own creative version of today's ageing women. Taking his cue from the text's enactment of silence, Nightingale puts the Shakespearean character to work in service of the promulgation of an image of dangerous, threatening female old age.

Through Nightingale's review, a (ventriloquised) version of Eleanor continues to speak. The imposition of total silence on an old mother is, however, more successfully carried out in *King John* than in *Coriolanus*; there is no manipulable wordless appearance or silent action on the part of Eleanor, whose death, responded to with a shock which befits its suddenness – 'What, Mother dead?' (4.2.127); 'My mother dead!' (4.2.182) – is an absolute end. While she remains onstage, however, productions of *King John* have found

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<sup>88</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'The fool in the crown', *The Times*, 30 March 2001.

ways to make Eleanor speak in her silent moments, staging (as in performances of a consciously ‘guilty’ Volumnia, and as in Nightingale’s imagined game of ‘killer lacrosse’) an old mother with blood on her hands. 3.3 is an ambiguously written scene; Eleanor, standing aside in inaudible conversation with Arthur while John suggests the boy’s murder to Hubert, may or may not be aware of the fatal decisions being made by her son and his henchman. The old queen has, as we have seen, only three lines in the scene: her ‘Come hither, little kinsman’ is succeeded only by her blessing of John as he departs. The breadth of silence between these lines has been asked in performance to indicate the mother’s awareness of, and even involvement in, the intended assassination of her grandson.

Deborah Warner’s 1988 production staged an Eleanor resigned to her son’s plan, observing John and Hubert’s conversation as Arthur slept, and heaving a world-weary sigh as Hubert led Arthur off-stage. The sigh, itself a voiceless performance of a speaking silence, lent meaning to the old queen’s wordlessness and performed, briefly, an old woman who was at once an accessory to murder and uncomfortable with that fact. Throughout Doran’s production Alison Fiske’s Eleanor, even when not speaking, communicated menace by pacing, growling, and frowning threateningly. While Hubert and John spoke aside, Fiske conveyed the sense that her Eleanor listened in to their conversation: her well-timed turn back to the stage at John’s ‘Enough’ (3.3.66) was not that of a woman lost in conversation with her grandson. Josie Rourke’s production, too, seems to have staged a guilty Eleanor. Reviewing the production, Sam Marlowe wrote that Sorcha Cusack’s Eleanor ‘tolerates both [John’s misogyny] and his plot to murder Arthur’.<sup>89</sup> Even as the play closes down the voice it has afforded Eleanor, then, and even as reviews of the performed play collude in this silencing, performances of *King John* act to re-articulate Eleanor through her silent moments, speaking a guilty old mother who, like Volumnia, is content to sign a

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<sup>89</sup> Marlowe, ‘Bard’s rarity’. Marlowe’s comment could not be checked against a recording of the production as the taped recording was reported by SCLA librarians to be damaged and unwatchable.



*Figure 3:* Guy Henry and Alison Fiske as King John and Queen Eleanor in Gregory Doran's *King John*, reproduced from Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2001', p. 290. Photograph by Malcolm Davies. Fiske's Eleanor is clearly visible in the background.

(grand)son's 'death warrant'. This sense of the older female character's guilt will be followed through into the next chapter, manifesting itself across performances of *Hamlet's* Gertrude.

Drawing on the early modern sense of the old mother's right to speak and to be heard, *King John*, like *Coriolanus*, stages a loudly heard, vocal, powerful mother of an adult son, drawing sharp contrasts between the older woman and her younger counterpart. Both plays manifest discomfort with the authority in speech they afford old and ageing mothers, eventually silencing their speaking; performances of and responses to the roles in the present day demonstrate how we continue both to silence and to re-speak the characters. The noisy, speaking voice of the old Shakespearean woman, then, remains as a bone of contention in today's performances.

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Reviewing the *King John* staged in 2001 by Northern Broadsides (an ensemble of actors which makes a virtue of speaking the plays in their native, northern English voices), Susannah Clapp felt that 'The richness of the [production's] drama [was] intermittent'; when it came, 'it [came] from the sound of unusual, eloquent voices'.<sup>90</sup> Clapp's remark, like many of the early responses to Northern Broadsides's work, indicates the potential of voice to make Shakespeare strange, to defamiliarise a well-known play.<sup>91</sup> The voice holds a privileged position in today's major theatres: the RSC, Globe and National theatres all retain professional voice coaches, and voice work features as a major element of the training of student actors. Voice work has proven to be a domain of theatre in which older women can carve out a niche of considerable authority for themselves: the best-known voice coaches, such as Cicely Berry, Kristin Linklater, and Patsy Rodenburg, are all old or

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<sup>90</sup> Clapp, 'Chamber of love'.

<sup>91</sup> For a survey of the early years of Northern Broadsides's work, see Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Rough Magic: Northern Broadsides at Work at Play', *Shakespeare Survey*, 56 (2003), 236-55.

ageing women. The positions of theatrical power which these older women occupy have come at a cost. Performance in the present day, I am arguing, reveals itself still to be deeply concerned with the containment and control of the older woman's voice, and the visibility of Berry, Linklater, and Rodenburg in today's theatres is effected only through their efforts in support of this containment enterprise.

Voice training today works towards the 'freeing' of the voice, a process which allows the 'true' voice of the actor to emerge in order to speak a given text. Berry, Rodenburg, and Linklater speak and write of the restrictions placed on the voice through socialisation from birth, and of the need to cast off physical and psychological constraints in order to perform plays such as Shakespeare's correctly.<sup>92</sup> In effect, and although this is argued against by voice coaches themselves, voice training threatens to disallow multiplicities of voice on a Shakespearean stage by prioritising written texts over spoken sounds. The voice is 'freed' into a single idea of what a voice of quality ought to sound like.<sup>93</sup> Critics such as Sarah Werner and Ric Knowles have called attention to the potentially stultifying impact of voice training in performance: for Knowles, 'freeing' the voice closes down any potential for radical performance, reproducing as it does a single, sanctioned vocality.<sup>94</sup> Recalling Berry's direction of a 1988 *King Lear* for the RSC, Susan Bennett notes that the production was 'praised for its timelessness, for its wise decision [...] to let the text speak for itself with no other distractions'.<sup>95</sup> 'Distractions' for voice coaches

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<sup>92</sup> See for example Patsy Rodenburg, *The Right to Speak: Working With the Voice* (London: Methuen Drama, 1992), p. x.

<sup>93</sup> 'Freed', trained voices have tended to enunciate a wealthy, southern English version of Shakespeare: in her work on Northern Broadways, Rutter has discussed 'predictable discriminations fixed on accent' in present-day RSC performances even as 'colour-blind casting' is instituted. Rutter, 'Rough Magic', p. 247.

<sup>94</sup> Richard Paul Knowles, 'Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology: Interrogating the natural voice', in *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, pp. 92-112; see also Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance*. Rodenburg's rhetoric of the 'release' of Shakespeare via the correctly 'freed' voice demonstrates the capacity for voice training to enshrine conservative, universalist readings and performances of the playwright's work, with only the trained voice being understood as capable of accessing the 'true' Shakespeare: see Patsy Rodenburg *Speaking Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 2002), pp. 40-1.

<sup>95</sup> Bennett, p. 42. *King Lear*, dir. Cicely Berry (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Other Place, 1988).

such as Berry can include the interventions and interpretations of directors and actors who wish to encourage the play to communicate a new meaning. As Patsy Rodenburg writes, addressing her actors:

You should start by avoiding any discussion along the lines of ‘I wouldn’t say that’, ‘I don’t believe that’, ‘I don’t think my character would do that’, ‘Can we change this line?’ or ‘This scene is unreal’. Not only do such comments display an appalling lack of imagination, but they prove the actor’s fear of working with trust.<sup>96</sup>

‘Trust’ is a concept regularly returned to in the teaching of voice coaches: ‘With Shakespeare [...] you can relax, trust and allow the text to shine through you’; ‘Shakespeare will hold you up. An act of trust and commitment will allow him to play and transform you’; ‘trust in ourselves and in the text’.<sup>97</sup> The freeing of the voice that allows one to ‘trust’ in or submit to the text may come at the expense of the actor herself, vocal freedom paradoxically silencing the untrustworthy performing speaker: ‘If your voice is free we will hear the complexities of the text, not your voice’.<sup>98</sup>

The trained, free voice emerges at the actor’s expense, entailing her absolute submission to the text’s primacy: as Rodenburg writes, ‘All our reductive physical and vocal habits create a bond that holds the text, constraining and diminishing it’.<sup>99</sup> Actors are threatened with injury to their vocal cords should they try to ‘release’ Shakespeare ‘while vocally constricted’; voice training, or ‘freeing’, becomes an insisted-upon necessity for the serious Shakespearean actor, one which aims to efface the actor’s presence in favour of the

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<sup>96</sup> Rodenburg, *Speaking Shakespeare*, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> Rodenburg, *Speaking Shakespeare*, p. 11; Cicely Berry, *The Actor and his Text* (London: Harrap, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Rodenburg, *Speaking Shakespeare*, p. 44.

<sup>99</sup> Rodenburg, *Speaking Shakespeare*, p. 10.

eternal, unchanging characters believed to be written into the text.<sup>100</sup> *The Right to Speak*, finally, is afforded only to those actors willing to submit themselves to a singular vision of what their articulation of Shakespeare should sound and look like.<sup>101</sup> That submission is promoted and maintained, in large part, by a cohort of older women working behind the scenes in today's theatres.

In an exchange conducted across the pages of *New Theatre Quarterly* in 1996 and 1997, Berry, Linklater, and Rodenburg vigorously defended their work against accusations of its being anti-feminist levied by critic Sarah Werner.<sup>102</sup> The argument took the form of a battle between generations and between spheres of theatrical interest: Werner, a young, recent PhD awardee and academic in her first post, squared off against three far older titans of the theatre. Werner, Berry, Linklater, and Rodenburg performed their disagreements in text rather than voice, yet their struggle for authority speaks not only to those between Volumnia and Virgilia and Eleanor and Constance, but also to the conversations between academic interest and theatrical practice taking place throughout this thesis. While academia and theatre have worked fruitfully together in more recent years, not least at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre where productive collaborations have generated new insights into original performance conditions and practices, there remain indications of a mutual suspicion.<sup>103</sup> As Linklater termed it in 1997, 'Werner's article highlights the endemic split between academic theatre and professional theatre in general, on the one hand, and

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<sup>100</sup> Rodenburg, *Speaking Shakespeare*, p. 41, and see Sarah Werner, 'Performing Shakespeare: Voice Training and the Feminist Actor', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 12: 47 (1996), 249-58.

<sup>101</sup> Rodenburg tells of the rights an actor must earn through training: 'Thorough preparatory technical work frees both actor and audience, and gives one the right to speak Shakespeare and others the chance to hear it'. Rodenburg, *Speaking Shakespeare*, p. 7; see also Rodenburg, *The Right to Speak*.

<sup>102</sup> See Werner, 'Performing Shakespeare'; and Cicely Berry, Patsy Rodenburg and Kristin Linklater, 'Shakespeare, Feminism, and Voice: Responses to Sarah Werner', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 13: 49 (1997), 48-52; and Sarah Werner, 'Voice Training, Shakespeare, and Feminism', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 13: 50 (1997), 183.

<sup>103</sup> On collaboration at the Globe, see *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, eds. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: CUP, 2008). For commentary on splits and collaborations between academia and theatre which speaks to some of the methodology used throughout this thesis, see Bridget Escolme, 'Being Good: Actors' Testimonies as Archive and the Cultural Construction of Success in Performance', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 28: 1 (2010), 77-91.

academic feminist theatre and the very active women's theatre movement on the other'.<sup>104</sup> In the case of this particular disagreement, as in *Coriolanus* and *King John*, the older generation retained its dominance: Berry, for instance, was featured in a recent *Guardian* article teaching reporter Laura Barnett how to speak 'like a proper actor' and complaining that 'academic work has taken Shakespeare from us'.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, Rodenburg's hope that an audience will hear the text, 'not your voice', reminds us of the extent to which voice training has worked to silence actors' voices in favour of the 'falsely universal notion of character that relies on a male norm of interpretation' identified by Werner.<sup>106</sup> If the older woman working behind the scenes in today's major theatres has achieved considerable influence and an admired status, that position has in part been reached through a technique of voice control which echoes the work carried out by Shakespeare's plays as written and staged.

An anecdote recalled by Russ McDonald indicates the extent to which today's audiences expect the homogeneity of voice encouraged by remarks such as Rodenburg's:

The most famous property of [Judi Dench's] voice is the crack in it [...]. A legend has arisen concerning auditors' reactions to the voice. Told about different theaters – the Nottingham Playhouse and the Palace Theatre in London – the story is that she requested the management to put a sign in the lobby reading, "Miss Judi Dench does not have a cold; this is her normal speaking voice".<sup>107</sup>

Here a cracking voice, a voice in which 'certain notes fail to operate', proves as disconcerting to modern audiences as to early modern audiences, requiring the actor's

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<sup>104</sup> Berry, Rodenburg, and Linklater, 'Shakespeare, Feminism and Voice', p. 51.

<sup>105</sup> Laura Barnett, 'Cicely Berry, voice coach to the stars', *Guardian*, 24 July 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/jul/24/cicely-berry-voice-coach>>.

<sup>106</sup> Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance*, p. 19.

<sup>107</sup> McDonald, p. 111.

intervention and explanation.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, and in a sense antagonistically, the cracks in this voice can be manipulated to create meaning in performance, as cracking voices made meaning on the early modern stage: ‘The huskiness can serve a range of effects, and critics have frequently noticed her talent for summoning it at just the right moment, for just the right reason’.<sup>109</sup> What I find in the practice of voice in today’s major theatres is a mirroring of the treatment of the older mother’s voice in the three Shakespeare plays studied by this chapter: the apparent honouring of the speaking voice, counterpoised by the silencing of that voice. Like the early modern mother, actors and backstage practitioners must earn the ‘right’ to speak in the theatre; this ‘right’ is achieved in partnership with the containment and channelling of the voice, much as the old mother’s right to speak is managed by the deployment of silence. Turning now to the speaking, silenced old mother in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, this chapter will conclude by looking at what happens in today’s theatres when the speech-prerogative afforded to the elderly mother in Shakespeare is merely cursory, her right to speak quickly undermined. Building on the work carried out above on ventriloquised silences in *Coriolanus* and *King John*, my reading of *All’s Well’s* largely impotent Countess of Rousillon will find the reassuringly quiet old mother to make herself available for ‘national treasure’ status in performance today.

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<sup>108</sup> McDonald, p. 111. Dench’s ‘cracking’ voice is so famous as to warrant an acknowledgement in the title of her biography: John Miller, *Judi Dench: With a Crack in Her Voice*, 3rd edn (London: Orion Press, 2002).

<sup>109</sup> McDonald, p. 111.

George Bernard Shaw famously wrote of *All's Well That Ends Well*'s Countess of Rousillon that it was 'the most beautiful old woman's part ever written'.<sup>110</sup> Critics of the play in performance today continue to find beauty in Bertram's mother. In a review titled 'Vivid beauty of Bard shines through', Terry Grimley defined 'the centre of gravity' of Peter Hall's 1992 production as 'Barbara Jefford's wonderful performance as the Countess – full of poise and a sense of reflective wisdom'.<sup>111</sup> For Benedict Nightingale in 2003, Judi Dench's performance in the role was 'lovely': 'wise, warm, generous, tough, forgiving, grieving at times, yet always oddly serene'.<sup>112</sup> The odd 'serenity' Nightingale found in the role is one term used by reviewers for what I identify as the gradual silencing of the mother in *All's Well*: in 1992 Nightingale spoke of 'the usual serenity' manifested across performances of the Countess, as in 2009 Charles Spencer referred to her 'serenity'; the 'radiant goodness' found by Michael Billington in Dench's performance is a similar description and endorsement of the silent position eventually occupied by the Countess at the play's close.<sup>113</sup> My reading of *All's Well That Ends Well* finds reviewers responding with pleasure to a character who waxes increasingly silent as she ages across the course of the play. That pleasure is at its height when the production under review features a 'national treasure', someone we have seen to be available for reconstitution in the nation's preferred image of female old age, in the role of the Countess of Rousillon.

Unlike Volumnia and Eleanor, *All's Well That Ends Well*'s representation of the Countess as a mother is complicated from its first lines by ideas of widowhood: 'In

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<sup>110</sup> George Bernard Shaw, 'All's Well That Ends Well', *Saturday Review*, 2 February 1895, in *Shaw on Shakespeare*, ed. Edwin Wilson (London: Penguin Shakespeare Library, 1969), pp. 29-34 (p. 34).

<sup>111</sup> Terry Grimley, 'Vivid beauty of Bard shines through', *Birmingham Post*, 2 July 1992.

<sup>112</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Dame, set and match to Judi Dench', *The Times*, 13 December 2003.

<sup>113</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Hall thrives on moral ambiguity', *The Times*, 2 July 1992; Spencer, 'Magical tale where all ends well'; Michael Billington, 'All's Well That Ends Well', *Guardian*, 13 December 2003. *All's Well That Ends Well*, dir. Marianne Elliott (London: The National Theatre [Olivier], 2009). One 1992 reviewer, however, claimed a similarity between the Countess's son Bertram and Coriolanus, 'even to having a similar kind of mother', although he did not expand on the relationship he perceived between Volumnia and the Countess: Malcolm Rutherford, 'All's Well That Ends Well', *Financial Times*, 2 July 1992.

delivering my son from me I bury a second husband' (1.1.1-2). The Countess occupies further roles: as guardian to Helen and chief of her household, there is a suggestion from the play's earliest moments that this character is a more multivalent, even uncontained entity than Volumnia or Eleanor. Even the Countess's age, frequently assumed as old in today's stagings, is, as I will demonstrate, ambiguous in the first scenes. Her uncertainty and potential multiplicity trouble the play, which moves quickly to restrict her into a single category, that of elderly mother; unhappy with the authority it affords her, *All's Well's* anxiety is revealed in the rapid decommissioning of her speech and power that it conducts.

The opening scene of *All's Well That Ends Well* briefly proposes a mother who is also at once a widow, guardian, wise speaker, and powerful authority within her household. The first lines establish her as an historian of the play's past, like *Richard III's* Margaret (as we will see) a mourning keeper of the memory of events that took place prior to the play's opening and which will shape its unfolding: 'This young gentlewoman had a father [...] Gérard de Narbonne' (1.1.16-24). The play's attention, however, is quickly focused on her role as Bertram's mother, funnelling her potential multiplicity and power into a single, maternal function; her widowhood is not referred to again in the play and her guardianship of Helen is reconstructed, as I show below, as an act of mothering. Like Volumnia and Eleanor, the Countess proves herself to be a mother speaking to the early modern template: she and Bertram have 'a bond / Whereof the world takes note' (1.3.172-3), and in the first scene she acts as his counsellor:

Be thou blessed, Bertram [...]

Love all, trust a few,

Do wrong to none. Be able for thine enemy

Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend

Under thy own life's key. Be checked for silence

But never taxed for speech.

(1.1.54-61)

In her absence from her son she worries that he will have need of an adviser: ‘Tis an unseasoned courtier. Good my lord, / Advise him’ (1.1.64-5). As the play proceeds her motherhood is increasingly referred to, developing the sense of her primary role as being a maternal one and containing the character within a single dramatic category: ‘You know, Helen, I am a mother to you’ (1.3.121-2); ‘There’s letters from my mother’ (2.3.260); ‘He was my son, / But I do wash his name out of my blood’ (3.2.64-5); ‘your son was misled with a snipped-taffeta fellow there’ (4.5.1-2); ‘Son, on my life / I have seen her wear it’ (5.3.90-91).

The Countess’s maternity overtakes all other aspects of her character: *All’s Well* insists on it, prioritising it at the expense of her household authority as the dramatic centre of the play shifts towards the King of France’s court after the first scene. Her maternity proves fundamental to understanding the changes in her speech and voice as they emerge across the play. She differs in a key respect from Eleanor and Volumnia, however; as the mother of ‘Young Bertram’ (1.2.19), played in one recent performance as ‘a callow youth heavily influenced by the laddish military ethos’, the Countess begins the play ambiguously aged.<sup>114</sup> The role has long been believed to be one for an older actor: Barbara Jefford, Judi Dench, Gwen Watford and Peggy Ashcroft all played the role aged over sixty. More recent productions, however, have cast younger actors as the Countess, with Clare Higgins performing the role in 2009 and Janie Dee in 2011.<sup>115</sup> I will argue that the Countess appears

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Billington, ‘All’s Well That Ends Well’, *Guardian*, 6 May 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/may/06/all-s-well-ends-well-review>>.

<sup>115</sup> See for instance Claire Higgins’s and Janie Dee’s 2009 and 2011 Countesses: *All’s Well That Ends Well*, dir. John Dove (London: Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2011); *All’s Well That Ends Well*, dir. Elliott.

to age across the course of the play, moving from an ambiguous, speaking state to one of near-silent old age ('O my dear mother, do I see you living?' [5.3.316]).

Reviewing Peter Hall's *All's Well*, Charles Spencer described the play as 'a marvellous study of old age'.<sup>116</sup> The Countess's age is first invoked in 1.3, after her young son has departed for court: soliloquising in her first moments alone on stage, she reflects on the revelation of Helen's love for Bertram with 'Even so it was with me when I was young' (1.3.112). Kate Kellaway responded to Judi Dench's performance of the nine-line speech with 'Tears', defining the soliloquy as 'the last flowering of everything [the Countess] had ever felt – age's passionate identification with youth'.<sup>117</sup> Despite Dench's performance, we remain on uncertain ground regarding the Countess's age until later in the play. Twice in the first two acts Bertram's mother defines herself in opposition to youth, at 1.3.112 and again when wishing 'To be young again, if we could!' at 2.2.33. In the second act her son is still too juvenile to go to war – "'Too young'" and "'the next year'" and "'tis too early'" (2.1.28) – yet by the third act the Countess is beginning to sound old:

I have felt so many quirks of joy and grief  
That the first face of neither on the start  
Can woman me unto't.  
(3.2.47-49)

In 3.4 her 'age is weak' (3.4.41); by the fourth act there is a sense of the grief-stricken Countess as being so old that death is imminent: 'It rejoices me that I hope I shall see [Bertram] ere I die' (4.5.71). By 5.3 Helen is surprised to find that the Countess has

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<sup>116</sup> Charles Spencer, 'A not-so-well All's Well', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 July 1992.

<sup>117</sup> Kate Kellaway, 'Judi... and the beast', *Observer*, 14 December 2003.

survived to the final scene of the play: ‘O my dear mother, do I see you living?’. The play, it seems, stages the slow ageing of the character as the events of *All’s Well* unfold.

This sense of the Countess’s gradual ageing has been reproduced in recent performances of the play. Clare Higgins was glamorous in the role, dressed at the production’s opening in a low-cut black gown and played as enjoying a romantic flirtation with Lavatch. As the production unfolded, however, Higgins seemed to age through grief: by the final scene her hair was covered in a veil of mourning and her body noticeably more bent.<sup>118</sup> Peter Hall’s 1992 production also seemed to age Barbara Jefford’s Countess slowly. Jefford began by playing a mother on the very cusp of age, still a forceful woman but one whose posture frequently slumped, indicating an incipient, age-related tiredness. As the play unfolded Jefford seemed to shrink in height: by 3.4 she struggled to walk, stumbling offstage after ‘Grief would have tears, and sorrow bids me speak’ (3.4.42). This devastated Countess was hunched over by 4.5; in the final scene her performed age was so advanced that, collapsing into sobs at ‘a thousand proofs’ (5.3.201), she was ‘unable to control herself in public, [was] humiliated by her son’s actions’, and eventually required a chair to rest in.<sup>119</sup>

The ageing of the Countess takes place in parallel to her gradual silencing, yet *All’s Well That Ends Well* is a play favouring maternal silence across all ages. The play’s youngest mother, Helen, is silent in the final scene as to how she has become pregnant (the audience knows the reason to be a bed-trick, but Bertram, her child’s putative father, remains ignorant), remarking only that ‘If it appear not plain and prove untrue, / Deadly divorce step between me and you’ (5.3.314-5). The ‘*old Widow of Florence*’ (3.5.0), in her

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<sup>118</sup> This performative choice of ageing through grief is justified by the complex interactions of humoral theory and physiologies of age in early modern thought: see Introduction.

<sup>119</sup> Peter Holland, ‘Shakespeare Performances in England, 1992’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 46 (1993), 159-89 (p. 167).

first scenes a powerful old mother, adviser to her daughter (4.2.70-2), and unrestrained speaker ('Marry, hang you!' [3.5.89]), has in her 5.3 appearance only three lines (5.3.163-5) to deliver across the one hundred and thirty-eight lines of action in which she is present. Her descent into silence mirrors the old Countess's. The earliest Countess is highly vocal, delivering the play's first line, counselling her son, speaking Helen's personal history (1.1.16-21, 1.1.34-40), and advising her like a mother: 'No more of this, Helen. Go to, no more, lest it be rather thought you affect a sorrow, than to have –' (1.1.45-6). The departure of Bertram for the court of the King of France, however, effects a change in the Countess, dulling her tongue; in 1.1 the play inserts a distance between the old mother and her son, denying her the opportunity of face-to-face maternal speech until their eventual 5.3 reunion.

Discarding her position as Helen's guardian in 1.3 in favour of a role as mother, the play manages the Countess into a solely maternal entity. In doing so, she retains some speech: across a comic exchange with Helen, the act of speaking and her assumed mothering of the younger woman are repeatedly conflated: 'I say I am your mother' (1.3.126); 'I said "a mother"' (1.3.126); 'Does it curd thy blood / To say I am thy mother?' (1.3.133-4); and, again, 'I say I am your mother' (1.3.138). This exchange, in which the Countess confronts Helen with her knowledge of the younger woman's love for Bertram, reaches towards a statement of the threat embodied by maternity and, particularly, speaking mothers:<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> The concept of mothers as threatening has been thoroughly explored by Adelman in *Suffocating Mothers*; see however Krier, who comments in *Birth Passages* that '[m]asculine desire for and dread of the maternal body is only one of the responses to the maternal that bears scrutiny. Even works populated with monstrous or idealized mothers may register other forms of maternal relations' (pp. x-xi). A play first staged at the Edinburgh Festival in 2010 entitled *Shakespeare's Mothers: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* built on the sense of Shakespearean mothers as murderous and dangerous, staging a scene of Shakespeare himself attempting to justify his characters' supposed violence in a present-day television interview. *Shakespeare's Mothers: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know*, dir. Kath Perry (Edinburgh: Straylight Australia, 2010).

When I said “a mother”,  
 Methought you saw a serpent. What’s in “mother”  
 That you start at it? I say I am your mother,  
 [...] God’s mercy, maiden! Does it curd thy blood  
 To say I am thy mother?  
 (1.3.124-34)

The scene concludes with Helen and the Countess’s reconciliation and a somewhat jarring statement of intended inaction by the older woman regarding Helen’s planned treatment of the King and reunion with Bertram: Helen shall ‘have my leave and love, / Means and attendants’ (1.3.238-9) and her words (‘my loving greetings / To those of mine in court’ [1.3.239-40]). Those words of greeting designed to ease Helen’s passage will be delivered from a disabling distance, however: ‘I’ll stay at home / And pray God’s blessing into thy attempt’ (1.3.240-1). The Countess’s troubling conflation of her now absolute status as mother with the threat embodied by that speaking maternity, then – ‘I say I am your mother, / [...] Does it curd thy blood[?]’ – is resolved within the scene by removing loud maternal speech to the periphery of the play’s action. The distancing of the ageing woman in *All’s Well* serves to render her speech impotent, her voice unheard, and her dramatic function ultimately contained.

Residing in Rousillon while the focus of the play shifts to the French court, the Countess’s speech is expended only on clowns and messengers. The high-level political involvement of the old mother as seen in across *Coriolanus* and *King John* is in *All’s Well*’s comedy transformed into jokery; 2.2, a scene featuring just the Countess and the Clown, demonstrates that in order to advise or counsel this ageing mother must now either transcribe her voice into unspeaking letters or employ a man to do her speaking for her:

[...] give Helen this,  
 And urge her to a present answer back.  
 Commend me to my kinsmen and my son.  
 (2.2.53-5)

Bertram's response to his mother's attempts to address him from afar is dismissive:

'There's letters from my mother. What th'import is I know not yet' (2.3.260-1). The by now physically aged Countess (the Clown tells of 'her wrinkles' [2.4.17]) is being silenced, her voice now located at an inaudible distance from her son and her charge.

Recalling Doran's 2003 production of *All's Well*, Michael Dobson remembered that 'some younger London reviewers [...] professed considerable surprise when the Countess remained offstage for much of the first half and most of the second and then wasn't even given a line by which to express a view about the denouement'.<sup>121</sup> The Countess is indeed at a remove from the action, doing very little and having no real success in driving the play forward. Her efforts to influence the unfolding of events at the French court by writing letters are rendered almost comic in 3.2 when she remarks that 'It hath happened all as I would have had it, save that he comes not along with her' (3.2.1-2); her impotence and lack of awareness as to what has taken place make her speech sound ridiculous to a listening audience. Her language descends into bafflement: 'What have we here?' (3.2.17); 'Where is my son [...]?' (3.2.49); 'Towards Florence is he? / [...] to be a soldier[?]' (3.2.66-7). Advice to Helen sounds hollow and falls on deaf ears: 'Think upon patience' (3.2.46); her response to Bertram's actions, which should be the counsel of a wise and astute old mother, becomes the voice of an elderly woman talking to herself:

This is not well, rash and unbridled boy,

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<sup>121</sup> Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2004', p. 269.

To fly the favours of so good a King,  
 To pluck his indignation on thy head [...].  
 (3.2.27-9)

Failing to make her voice heard, the Countess must speak maternal advice through others: 'I will entreat you when you see my son / To tell him that his sword can never win / The honour that he loses' (3.2.92-4); further words cannot be voiced but must be written down ('more I'll entreat you / Written to bear along' [3.2.93-4])

3.4 furthers the sense of the Countess's impotence and silence; at its opening, her voice has been diminished to such a degree that she no longer reads letters aloud, requiring a substitute speaker (3.4.4-17). Helen has vanished from court, seemingly due to the old woman's incapacity of speech:

Had I spoke with her,  
 I could well have diverted her intents,  
 Which thus she hath prevented.  
 (3.4.20-2)

Again the Countess attempts to communicate with her son by letter, this time requiring an assistant as compositor – 'Write, write, Reynaldo, / To this unworthy husband of his wife' (3.4.29-30). Though she claims that 'sorrow bids me speak' (3.4.42), in fact what we see as the play proceeds is an old mother rendered increasingly silent as she ages. The Countess who appears in 4.5, by now very old ('it rejoices me that I [...] shall see [Bertram] ere I die'), is remarkably quietened, receiving letters yet sending none, and remaining wordless across fifty lines of exchange between Lafeu and the Clown. The old mother's silence is, as Dobson found, particularly noticeable in the final scene; given just three lines in which to

speak to her long-absent son (5.3.90-2), she delivers only fourteen lines in total across this scene of three hundred and thirty-four lines in length. The return of Helen from the supposed dead at 5.3.301 elicits no comment, generating a potentially awkward silence in performance which demands filling; no response is given to Helen's 'O my dear mother, do I see you living?' and no final expression of satisfaction or disapproval regarding Helen and Bertram's reunion and the play's resolution is afforded us. Across *All's Well* this mother ages into silence.

The voice of the actor originally playing the Countess, then, was muted over the course of the play; the old mother's voice, a potentially fluctuating and unstable male voice, was manipulated into silence. Even if played by an adult male actor, the language given the Countess ensures that her voice is controlled. This mother's first line, 'In delivering my son from me I bury a second husband', necessarily is articulated more softly, reflectively, and less aggressively than either Eleanor's declaration of 'A strange beginning' or Volumnia's exclaimed 'I pray you, daughter, sing', the Countess's thin vowels being buried in strings of consonants. An actor playing the Countess was under the most vocal pressure in the play's first scene. At the moment at which repeated, loudly resonating vowel-sounds (Bruce Smith's 'O') most threaten to establish the Countess's firm vocal presence, Helen cuts off her voice in an inversion of the aural dominance of the older mother we witnessed across *Coriolanus* and *King John*:

*Countess*      [...] No more of this, Helen. Go to, no more, lest it be  
rather thought you affect a sorrow, than to have –

*Helen*            I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too.

(1.1.45-7)

Today's productions build upon this textual silencing of the originally performing voice by superimposing tears or vocal shakiness over the speaking of the earlier scenes, and by filling the later scenes' silences with weeping. In advancing such stagings, directors of *All's Well* mirror the treatment afforded Paulina in productions of *The Winter's Tale* which emphasise her emotion at the play's close. Judi Dench's Countess's voice cracked as she delivered her final advice to Bertram in person; in this moment the breaking of today's performing old female voice at a moment of maternal advice-giving remembered the early modern anxieties of unstable voices, bodies, and genders implicit in Shakespeare's treatment of the loudly speaking old mother. Clare Higgins was still more emotional as the Countess, her voice failing as she broke into sobs on Bertram's 1.1 departure. Higgins's was a performance which traced the Countess's gradual ageing in tears, emotion frequently interrupting her speeches and, eventually, filling her silence in 5.3. Barbara Jefford's Countess followed a similar pattern. Such performances invert the early modern urge to contain leaky bodies described by Paster; concurrently, however, they control the character's voice into a wordless articulation.<sup>122</sup> The decision to replace the Countess's voice with sobs is a means of making her silence speak, a performative choice similar to the soundless screams and heaved sighs we observed in Doran's *Coriolanus* and Warner's *King John*. Even in the Countess's first, seemingly vocal scene, then, work is already being done which at once dampens down her voice while rearticulating her character through sobs and cracks. This work continues as the play unfolds into an endorsement of maternal silence.

Critics enjoy a 'wise', 'serene' Countess, a Countess who is largely silent, accepting, and essentially unobtrusive. Nicholas de Jongh praised the 'restrained' Barbara Jefford as being 'calm and collected' in 1992; other eyebrows were raised, however, at

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<sup>122</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*.

what many critics felt was an unusually vocal performance of the role: the Countess was ‘given more unforgiving asperity than usual by Barbara Jefford’; she was ‘brittle, angry’; Jefford ‘exud[ed] gimlet-eyed aggression rather than the usual serenity’.<sup>123</sup> In 2009 Michael Billington wrote of how Clare Higgins ‘endow[ed]’ the role with ‘an unusual sternness’, hinting with subtle disapproval that the actor imposed an interpretation on a character who ought to be played as gentler.<sup>124</sup> Benedict Nightingale was warmer, suggesting that Higgins’s ‘dauntingly reproachful’ Countess brought the role ‘down to earth’; like Nightingale’s earlier 1992 review, however, Charles Spencer in 2009 noted the absence of ‘the usual wise serenity’ in Higgins’s performance. Actors who attempt to make the Countess more ‘active’, who try to convey a new voice for the role in performance, then, are responded to with surprise or bemusement. Unadulterated praise for an active, loudly-heard Countess has come only recently, in response to the Globe’s 2011 production, and then only when qualified by the actor’s relative youth. For Billington, ‘Janie Dee [is] much younger than usual and invests the character with a sparky volatility: at one point, she slaps Helena’s face’; Susannah Clapp wrote of Dee’s ‘mixture of cajoling gentleness and fizz’ in the role, claiming that ‘when she claps her hands you see the young girl peep out of the wise matron’.<sup>125</sup> ‘Though too young for the role’, Charles Spencer felt Dee played the Countess ‘with a winning mixture of humour, severity and grief’.<sup>126</sup> Today it seems that a female actor’s youth allows what at an older age is interpreted as ‘gimlet-eyed aggression’ and ‘unforgiving asperity’ to be understood as a ‘winning’, ‘sparky’, ‘fizz[y]’ performance. As for *Macbeth*’s witches and, as we will see, Cleopatra and Gertrude, agency, power, or

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<sup>123</sup> De Jongh, ‘All’s too well’; Paul Taylor, ‘Marriage of two minds’, *Independent*, 2 July 1992; Helen Reid, ‘West couple beat language barrier’, *Western Daily Press*, 1 July 1992; Nightingale, ‘Hall thrives’.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Billington, ‘All’s Well That Ends Well’, *Guardian*, 29 May 2009  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/may/29/theatre>>.

<sup>125</sup> Billington, ‘All’s Well’, 2011; Clapp, ‘Tender Napalm’.

<sup>126</sup> Charles Spencer, ‘All’s Well That Ends Well’, *Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 2011

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8503439/Alls-Well-That-EndsWell-Shakespeares-Globe-review.html>>.

force in present-day performance is afforded the female character only at the expense of her assumed age.

Today's old Countesses find their voices silenced; where activity is reached toward, it is received with discomfort by a reviewing audience. Even Dee's youthful, face-slapping performance was not received with unanimous pleasure; qualifying his review, Spencer complained that Dee 'couldn't eclipse my memories of Dame Judi, who brought a glowing autumnal glory to the stage, and discovered truth and beauty in almost every line'.<sup>127</sup> Judi Dench's performance as the Countess and its reception in the national press is of particular interest in terms of the articulation and silencing of a national treasure's voice, returning us to the concerns expressed at the beginning of the previous chapter. As the Countess, Dench's voice was muffled from the first scene, the actor sobbing and her voice cracking as Bertram departed. Buttoned-up in a black gown and wearing a ruff, this was a restrained Countess who worked from the production's beginning to soften the 'volatility' other actors have found in the role: 'Dench [...] somewhat underplays [the character's] flashes of harshness'.<sup>128</sup> Critics' responses were extraordinary, achieving a height of emotion rarely seen in theatre reviews: much of their praise for Dench's performance engages with her silence in the role. For Richard Edmonds, Dench as the 'ageing and widowed' Countess was 'the great draw of the season'; Edmonds admired her depiction of 'a woman transformed by suffering and living out her time in an autumnal court', approving of the character's silent isolation as events unfolded in France.<sup>129</sup> Kate Kellaway became emotional watching Dench speak about age: 'Tears started into my eyes'.<sup>130</sup> Enjoying Dench's delicacy of voice ('A tiny shift in vocal emphasis takes her from severe to wry'), Alastair Macaulay saved his greatest praise for the quietness of her acting in the role: 'The

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<sup>127</sup> Spencer, 'All's Well'.

<sup>128</sup> Kate Bassett, 'Beauties and beasts – and a morris dance', *Independent on Sunday*, 14 December 2003.

<sup>129</sup> Richard Edmonds, 'Dame Judi in unforgettable style', *Birmingham Post*, 12 December 2003.

<sup>130</sup> Kellaway, 'Judi... and the beast'.

stillness and simplicity of her performance are heartstopping'.<sup>131</sup> Benedict Nightingale revelled in Dench's final-scene silence: 'All she does is thrust out her palms a little. How many actresses could do virtually nothing – and radiate such welcome and love?'.<sup>132</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, too, admitted enjoying the Countess's marginalisation, noting in his 2003 review that she 'hovers attractively on the periphery of the action'.<sup>133</sup> Finally, Michael Billington also found Dench's relegation to the peripheries to be attractive in performance, glorying in her 'perfect Countess': 'what I shall long remember is Dench's silent, mortified regret as Bertram's sins are revealed'.<sup>134</sup> Today, the 'perfect' performance of an old Shakespearean mother is a silent, humiliated performance of maternal failure.

The role of the Countess when played by a 'national treasure' such as Dench is doubly silencing. The label, as we have seen, is sanitising; the national treasure's silence in a scene such as 5.3 of *All's Well* is inevitably assumed to be benevolent, the body of the actor 'radiating love' rather than articulating her voice. A further layer of silence is imposed upon Judi Dench's performance by the nature of the role of the Countess itself: the last 'Dame' to play the part was Peggy Ashcroft in Trevor Nunn's 1981 production, a performance which proved to be her last on the public stage. The Countess of Rousillon has come to be seen as a valedictory role for Britain's greatest female Shakespearean actors; critics assumed this to be the case with Dench's performance, with Michael Dobson noting 'the production's determination to underline as heavily as possible the poignancy of what will probably be Dame Judi Dench's last stage appearance in a Shakespeare play'.<sup>135</sup>

Review titles made much of Dench's presence in the role – 'Dame Judi in unforgettable style', 'Dame, set and match to Judi Dench', and 'All rise for Dame Judi' comprising just a

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<sup>131</sup> Alastair Macaulay, 'All's Well That Ends Well', *Financial Times*, 15 December 2003.

<sup>132</sup> Nightingale, 'Dame, set and match'.

<sup>133</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, 'Incandescent Dame Judi sets comedy romp on fire', *Evening Standard*, 12 December 2003.

<sup>134</sup> Michael Billington, 'All's Well', 2003.

<sup>135</sup> Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2004', p. 269.

selection – in a departure from the norm which ensured the actor would prove central to the review’s meaning (and the inferred meaning of the production as a whole).<sup>136</sup>

Understanding Dench’s performance as a leave-taking, then, critics came to Doran’s *All’s Well* with a unique weight of interpretive baggage acting on them as audience members, and on Dench’s capacity to communicate independently as an actor. In effect, her performance (of silence) was itself silenced in favour of an assumed intended valediction: her voice was appropriated through silence and re-spoken into the still greater silence of theatrical retirement.

‘Her voice was ever soft, / Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman’: the appreciation of female quietness Lear comes to in his final moments echoes the movement from noisily vocal speech to soundlessness seen across three old Shakespearean mothers in this chapter.<sup>137</sup> If the quietly ‘serene’ Countess of Rousillon is understood today as an appropriately valedictory role for a retiring female actor, her male counterpart is liable to be Lear, or perhaps Prospero – both relentlessly speaking, loudly heard, forcefully articulated characters. Today, we prefer our older female actors silent. Dench, however, disappointed: her 2010 return to the Shakespearean stage to play Titania in Peter Hall’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* received a great deal of attention, particularly for what critics felt to be her expert handling of the supposedly enormous challenge of playing a woman in love while in her seventies. As Nightingale faux-delicately phrased it, ‘isn’t she a bit, um, mature to be

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<sup>136</sup> Edmonds, ‘Dame Judi’; Nightingale, ‘Dame, set and match’; Charles Spencer, ‘All rise for Dame Judi’, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 December 2003. To title reviews in such a fashion is furthermore revealing of what headline-writers judge to be of eye-catching interest to a reading public; Dench’s name here is thought to be magnetic.

<sup>137</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, 5.3.271-2. Cleopatra too indirectly lauds female silence by expressing concern at the threat posed her by Octavia’s attractively quiet ‘low’ voice: ‘That’s not so good’. *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* (3.3.13-4). *The Norton Shakespeare* prioritises neither the F nor Q1 texts of *King Lear*, but states that ‘[t]he Folio [...] with its substantial cuts and its small additions, its streamlining and its subtle shifts in emphasis, is the more theatrical text’ (p. 2315). I choose to quote from the F version of *Lear* due to the emphasis my thesis places on performance.

playing the fairy queen [...]?’.<sup>138</sup> Charles Spencer, recalling his reaction to the announced casting, remembered that he ‘thought it must be a joke’:

The Fairy Queen is usually played by a voluptuous actress in her thirties, not a grand theatrical dame in her mid seventies. Wouldn't the effect of watching a woman so advanced in years falling passionately in love with an ass be more grotesque than amusing? But I underestimated Dame Judi's greatness as an actress [...].<sup>139</sup>

Only an actor so great and so familiar as to be named offhandedly as ‘Dame Judi’ – a national treasure, public property – can get away with performing the spectacle of love in late life. As my next chapter will demonstrate, the work of containing Shakespeare's old women characters extends into the domain of sex; our performed and written responses to ageing female sexuality remain, like our responses to the older woman's vocality, deeply strained.

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<sup>138</sup> Benedict Nightingale, ‘A Midsummer Night's Dream’, *The Times*, 16 February 2010  
<[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/stage/theatre/article7028559.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/theatre/article7028559.ece)>.

<sup>139</sup> Charles Spencer, ‘A Midsummer Night's Dream’, *Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 2010  
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/7249678/A-Midsummer-Nights-Dream-at-the-Rose-Theatre-review.html>>.

## *Chapter Four*

### *Age Cannot Wither Her: Sex and the Ageing Woman*

‘[U]nseemly exhibitionism, menopausally desperate or mutton dressed as lamb’:  
 such was *Daily Mail* journalist’s Carol Sarler’s diagnosis of what she found to be the  
 increasing numbers of ageing female actors choosing ‘to drop their drawers’ on stage and  
 film in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Her article was provoked by the performance of the then sixty-five-year-old  
 Helen Mirren, accomplished Shakespearean actor, in the role of a brothel madam seeking  
 love and sex in Nevada in Taylor Hackford’s 2010 *Love Ranch*.<sup>2</sup> Sarler’s rhetoric is  
 strident throughout, criticising a ‘trend’ she identifies of ‘predatory old trouts’ in  
 competition for the sexual attention of younger men. Her vociferous condemnation of still-  
 sexually active older women speaks to a similar anxiety which this chapter will find at  
 work in the drama of early modern England. The popularity of recently-conceived  
 television programmes such as *Cougar Town* and *Desperate Housewives*, which claim to  
 represent a version of middle-aged female sexual experience for the consumption of a  
 younger, mixed-gender audience, speaks to the current public fascination with older  
 women’s sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Gendered ageism at the BBC, the ongoing *Daily Mail* campaign  
 against post-menopausal female sexuality, and the strained responses to the performance of  
 love and sexual attraction in present-day old age articulated across reviews of 2010’s  
*Midsummer Night’s Dream* evidence a darker, anxious, and potentially disgusted tone to

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Sarler, ‘Oh Helen! Surely at our age it’s time to put them away’, *Daily Mail*, 14 October 2010  
 <[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1320353/Helen-Mirren-naked-Love-Ranch-Surely-age-time-  
 away.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1320353/Helen-Mirren-naked-Love-Ranch-Surely-age-time-away.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> *Love Ranch*, dir. Taylor Hackford (Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Films, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> *Cougar Town*, exec. prod. Bill Lawrence, Courteney Cox, David Arquette, Ric Swartzlander (Disney – ABC Domestic Television, 2009-date); *Desperate Housewives*, exec. prod. Marc Cherry (Buena Vista Home Entertainment and Disney – ABC Domestic Television, 2004-12).

that fascination.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will examine the construction of two ageing female characters in Shakespeare, Cleopatra and Gertrude, as anachronistically, excessively sexual beings; as in the previous chapter, the plays will be found to respond nervously to the freedoms of age and sex that they propose.

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Early modern England prescribed chastity for the aged; its pronouncements were rooted in the contemporary physiology of age which, as we have seen, predicted the inevitable cooling of the blood over a lifespan. Galenic theories of the body associated heat and blood with lusty youth. As William Bulleyn wrote:

Youth which is the second part of life, beginneth to reigne [at fifteen], his temperament or complection hath rather more firy heat, than perfitte naturall heat, and this second age continueth for ten yeares as Galen sayth [...]. [T]he thirde age of mankinds, which is called the lustie state of life, [...] beginneth at xxv. yeares, and continueth vnto xxxv. This age is hote and drie, and verie cholericke, as Galen sayth : This part of life is subiect, to manie burning and extreeme feuers, and hote vlcers.<sup>5</sup>

For Bulleyn, then, the years between fifteen and thirty-five monopolised heat and lust; Thomas Cogan too described ‘Lustie Iuventus, from 25 yeares to 35’ as ‘hoat and dry’.<sup>6</sup> Old age, by contrast, was cold and dry: the body’s blood evaporated across a lifespan and what blood remained in late life was insufficient to heat the body. Accordingly, as Levinus

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<sup>4</sup> Former *Countryfile* presenter Miriam O’Reilly won her unfair dismissal case against her former employer the BBC on the grounds of ageism in January 2011: see Emine Saner, ‘Too old for TV?’, *Guardian*, 5 February 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Bulleyn, sigs. C2<sup>v</sup>-C3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Cogan, p. 193.

Lemnius predicted, a man above the age of fifty would '[leau] former pleasures & delyghtes', instead turning his thoughts towards 'his long home'; similarly, Bullein looked for old age to cause 'the lusty braunches of youth [...] to abate his pleasant leaues'.<sup>7</sup> '[T]emperance' was expected of the old; as Cicero's widely circulated *De Senectute* claimed, 'there is not in old men so great a desire of Carnalitie nor suche ticklinge concupiscence of venerie'.<sup>8</sup> For women, for whom chastity was always compulsory and among whom cooler blood was considered the norm irrespective of age, a setting-aside of sexuality in later life was imperative. A prayerful disinterest in sex was looked for: Vives hoped of 'a Wife well worne in age' that 'when she is past the pleasure of her body [...] she shall neither say nor do any thing that is not ful of holines'.<sup>9</sup>

The literature of early modern England suggests that these dictates of cold-blooded chastity were frequently ignored. Alice Tobriner has written on the large number of broadside ballads in circulation between 1508 and 1688 which concerned themselves with marriage between incongruously aged spouses, particularly old women and young men: 'Evidently', she argues, 'the ballad of 'The Toothless Bride' rated the loudest of raucous laughter and the most suggestive of smirks, so often was it found in reprint'.<sup>10</sup> Tobriner locates in this laughter a 'nervous reaction' to the contemporary commonplace of marriage between significantly older, wealthy, and hence powerful widows to younger men.<sup>11</sup> As Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have found, while such marriages were officially frowned upon, they were far from unheard of.<sup>12</sup> Historical research on the sixteenth century has found one in two widowed women remarrying after a bereavement, a reality

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<sup>7</sup> Lemnius, fol. 30<sup>r</sup>; Bullein, sig. C4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Vaughan, p. 113; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Worthye Booke of Old Age*, trans. Thomas Newton (London: 1569), sig. E1<sup>v</sup>. Cicero's *De Senectute* circulated widely in print in both its original Latin and in multiple English translations such as this one.

<sup>9</sup> Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, sig. 2B1<sup>v</sup>-2B2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Tobriner, p. 164.

<sup>11</sup> Tobriner, p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 193.

reflected and often disparaged as sexual incontinence on the woman's part across early modern drama.<sup>13</sup> This perceived incontinence was thought, in a logic which troubled Galenic predictions of cold, chaste blood in age, to be the fruit of a woman's loss of virginity. The conflict between demands for chastity and the potential for arousal among older women, particularly those who were widowed (and hence at once sexually experienced and beyond male control), generated anxiety. This anxiety is traced on the early modern stage across old woman figures of lusty widows, bawds, and sexually influential Nurses, each category seeming to threaten disorder.<sup>14</sup>

The breach of sexual strictures was not the habit of the aged alone. As Thomas Middleton's Mother Gruel wryly notes, 'as an old lady delights in a young page or monkey, so there are young courtiers will be hungry upon an old woman, I warrant you'.<sup>15</sup> Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre* proved Gruel right. Richly-left and sufficiently old to be the mother of a pregnant woman, the pious and chaste Dame Purecraft is much sought after: 'my taste, Master *Little-wit*, tends to fruct of a later kinde : the sober Matron, your wiues mother'.<sup>16</sup> When the sexuality of an ageing woman is represented on the early modern stage, it is more usually depicted as wildly uncontrolled; even Beaumont and Fletcher's sternly chaste Rosella, a woman in her fifties, wavers in the face of Tibalt's propositions.<sup>17</sup> Writing *Dido Queene of Carthage*, Christopher Marlowe included for comic effect an episode of an elderly, widowed Nurse-character struck down by sudden lust: 'He haue a husband, or els a louer. / [...] Fourescore is but a girles age, loue is

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<sup>13</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 182.

<sup>14</sup> On these categories of old woman, see Roberts, 'Types of Crone'. On the effects of a woman's sexual experience on her representation in drama, see Jennifer Panek, 'The Mother as Bawd in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *A Mad World, My Masters*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 43: 2 (2003), 415-37.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Middleton, *Michaelmas Term*, ed. Michael Taylor (Oxford: OUP, 1995), 1.1.305-7.

<sup>16</sup> Jonson, *Bartholomew Fayre*, sig. B1<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Massinger and John Fletcher, *The Sea-Voyage*, in Beaumont and Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies*. For Rosella's age, see sig. 5B2<sup>f</sup>.

sweete'.<sup>18</sup> *Dido's* Nurse epitomises the dramatic use of an uncontrollably libidinous old woman for comedy; such characters were also material for early modern tragedy, however. Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy*, like many widow-plays, makes much of a woman's supposed inability to keep her word in its representation of an 'antient' mother's transformation from keeper of her daughter's chastity to attempted pander and, in her musings, from supposed temple of virtue to a woman who, 'if [she] were yong, [...] should be rauisht'.<sup>19</sup> Like Middleton's old mother, Nurses were often revealed to be bawdy panders, worrisome in their proximity to and potential influence over the virginal young bodies of their charges: John Marston's 'pandresse' Maquerelle was a famous example of an early modern bawd of this type.<sup>20</sup> It was not unknown for Shakespeare to work in such categories: Anne Bullen's 'Old Lady', a Nurse-figure in *All is True*, is a shrewd woman who would 'venture maidenhead' to 'be a queen' (2.3.24-5) and for whom 'A threepence bowed would hire me, / Old as I am, to queen it' (2.3.36-7). Even Juliet's Nurse, privy to the girl's secrets, quickly becomes 'A bawd, a bawd, a bawd' (2.3.116).

In *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare does something quite different with the sexually desiring and desirable ageing woman. By placing the older woman at the heart of the narrative, both plays reject stock stage types in favour of something more complex. Cleopatra and Gertrude challenge early modern prescriptions of the chastity of ageing women, at least at first glance. Both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet*, in different ways, establish character through the breach of theories and prescriptions of early modern age. Like the uncertain plays of Chapters Two and Three, however, both plays then anxiously withdraw from the experiments of age and sex that they conduct, demonstrating their unease with the concept of a sexually vital yet ageing woman.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedie of Dido Queene of Carthage* (London: 1594), sigs. F1<sup>v</sup>-F2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Middleton, *The Revengers Traegedie*, sigs. D3<sup>r</sup>, D1<sup>r</sup>, and see Panek, 'The Mother as Bawd'.

<sup>20</sup> John Marston, *The Malcontent* (London: 1604), sig. D1<sup>r</sup>. This character made a reappearance in Thomas Overbury's characterisation of 'A Maquerela, in plain English, a Bawd': Overbury, sigs. I3<sup>v</sup>-I4<sup>r</sup>.

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Of all of Shakespeare's older female roles, the part of Cleopatra most challenges its performers with a uniquely demanding set of resonances and pre-emptive public memories. Barbara Hodgdon stated the case clearly when she wrote of *Antony and Cleopatra*'s 'two larger-than-life protagonists, historical celebrities with citational pasts [...] [d]erived from historical accounts, paintings, opera, and film as well as from past theatrical performances'.<sup>21</sup> In October 2010, present-day celebrity Kim Cattrall took to the stage of the Liverpool Playhouse to perform the role of Cleopatra in what was, as many reviewers noted, a 'homecoming' for the Liverpool-born Hollywood actor.<sup>22</sup> For some, Cattrall's performance was a homecoming in a further sense: best known for her role 'as Samantha, *Sex and the City*'s love 'em and leave 'em, 40-something vamp', Cattrall had long been associated with a sexuality of the kind unloved by Carol Sarler, one which frequently found her naked on screen.<sup>23</sup> As an actor in her fifties with a reputation built on playing a 'man-eater', Cattrall was expected to be uniquely suited to the role of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, mythical Egyptian archetype of exotic, infinite sexuality – 'all things to all men'.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the varied reviews of her performance – 'the night belongs to Cattrall'; 'she is not yet the mistress of Cleopatra's infinite variety'; 'She's supposed to make hungry where most she satisfies. Instead, she's a wildcat tamed' – testify to the difficulty my

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, 'Antony and Cleopatra in the theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp. 241-63 (p. 251).

<sup>22</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Janet Suzman (Liverpool: The Liverpool Playhouse, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Clare Brennan, 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Observer*, 17 October 2010  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/oct/17/antony-and-cleopatra-review>>.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Marmion, 'Man-eater Kim Cattrall's too tame for Cleopatra', *Daily Mail*, 14 October 2010  
<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1320629/Antony-And-Cleopatra-Man-eater-Kim-Cattralls-tame-Cleopatra.html>>; Cook, p. 131.

reading will find to be central to Cleopatra: the impossibility of realising a character which the written play, its performances, and its receptions remain unsure of.<sup>25</sup>

Cleopatra was already a legend when Shakespeare wrote his play.<sup>26</sup> The character had been articulated and re-articulated, often to forward a moral argument, in poetry, prose, and drama across the fifteen years prior to Shakespeare's writing. The Countess of Pembroke's translated *Tragedie of Antonie*, like Samuel Daniel's later *Tragedie of Cleopatra*, portrayed Cleopatra in a sympathetic light; Thomas Beard, however, used the story of Cleopatra and Antony to illustrate the tragic fruits of adultery and divorce, blaming Antony's downfall on his lover: 'by her flattering allurements [she] rauished the hart of this miserable man [...] & as she partaked of the sin so she did of the punishment'.<sup>27</sup> Samuel Brandon's *Tragicomoedi of the vertuous Octauia* took the part of Cleopatra's rival in Antony's love, Caesar's sister and Antony's second wife Octavia, again criticising the Queen, 'whose shamefull luxurie, / Dooth make the world his folly to deride'.<sup>28</sup> Robert Chester, writing in the tradition of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, reintroduced a pitiable Cleopatra to the narrative, describing her as a 'faire soule' who died 'most patiently'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Coveney, 'First Night: Antony and Cleopatra', *Independent*, 15 October 2010 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/first-night-antony-and-cleopatra-liverpool-playhouse-2107260.html>>; Charles Spencer, 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8065853/Antony-and-Cleopatra-Liverpool-Playhouse-review.html>>; Marmion, 'Man-eater Kim Cattrall'.

<sup>26</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra* is typically dated in the 1606-7 period: see *Anthony and Cleopatra*, ed. Michael Neill, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 20-2; *Antony and Cleopatra: Updated Edition*, ed. David Bevington, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 1-2; *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders, The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2002), pp. 69-74. No early records of performance exist, however 'A booke Called. Anthony & Cleopatra' was entered in the Stationers' Register on 20 May 1608.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Garnier, *The Tragedie of Antonie*, trans. Mary Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke (London: 1595); Samuel Daniel, *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, in *Delia and Rosamond augmented. Cleopatra* (London: 1594), sigs. H4<sup>r</sup>-N8<sup>r</sup>; Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of Gods Judgements* (London: 1597), p. 352.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Brandon, *The Tragicomoedi of the vertuous Octauia* (London: 1598), sig. E7<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Chester, *A Dialogue*, in *Loves Martyr* (London: 1601), sigs. C4<sup>v</sup>-S2<sup>r</sup> [sig. Q1<sup>v</sup>]; Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women: The Legend of Cleopatra*, in *The Riverside Chaucer: New Edition*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: OUP, 1987), pp. 604-5.

Out of this ambivalent collection of perspectives on Cleopatra emerged Shakespeare's character. My reading of the play finds its depiction of Cleopatra to be riddled with contradictions and anxieties, symptoms of the play's tense response to two central aspects of her character: her age, and her paradoxical, anachronistic sexuality. Shakespeare's most drawn-upon source for his *Antony and Cleopatra* was Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, in which he found a Cleopatra who was 'at the age when a womans beawtie is at the prime, & she also of best iudgement'.<sup>30</sup> While for Plutarch Cleopatra 'nether excelled *Octauia* in beawtie, nor yet in young yeares', he does not linger over her age; it was Daniel's play which provided Shakespeare with a Cleopatra in the 'Autumne of [her] beauty', one in whom 'Such beawtie shines, thorow clouds of age & sorow, / If euen those sweet decayes seeme to plead for her'.<sup>31</sup> For Shakespeare, famously, Cleopatra is 'wrinkled deep in time' (1.5.29), her chronological age undefined yet her 'salad days, / When I was green in judgement, cold in blood' (1.5.72-3) long past. Despite this, we are told in a key contradictory report that 'Age cannot wither her' (2.2.240): this early modern woman remains sexually enchanting even as she ages, apparently dismissing Daniel's pleading, pitiable 'decayes'. Shakespeare's play constructs the character of Cleopatra through her breach of expectations of age: the shock of Cleopatra, her dramatic impact on an early modern stage, is rooted in her refusal to be contained by age.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare teases the audience with the promise of a deeply attractive, sexually confident character whose beauties and appetites survive her ageing. Cleopatra is a 'Rare Egyptian!' (2.2.224) possessing a unique power over Roman men: each of Antony, Enobarbus, Dolabella, and potentially even Caesar ('she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace' [5.2.356-7]) falls before her beauty. Her

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<sup>30</sup> Plutarch, p. 981.

<sup>31</sup> Plutarch, p. 997; Daniel, *The Tragedie*, sigs. I5<sup>v</sup>, L1<sup>v</sup>.

person ‘beggar[s] all description’ (2.2.204), defeating the estimation of language; her attractions are sufficient to cause Antony to throw a third part of the Roman empire to the winds. Her flouting of age is encouraged by the play’s location of her at an early modern geographic extreme: Egypt was, for Shakespeare’s first audiences, at the very periphery of the known world, a location at which stabilities collapsed. Egypt was climatically mysterious, defying ‘the vehement heate and scorching of the sunne’ to be a land of ‘*great fertility and richnesse of soile [...]. For, although it neuer raineth here, yet it breedeth great plenty of men and beasts*’.<sup>32</sup> Cleopatra’s imagined country was a place of sexually voracious women – ‘it falleth out oftentimes that the wife will complaine of her husband vnto the iudge, that he doth not his dutie nor contenteth her sufficiently in the night season’ – and effeminate men – ‘the men remayne at home, and play the good huswiues in spinning and weauing and such like duties’.<sup>33</sup> Old age had little negative impact on human wellbeing in this fertile, evergreen Egypt; John Leo’s *geographical historie of Africa* told of:

some which had liued an hundred yeeres, and others which affirmed themselues to be older; whose age was most healthfull and lustie. Yea some you shall finde here of fowerscore yeeres of age, who are sufficiently strong and able to exercise husbandrie, to dresse vines, and to serue in the warres [...].<sup>34</sup>

Egypt thus makes itself available to early modern English drama as a fantasised site of inversion, offering a convenient space for experimentation and the stretching of the limits

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<sup>32</sup> *The Famous Hystory of Herodotvs*, trans. Barnabe Rich (London: 1584), fol. 75<sup>r</sup>; Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum: The Theatre of the World*, trans. W. B. (London: 1606), fol. xxxj<sup>v</sup> (italics in the original).

<sup>33</sup> John Leo, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, trans. John Pory (London: 1600), p. 315; *The Famous Hystory*, fol. 78<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> *The firste booke of the description of Africa*, p. 37.

of age, gender, and generativity.<sup>35</sup> There are strong echoes of this imagined Egypt at work in Shakespeare's play.<sup>36</sup> It is in such a fantasised location that the character of Cleopatra emerges, established by means of the very inversions she represents. By emphasising Cleopatra's origin in this topsy-turvy domain, *Antony and Cleopatra* calls attention to the character's impropriety, rendering her the embodiment of an excessive, paradoxical, upside-down Egypt. Much of the play's Cleopatra-anxiety circulates around the associated fact of her seeming inversion of the ageing process.

*Antony and Cleopatra* establishes a sense of Cleopatra's voracious sexuality through her breach of one particular aspect of early modern age-theory, that of the cooling of the blood with age; in characterising her, the play makes use of Egypt's 'vehement heate'. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, we are told, has the 'naturall heat' of youth; the play's first lines inform us that Antony is at once 'the bellows and the fan' (1.1.9) struggling to 'cool' her 'gipsy's lust' (1.1.10). Performance demands that an audience pay attention to Philo's report of Cleopatra as overheated with an original stage direction dictating a '*Flourish. Enter Antony, Cleopatra, her ladies, the train, with eunuchs fanning her*' (1.1.10). Cleopatra's heat, so great as to require fans, denies the expected cooling of the blood in early modern age. Later in the first act, extending this sense of her inversion of age, Cleopatra reminds us of her 'salad days, / When I was green in judgement, cold in blood', and in his anger Antony speaks of how he first 'found [Cleopatra] as a morsel cold upon / Dead Caesar's trencher' (3.13.117-8). Here we are asked to imagine a woman whose body rises in temperature as she ages, overturning contemporary expectations of the

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<sup>35</sup> For other early modern dramatists Egypt is a distant land of unrestrained luxury and vice. Daniel's Arius recalls 'wanton thoughts, with lust and ease made feeble', 'fat-fed pleasure, / New-fresh inuented ryots', 'this confluence of vice' and an 'innondation of disorders'; the Countess of Pembroke's *Tragedie* told of a 'sweete fertile land', 'rich *Aegipt*', and an Antony who 'With gluttred heart [...] wallowed in delights'. Daniel, *The Tragedie*, sig. K5<sup>v</sup>; Garnier, sigs. C7<sup>v</sup>, D7<sup>v</sup>, E1<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Examples include the discussion in 2.7 of Egypt's mysterious animal life and prodigious fertility, and Caesar's suggestion of Antony's effeminacy (and Cleopatra's masculinity) at 1.4.3-7.

ageing process – Cleopatra not only retains heat despite being ‘wrinkled deep in time’, but in fact has progressed from a cold-blooded youth to a hot-blooded age.

Cleopatra’s apparent heat is, of course, closely associated with the play’s insistence on her sexuality: ‘O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!’ (1.5.21). Enobarbus’s description of her barge on the river Cydnus, couched in the language of desire, is a narrative of her improbable, unquenchable sexual heat:

On each side her  
 Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,  
 With divers-coloured fans whose wind did seem  
 To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,  
 And what they undid did.  
 (2.2.207-11)

Like Antony’s bellows and fan, cooling and heating at once, the cupids’ fans ‘glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool’, raising heat where they should chill.<sup>37</sup> Cleopatra’s heat is such that her very barge ‘Burned on the water’ (2.2.198); her parting conversation with Antony is not ‘idleness’ (1.3.95) but ‘sweating labour’ (1.3.94).

Cleopatra poses a memorable challenge to the early modern theory of age; the supposed force of her sexual potency has become the stuff of legend, frequently provoking criticism of actors who struggle to replicate it satisfactorily (‘she is never bewitching in the coquettish way of Cleopatra, never quite entrancing enough’).<sup>38</sup> The play’s establishment of a woman whom age cannot contain is highly tenuous, however. The conflict in *Antony*

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<sup>37</sup> Enobarbus’s speech, long recognised as a near word-for-word quotation from Plutarch, interestingly places greater emphasis on Cleopatra’s heat than the source material. Plutarch mentions only ‘pretie faire boyes [...] with litle fannes in their hands, with the which they fanned wind vpon her’ (p. 981).

<sup>38</sup> Anon., ‘This pair sadly lack that vital sparkle’, *Evening News*, 6 November 1992. The reviewer was commenting on Clare Higgins’s performance in *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. John Caird (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1992).

*and Cleopatra* between the Egyptian queen's age and her great beauty and sexual vivacity engineers a significant tension in the text, one which articulates early modern England's fear of the uncontrolled sexuality of the older woman. Across *Antony and Cleopatra* the play anxiously moves to undermine what it seems to promote, pulling back from the inversions it has proposed. Even as Cleopatra's age-defying sexuality is held up to the audience's gaze, it is nervously picked apart. A pattern is established whereby the play denies the triumph over age that Cleopatra's reported sexuality and beauty seem to represent and, concurrently, demonstrates the tenuousness and potential unreliability of reported accounts of the character, both within the play and in the Cleopatra-legend more widely.

'Age cannot wither' Shakespeare's Cleopatra, or so we are told, yet she has a 'waned lip' (2.1.21) and fears 'the feature of Octavia: her years, / Her inclination' (2.5.113-4). Throughout *Antony and Cleopatra* conflicting accounts of Cleopatra's beauty strain the ideal of the 'Rare Egyptian' whom 'Age cannot wither' conjured by Enobarbus. Pompey's invocation is revealing:

[...] but all the charms of love,  
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip.  
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both [...].  
(2.1.20-22)

Here we have a Cleopatra who, although seemingly beautiful, still requires the 'charms' and 'witchcraft' of love to 'soften' her waned lip: a Cleopatra who falls between seductress and hag in the early modern imagination. Caesar's descriptions of the Queen are harsher still: she is 'a whore' (3.6.67) and 'a trull' (3.6.95), as for Scarus she is 'Yon riband-red nag of Egypt' (3.10.10) and for Philo 'a strumpet' (1.1.13). In his anger, Antony himself refers

to Cleopatra as ‘This foul Egyptian’ (4.13.10) and ‘Triple-turned whore’ (4.13.13), transforming her beauty into an ugly and corrupted sexuality. The insults cannot all be due to Cleopatra’s failed soldiery in the play’s third and fourth acts (3.10, 4.13); there is a palpable strain of anger and disgust at work in the text, corresponding as we will see below with a tendency to violence in recent performance and criticism, which can be read in part as a response to the experiment of the woman’s ageing sexuality. Claims throughout the play of the Queen’s beauty and sexual charm as products of witchcraft similarly seem rooted in the play’s discomfort with the challenge to age-theories posed by Cleopatra’s hold over Antony. Cleopatra is ‘this enchanting queen’ (1.2.117), ‘cunning past man’s thought’ (1.2.132), and Antony is ‘The noble ruin of her magic’ (3.10.18); in an echo of the plays discussed in Chapter Two, ‘magic’ is deployed as a means of explaining, and defusing, this ageing woman’s anachronistic sexuality and excessively attractive body. Anxious in response to what it has suggested – a woman who cannot be contained by age – the play reacts with disbelief, with anger and with accusations of witchcraft. As an experiment in age, heat, and sex conducted in an English-imagined Egypt, at once exotically liberated yet with roots in contemporary, local constraints of age and sexuality and their attendant anxieties, Cleopatra is, finally, neither one thing nor another: ‘For her own person, / It beggared all description’ (2.2.203-4).

The Cleopatra proposed by Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* is an early modern absurdity, an aberration that cannot be allowed to be staged. One way in which the play scripts a character who proved, and continues to prove, impossible to realise is by means of Cleopatra’s renowned ‘infinite variety’ (2.2.241). The phrase is embedded by Enobarbus within a series of unlikely qualities:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale

Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
 The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
 Where most she satisfies. For vilest things  
 Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
 Bless her when she is riggish.  
 (2.2.240-5)

Enobarbus's description stretches plausibility, speaking the inversions of Cleopatra's Egypt ('she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies'). In advancing the notion of her 'infinite variety', however, he ensures the character can never be realised; the vision of an unwithering age is revealed as insubstantial fantasy. 'Infinity' is necessarily an impossible concept to perform, a test of skill which any actor is destined to fail; despite this (or because of it) 'infinite variety' has been seized on by reviewers and has served as the bar against which actors of the role have been measured. Benedict Nightingale reads the speech as the ultimate test for any Cleopatra: 'Imagine the exhortations that must sometimes wing across rehearsal rooms: "Very nice dear, but age might wither or custom stale your variety – it just isn't *infinite* enough"'.<sup>39</sup> Six years later he appraised Helen Mirren's performance along precisely those lines: '[A] Cleopatra who [...] is fearful that age may indeed be beginning to wither and custom to stale her infinite variety'.<sup>40</sup> Caroline Palmer hedged her assessment of Mirren, reading her as unfortunately not-quite-infinite ('The line [...] is true of Mirren, up to a point'), as in 1999 Charles Spencer complained of Frances de la Tour that 'her variety is a little less than infinite'.<sup>41</sup> The phrase has proved taxing for the actors themselves – 'How does one attempt to play what Enobarbus calls her

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<sup>39</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'A Cleopatra of infinite variety', *The Times*, 7 November 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Mirren's moments of class fail to lift revival', *The Times*, 21 October 1998. Nightingale was reviewing *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Sean Mathias (London: The National Theatre [Olivier], 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Caroline Palmer, 'Mirren's 'infinite variety' puts Rickman to shame', *Sunday Business*, 25 October 1998; Charles Spencer, 'RSC resorts to adolescent shock tactics', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 June 1999.

“infinite variety”?’ – and, when almost achieved (‘Barber amply suggests the “infinite variety”’), proves a stick to beat actors with: ‘one longed for some decorum [...]. Cleopatra needs to simmer down’.<sup>42</sup> By seizing on infinity in this way as an indicator of sexuality, critics, like Enobarbus, ensure that the spectre of a woman at once ageing and sexually vital can never be realised on a present-day stage.<sup>43</sup> The conditions of the play’s original performances necessarily achieved the same effect. Performing *Antony and Cleopatra* on the early modern London stage would have served to draw out those elements of the play which subvert to the point of near-ridicule the testing of age, heat, beauty, and sexuality conducted elsewhere.

It is likely that *Antony and Cleopatra* was first performed at either the Globe or Blackfriars theatres in London.<sup>44</sup> The geographical periphery of Cleopatra’s Egyptian location was sabotaged by the London performance; the sexually enchanting ageing woman’s presence on an English stage, spoken by an English actor, undermined the potential alternatives to early modern age theory she seemed to promote. As though to encourage the failure of the experiment it begins, the text famously and self-reflexively calls attention to the artifice of its own performance:

The quick comedians

Extemporally will stage us, and present

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<sup>42</sup> Frances de la Tour, ‘Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*’, in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, pp. 212-30 (p. 215); Dominic Cavendish, ‘Cleopatra walks off with the show’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 July 2006; Peter Whittle, ‘Keep a lid on it, Cleo’, *Sunday Times: Culture*, 9 July 2006. Whittle and Cavendish were reviewing *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Dominic Dromgoole (London: Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Booth has described Shakespeare’s Cleopatra as a ‘kamikaze’ role for actors, claiming that in Cleopatra the playwright depicts a character riven with contradictions and a human impossibility; witnessing her personation, we refuse to believe it: ‘Cleopatra’s unbelievability is of her essence [...]. The actor is blamed for Shakespeare’s success in creating an unbelievable character we believe in’. Stephen Booth, ‘The Shakespearean Actor as Kamikaze Pilot’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36: 5 (1985), 553-70 (p. 563).

<sup>44</sup> While we have no records of the first performances of *Antony and Cleopatra*, we can be assured of its having been performed somewhere, in some form, due in part to revisions made to Daniel’s 1607 edition of *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* which seem to be influenced by Shakespeare’s play. See *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Richard Madelaine, *Shakespeare in Production* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 14-7.

Our Alexandrian revels. Antony  
 Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see  
 Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness  
 I'th' posture of a whore.  
 (5.2.212-217)

These lines call into question age as well as gender, the use of 'squeaking' and 'boy' imagining a youthful actor in the role. As in 1.3 of *Coriolanus*, the ideas suggested here about the performing voice remind the audience of the potentially unstable gendering of all performed and actual early modern ageing women. The lines do not necessarily determine that Cleopatra's first actor was a boy or even a youth; however, they do put further pressure on ideas of age in the play and on the space between what is performed and what is actual by indicating the artifice (and hence implausibility) of the hot-blooded older woman.<sup>45</sup> Cleopatra here demolishes the fantasised space between Egypt and London, challenging the audience to reduce her 'greatness' to the status of 'a whore'.

In at once advancing the powerful sexuality of an older female character and, concurrently, denying that sexuality, *Antony and Cleopatra* finds itself in a position of anxious ambivalence regarding sex and the ageing woman. In recent years, age in *Antony and Cleopatra* has continued to prove awkward. A regular feature of the publicity campaigns conducted in advance of a major national production of *Antony and Cleopatra* is an article demonstrating a journalist's, and sometimes the actors', struggle to get to grips with the ages of the lovers, with comment shifting uncomfortably between the stated ages

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<sup>45</sup> Cleopatra's expectation for her later performance was not necessarily met, and the lines may instead have served to call attention to the talent of the actor playing the role. Bridget Escolme has recently discussed Cleopatra's artifice in relation to her purposeful visual construction of power: she reads Cleopatra as a queen who 'consciously plays with dress to display, rather than to hide, what she is'. Escolme, 'Costume, Disguise and Self-Display', in *Shakespeare's Theatres*, eds. Karim-Cooper and Stern, p. 138. On the costuming of Cleopatra in present-day performance, see Suzanne Osmond, "'Her Infinite Variety': Representations of Shakespeare's *Cleopatra* in Fashion, Film and Theatre', *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 1: 1 (2011), 55-79.

of the historical figures referred to in Plutarch and the apparent ages of the characters drawn in Shakespeare's drama. One example is an article in the *Birmingham Post* written in advance of Michael Attenborough's 2002 RSC production, featuring an interview with Stuart Wilson (Antony) and Sinéad Cusack (Cleopatra). "Oh yes, we're terribly elderly" joked Wilson in response to a query as to the actors' ages and the ages of Shakespeare's characters: "Actually, I'm absolutely the correct age – 54 – that Antony was in Shakespeare's play".<sup>46</sup> Wilson here seeks to justify his own casting as a lover by referring to Antony's supposed 'correct age', an age which must be sourced outside the play in a reading of Plutarch. This reading was likely to have formed part of the actor's preparatory work of fleshing-out the character in rehearsal, filling in Shakespeare's silences through a combination of 'research and imagination'.<sup>47</sup> Wilson's insistence on Antony's intended age of fifty-four, however, demonstrates the uncertainty which lasts beyond the early modern period into the present day regarding the play's depiction of a seemingly anachronistic passionate sexual relationship, and, in addition, seems to deny the very performativity inherent to the art of acting any character, of any age. Wilson's age, of course, should be beside the point; however, in an effort to rationalise Shakespearean choices which may read and perform as unorthodox today, the plays' source materials are invoked. These sources are treated as a window of insight onto the playwright's intentions regarding otherwise ambiguous aspects of the play, such as the chronological ages of Antony and Cleopatra. The need to 'justify' Shakespeare by invoking the sources is psychologically revealing; as he continues, Wilson sounds anxious regarding the ages and sex lives of both

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<sup>46</sup> Andrew Davies, 'Sex for the older generation', *Birmingham Post*, 23 April 2002. *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Michael Attenborough (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, performance, self* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 4. Escolme describes the ways in which an actor, in this case Antony Sher, prepares for a performance by amassing as full a sense of a character's psychology as possible; see also Laurie Maguire, *Studying Shakespeare: A Guide to the Plays* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), pp. 4-5.

himself and Antony: “This idea that sex stops at 30 just isn’t true – [...] there just isn’t enough of that older generation sexual stuff”.

The anxiety seems to be heightened when Cleopatra’s age is under discussion; actors, directors, and members of the press have been nervous regarding the discrepancies between Cleopatra’s legendary sexuality, the visibly ageing woman Shakespeare suggests her to be in the play, the age of actors performing the role, and, additionally, the relative youth of Plutarch’s historical Cleopatra. Davies continues: “Cleopatra was 38, 39 – so I’m just one year out,” jokes [Sinéad] Cusack’. The reporter’s use of ‘jokes’ carefully calls the reader’s attention to Cusack’s circumspection; she was, in fact, fifty-four playing Cleopatra – “But I don’t think the young have got the monopoly on being sexy, hopefully”.

Cusack’s anxious ‘hopefully’ resonated with journalist Terry Grimley’s claim three years earlier in a promotion piece published in advance of Steven Pimlott’s production that the subject of Frances de la Tour and Alan Bates’s ages (‘some years past the historical ages of these characters’) was a ‘potentially hazardous’ one to raise in interview.<sup>48</sup> De la Tour played Cleopatra at fifty-five, opposite Bates as Antony at sixty-five. Grimley was surprised to find that the discrepancy between the actors’ and the characters’ supposed ages ‘[didn’t] bother them at all’: “We’re about ten years older,” says de la Tour, to which Bates chimes: “All actors play ten years younger”. Bates nervously accommodates his and de la Tour’s bodies to their characters by insisting on the distinction between actors’ ages and the ages of the characters they perform, a point of distinction fundamental to the craft of acting as performance and one not recognised by Grimley. As in Davies’s later interview, the age of Cleopatra and Antony here is a bone of contention, something

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<sup>48</sup> Terry Grimley, ‘Mid-life crisis mirth’, *Birmingham Post*, 5 June 1999. *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Steven Pimlott (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1999). Other recent actors performing the role of Cleopatra include Kathryn Hunter (*Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Michael Boyd [Stratford-upon-Avon: The Courtyard Theatre, 2010]), Kim Cattrall, Harriet Walter, and Helen Mirren in their fifties, and Frances Barber in her late forties. Actors playing the role of Antony, such as Richard Johnson, Alan Rickman, Patrick Stewart, Nick Jones, Darrell D’Silva, Jeffery Kissoon, and Paul Shelley, have tended to be aged in their late fifties and sixties.

requiring explication; the unspoken, tense truth is that the young, traditionally, *do* 'have the monopoly on being sexy'. Performing sexiness at an older age raises eyebrows and threatens failure. Reviewing Giles Block's 1999 Globe production for the *Independent*, Paul Taylor seemed to express relief that 'At thirty-nine, [Mark] Rylance [playing Cleopatra] is the same age as the heroine'.<sup>49</sup> Taylor was drawing on a director's commentary in the programme in which Block claimed that 'Cleopatra, who is 39 at her death [...], is in the middle range of Shakespeare's female characters, between the teenage Juliet and her nurse'.<sup>50</sup> The context of the remark was a discussion of potential original performance conditions, with Block considering the likelihood of the role having been played by an adult male in its first staging; again, there is nothing unusual in a director or performer's turn to a play's source materials in order to secure a greater depth of psychological detail for the performance of a role. The frequency with which historical details of age, noticeably absent from the play, are called to account in writing on *Antony and Cleopatra* in performance, however, makes clear that anxiety is still inspired today by the staged spectacle of 'that older generation sexual stuff'.

Across pre-performance interviews and subsequent reviews, then, the confluence of age and sexuality in *Antony and Cleopatra* troubles us today as it troubled the original play. Within the theatre itself, the unease has been most tightly focused on the character of Cleopatra: 'Mirren [as Cleopatra] worries us brilliantly'.<sup>51</sup> The version of Cleopatra offered up by the play is fraught with contradictions, and the Queen herself is the first to note them, challenging the audience with the problems of her age and her sexuality: 'Think on me, / That am with Phoebus amorous pinches black, / And wrinkled deep in time'

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Taylor 'Everything but the girl', *Independent*, 3 August 1999 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-everything-but-the-girl-1110418.html>>.

<sup>50</sup> Programme archived at SGLA. *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Giles Block (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> David Murray, 'Shakespeare's unique voice disappears into Rickman's beard', *Financial Times*, 22 October 1998.

(1.5.27-29). No punctuation more than a period is given, leaving directors, actors, and editors to decide whether the lines are a question, statement, or exclamation.<sup>52</sup> For Harriet Walter's 'mature femme fatale' in 2006 they were a sceptical question: 'Think on me?'.<sup>53</sup> For Clare Higgins the lines were an invocation: she stood to deliver them to the sky, her 'deep in time' becoming a comment on her own myth. The moment was more personal for Walter, the lines addressed to her worried reflection in a mirror; Helen Mirren also consulted a mirror as she spoke. Michael Attenborough's 2002 production cut the lines entirely, demonstrating its uncertainty with Cleopatra's meaning, and discomfort with the sudden conflict of age and beauty the lines evoked. The text poses a problem for performers and readers in these lines, threatening to reduce the fantasy of a hot-blooded, sexually vibrant, beautiful ageing woman to ridiculousness by stating and staging her insecurities; it requires us to ponder whether in fact the Queen truly is as triumphant a lady (2.2.190) as we have been told. Recent productions have tended to seize upon the lines as an opportunity to demonstrate a chink in Cleopatra's armour, approaching them as a revelation of her essential, ageing normality: 'No more but [e'en] a woman' (4.16.75). In 2006, for instance, having considered her appearance in a mirror, at 'wrinkled deep in time' Harriet Walter 'pull[ed] off her fabulous, glossy wig and attempt[ed] to fluff up her own thinner hair, revealing every middle-aged woman's anxiety about losing her looks'.<sup>54</sup> Walter then threw the wig to the ground and slumped forward with her head in her hands, performing a neurotic Cleopatra. Steven Pimlott's 1999 production similarly had Frances de la Tour's Cleopatra collapse into a chair at this moment, conveying worry and dejection where previously she had been revelling in Antony's memory. What we see in the scene as it is played, then, is a present-day anxiety at the juxtaposition of female sexual power and

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<sup>52</sup> Arden's John Wilders inserted a question mark – 'Think on me [...]?' – while Richard Madelaine's edition followed the series policy of leaving the punctuation unedited, as does the Norton collected works edition, the New Cambridge edition and the Oxford edition.

<sup>53</sup> Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2006', p. 298.

<sup>54</sup> Georgina Brown, 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Mail on Sunday*, 23 April 2006.

age which mirrors the early modern period's, and a relief at our capacity to puncture that juxtaposition through performance.

Across a range of recent productions, directors have seen fit to strip the Queen of the beauty and majesty which the text calls into question, transforming the movement of the written play between allure and ugliness into a performed humiliation. The earliest of the productions of *Antony and Cleopatra* I have looked at, John Caird's 1992 production, featured Clare Higgins as a curly-haired Cleopatra of 'foxy good looks and [a] mercurial manner'.<sup>55</sup> Higgins was a well-received Cleopatra, regal throughout, until the final act. At 'I have nothing / Of woman in me' (5.2.234-5) she proved her curls to have been false by suddenly pulling off her wig to reveal a shaven head. Higgins's Cleopatra was textually and performatively de-feminised and de-sexualised in a movement that was greeted with satisfaction by critics. For Richard Edmonds, Higgins was 'memorable' when '(her wigs finally abandoned and her head cropped like a poor soldier)' she faced death.<sup>56</sup> Paul Lapworth of the *Stratford Herald* was more direct than most when he wrote that Higgins's de-wigging was 'a staggering transformation, a late maturing splendidly staged'.<sup>57</sup> Lapworth's use of 'maturing' is intriguing: to his mind, Cleopatra's age was ultimately irreconcilable with her beauty, necessitating her alternative appearance in the final act. In suggesting the staging of age alongside sex the play seems to have posed recent directors and audiences an impossible task; their responses mirror the early modern period's fears of the sexually active and uncontained ageing woman. Cleopatra's 'late maturing' into the humiliated, shaven-headed figure of a victim of punishment at once states the implausibility of a sexually attractive ageing woman and concurrently demonstrates the fate awaiting even a queen who dares to exceed the limitations placed on sexuality in age

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<sup>55</sup> Kirsty Milne, 'Voice that launched a thousand smokes', *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 November 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Edmonds, 'Infinite variety keeps this affair fresh', *Birmingham Post Weekend*, 7 November 1992.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Lapworth, 'Perfect match of imperfect people', *Stratford Herald*, 13 November 1992.

which last into the present day. A similar effect was seen in Sean Mathias's 1998 production at the National Theatre, with Helen Mirren's Cleopatra donning a shapeless nightgown and revealing hair suddenly cut short following Antony's death. In Pimlott's production a year later at Stratford, de la Tour's Cleopatra was memorable for her sexual demonstrativeness, famously opening the play by receiving oral sex from Antony. By the play's end, however, she was 'looking frighteningly old and vulnerable, her face devoid of make-up and her chestnut mop scraped into a hairnet'.<sup>58</sup> Charles Spencer was relieved to find the truth of this Cleopatra's sexuality to be an ugly and indeed aged affair: 'Cleopatra is finally revealed as a hideous, Norma Desmond-like crone'.<sup>59</sup>

In recent productions of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the sexuality of the ageing woman has become subject to attack in a performance of violence which mirrors the anxious promotion of and withdrawal from sex and age in the play as first written. Critics respond with approval to stagings which punish or tarnish the figure of a sexually vibrant, attractive ageing woman, stagings which reimpose control on a sexually excessive female body. We cannot know whether the role originally was played along such lines; however, one production which heavily advertised its 'original practices' pedigree, Giles Block's 1999 all-male *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Globe, did follow the trend of stripping Cleopatra of her beauty and de-feminising her by removing her hair. Block's production went further than most: the act was not performed as the straightforward removal of a wig, but rather took place off-stage and resulted in a bloodied Cleopatra who required her scalp bathed and her arms bandaged. Entering after the death of Antony, this was a Queen who had torn out her hair and cut her hands and arms in a violent act of self-mutilation. The role was played to great critical acclaim by Mark Rylance. A research report on the production by

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Misplaced imagination', *Independent*, 26 June 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Spencer, 'RSC resorts'.

Jaq Bessell explains that the decision to perform a self-harming Cleopatra arose from a reading of Plutarch, not Shakespeare:

M[ark] R[ylance] was interested in Plutarch's account of Cleopatra's appearance after the death of Antony. [...] MR and J[enny] T[iramani] worked together to present as poor and naked an image of the great Queen of Egypt as could be imagined. MR shaved his own hair off in clumps which (when painted with stage blood) suggested the frenzy of self-mutilation hinted at by Plutarch.<sup>60</sup>

Block's production, like other contemporary productions, seemed determined to crush the image of the beautiful, sexually powerful Cleopatra still being hinted at in the play's final lines ('she looks [...] / As she would catch another Antony'), yet there is nothing in Shakespeare's text to suggest that his Cleopatra was intended to mirror Plutarch's in this way. Recourse to the source material in order to effect a 'mutilation' of the ageing woman cannot be explained away as purely preparatory character study or a fleshing-out of psychological detail. Rather, it seems a violent punishment was acted upon the character in a performance of shame: Rylance 'appear[ed] shorn-headed, like a female collaborator at the end of the second world war'.<sup>61</sup> For Paul Taylor the diminishment of Cleopatra in the final scene, 'her wig now removed, revealing a scalp riddled with alopecia, and wearing a simple white shift', was 'an excellent directorial detail'.<sup>62</sup> The *Daily Mail*'s Michael Coveney also savoured the performance: 'Finally bereft and humiliated, he loses his hair and his womanhood [...]. His femininity is first displayed and then dismantled, a wonderful way of treating this teasing, complicated character'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Plutarch writes that following the death of Antony, Cleopatra 'had plucked her heare from her head, as also for that she had martired all her face with her nailes' (p. 1008). Jaq Bessell, 'Findings from the Globe 1999 Season: *Antony and Cleopatra*', Shakespeare's Globe Research Bulletin, 14 (2000) <[http://globe-education.org/files/Antony\\_and\\_Cleopatra\\_1999.pdf](http://globe-education.org/files/Antony_and_Cleopatra_1999.pdf)>.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Hewison, 'Playing fast and loose with a queen', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 8 August 1999.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, 'Everything but the girl'.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Coveney, 'Why it's all right for a chap to carry on as Cleo', *Daily Mail*, 31 May 1999.

Coveney's endorsement of the Globe staging makes for uncomfortable reading, tapping a strain of sexually-accented violence towards the 'teasing' Cleopatra which finds its roots in the text but which continues to resonate in the present day.<sup>64</sup> For example, Pimlott's production, also in 1999 and renowned for its sexual display, had Alan Bates's Antony strike Frances de la Tour's Cleopatra in rage, throwing her to the floor in an act of domestic violence which went unremarked on in review. Critics rather preferred to call attention to de la Tour's final act appearance 'looking frighteningly old and vulnerable, her face devoid of make-up', expressing pleasure at her degradation: 'Time, love and defeat have ravaged her face'; 'Only at the close, where she appears shockingly shorn of make-up [...] does she acquire a regal stillness'.<sup>65</sup> Again we see a Cleopatra who is punished by directors for her anachronistic sexuality, and for whose critics her 'vulnerable', sexually redundant, and ultimately carefully contained incarnation ('stillness') in the staging of the play's final moments is her finest hour.

Some critics take a different approach to the performance of Cleopatra's sexuality. Seeming to view Sinéad Cusack's performance as an invitation to gaze aggressively, critics were unusually graphic in their descriptions of her Cleopatra, acting a kind of sexual violence upon both character and actor in their deconstruction of Cusack's body. Alastair Macaulay wrote that:

As for her beauty – even though her shoulder/neck area has a tension that does not become a Cleopatra – your eye gorges on the brightness of her eyes, the breadth of her cheekbones, the full Cupid's bow of her mouth, the glow of her skin, the sensational curves and line of her naked back.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> On this, see Linda Fitz, 'Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in Antony and Cleopatra Criticism', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 28 (1977), 297-316. Fitz writes that she has 'noticed, in male critical commentary on the character of Cleopatra, an intemperance of language, an intensity of revulsion uncommon even among Shakespeare critics' (p. 298).

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, 'Misplaced imagination'; John Peter, 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 27 June 1999; Michael Billington, 'Enobarbus steals the show', *Guardian*, 25 June 1999.

<sup>66</sup> Alastair Macaulay, 'A stunning queen, but where is the chemistry?', *Financial Times*, 25 April 2002.

John Peter went further in his review, again dissecting Cusack's appearance (this time in comparison to an earlier Cleopatra, Janet Suzman):

Cusack plays a sensual woman who can laugh at love, and in love, but only when she is sexually and emotionally safe. Her one slight flaw is her deportment: you feel like saying, be more regal. Head up, shoulders back. Cleopatra is a consummate actress: Suzman's was more calculating; Cusack's loves acting, and regards it as a form of foreplay. Suzman's was a majestic loner who used people; Cusack's is more exuberant, as if saying, use me, do, and I'll show you.<sup>67</sup>

Macaulay's and Peter's extraordinary reviews deconstruct, interpret, and even command the body of the female actor for the gaze of the reader ('Head up, shoulders back'), defining it as public property. Although seemingly writing in praise of Cusack's body, both reviews conduct the same 'dismantling' of femininity that was acted upon Rylance's Cleopatra in performance. Interventions such as Peter's and Macaulay's in the afterlife of a production of *Antony and Cleopatra* build upon the play's inherent Cleopatra-anxieties; they demonstrate the relish with which reviewers return a woman initially characterised as sexually powerful to a position of subordination. Their deconstruction challenges the myth of 'age cannot wither her' by asking a reader to look as closely as possible at the specifics of the character's acting body ('the brightness of her eyes, the breadth of her cheekbones'); the reviews open a space between the actor's body and the performed character which serves to neuter the threat of an embodied, sexually challenging Cleopatra manifesting herself on today's stages. Contemporaneously and paradoxically they re-speak her myth, strengthening it forward by narrating an image of almost-perfect sexuality that in performance falls fatally (and happily) short of the impossible, imagined, ever-absent 'real'

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<sup>67</sup> J[ohn] P[eter], 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 28 April 2002. Suzman performed in *Antony and Cleopatra*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1972).

Cleopatra: ‘Her one slight flaw is her deportment’; ‘her shoulder/neck area has a tension that does not become a Cleopatra’.

We are returned, in reviews such as these, to the effect at work in ‘infinite variety’, that implausible proposal seized upon by critics as a means of ensuring that no Cleopatra is ever admitted to achieve the dangerous combination of age and sexuality the play seems to forward.<sup>68</sup> If *Antony and Cleopatra* cannot allow age and sex to be performed together in the person of one enacted character, nor too can its critics who prefer to imagine, rather than encounter, the performance of an ageing, highly sexually attractive Egyptian queen. It is interesting to consider Kathryn Hunter’s recent performance as Cleopatra in Michael Boyd’s 2010 production in the light of these ideas. Hunter’s performance was frequently remarked upon for its ‘chameleon’s changeability’, approaching the ‘almost infinite variety’ which Charles Spencer conceded ‘the actress suggest[ed] superbly’.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, critics drew the reader’s attention to Hunter’s appearance: ‘Some will argue that Hunter is hardly a beauty, but then Cleopatra is no longer in her salad days’; ‘much given to rolling her eyes, grotesquely sexy without being sensual’; ‘Hunter isn’t obvious casting when you think of Mirren, Redgrave and the other creamy beauties who have played the role’; ‘a tiny double-jointed actress with a cracked voice whose Cleopatra sometimes puts me in mind of a doting granny’; ‘the bony shoulders and sinewy arms [...]. The staring

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<sup>68</sup> Nancy Vickers’s work on the Petrarchan blazon speaks to this effect. Vickers has explained that by presenting just ‘parts of a woman’ for description – an arm, her hair, an eye – the metonymy of the sonneteer’s blazon ensures that ‘a complete picture’ of femininity is never realised. Something similar is at work in these reviews. Nancy J. Vickers, ‘Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme’, *Critical Inquiry*, 8: 2 (1981), 265-79 (p. 266).

<sup>69</sup> Michael Billington, ‘Antony and Cleopatra’, *Guardian*, 11 May 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/may/11/antony-and-cleopatra-review-theatre>>; Patrick Marmion, ‘Antony and Cleopatra: Rough and ready, but where’s the fire?’, *Daily Mail*, 14 May 2010 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1278189/Antony-And-Cleopatra-Rough-ready-wheres-fire.html>>; Charles Spencer, ‘Antony and Cleopatra’, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/7711337/The-RSCs-Antony-and-Cleopatra-in-Stratford-review.html>>.

eyes, dropping jaw and furrowed brow do not help'.<sup>70</sup> Hunter's Cleopatra is allowed to be infinite only because sex is out of the picture.

Sex and the ageing woman struggle to be reconciled in *Antony and Cleopatra*, their incompatibility as clear in the play's present-day revivals as it is in the early modern text and as it was on its first stages. The play's attempt to articulate Cleopatra's unwithering beauty and sexual charm generates an internal tension which recurs in performance and reception today; while establishing a dramatically memorable character through the breach of contemporary age-theory, Shakespeare sets up an impossible paradox which his play subsequently works to undermine. In both her early modern origins and her present-day afterlife, Shakespeare's Cleopatra provokes an anxious response; today, that anxiety is most clearly heard in the reactions of the theatre critic.

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Despite the concerns outlined in the Introduction, newspaper criticism of theatre remains, as Paul Prescott notes, 'a key genre for the study of Shakespeare and performance', critics 'play[ing] a key role in mediating and circulating performance in the public sphere'.<sup>71</sup> Critics interpret performance for their readerships, defining the meaning of a staging in short form. It is the newspaper review's intervention to determine a performance for its readers which speaks to the concerns of this chapter. Both Gertrude

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<sup>70</sup> Spencer, 'Antony and Cleopatra', May 2010; John Peter, 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 16 May 2010; Benedict Nightingale, 'Antony and Cleopatra', *The Times*, 12 May 2010 <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/stage/theatre/article7123013.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/theatre/article7123013.ece)>; Marmion, 'Antony and Cleopatra'; Patrick Carnegy, 'Carry on up the Nile', *The Spectator*, 29 May 2010 <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/arts-and-culture/featured/6025578/carry-on-up-the-nile.html>>.

<sup>71</sup> Prescott, p. 360.

and Cleopatra are articulated for an audience's or reader's consumption by others. Cleopatra, as we have seen, brings with her a weight of audience expectation which is built upon by reviewers speaking her legend forward for future productions and refusing, through their criticism, the possibility of ever fully realising a female character at once ageing and sexually desirable. In *Hamlet*, Gertrude's supposedly aged, supposedly rampant sexuality is spoken for an audience by her son, a son whose opinions have been trusted much as a readership trusts a critic; the character of Gertrude, famously difficult to make sense of in performance – '[she] doesn't say anything at times when you think she would do so, so you just have to make your mind up about her' – is reviewed and narrated by Hamlet.<sup>72</sup> Hamlet's perspective, as I will demonstrate, is as problematic as those of today's newspaper critics: relentlessly misogynist and deeply unreliable, his readings of his mother articulate a single perspective on her performance of age and sexuality, one which audiences and critics mistakenly have accepted as absolute truth.

'[O]ne of the main things about [Gertrude] is that she is a very sexy lady who desperately needs it and finds Claudius very, very attractive. [...] It's as simple as that'.<sup>73</sup> So claimed Barbara Jefford, who played the role at the Old Vic theatre in 1978 opposite Derek Jacobi as Hamlet.<sup>74</sup> It is likely that Jefford was exaggerating, however the thrust of her remarks – Gertrude's uncontrollable sexual impulses – resonates with Hamlet's descriptions of his mother and has held a great degree of currency in productions and reviews of the play. My reading of Gertrude, however, will argue for an almost entirely ambiguous character. Our responses to what I find to be the open-ended and ambivalent representation of the character, her age, and her sexuality will be traced across nine major British productions staged over the past twenty years.

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<sup>72</sup> Judi Dench, 'A Career in Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, eds. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: OUP, 1996), pp. 197-210 (pp. 209-10).

<sup>73</sup> Cook, p. 86.

<sup>74</sup> *Hamlet*, dir. Toby Robertson (London: The Old Vic Theatre, 1978).

Hamlet's Gertrude is an ageing, even elderly, woman guilty of unnamed and unnameable crimes: 'an act' (Q2: 3.4.38); 'such a deed' (F: 3.4.45); 'the act' (Q2: 3.4.49).<sup>75</sup> Widowed following the death of old King Hamlet, she has, at the play's opening, been 'Taken to wife' (Q2: 1.2.14) by Claudius, subsequently revealed by the Ghost to be the murderer of Hamlet's father. Across each of *Hamlet's* three texts, Gertrude is made subject to her son's rage and asked to repent for her unspeakable sins – 'Ay me, what act?' (F: 3.4.51). Sex in her supposed old age is just one of a range of crimes of which Hamlet understands his mother to be guilty, including marriage in widowhood ('Frailty, thy name is woman' [Q1: 2.66]), haste ('Within a month!' [F: 1.2.151]), stupidity ('sure, that sense / Is apoplexed' [Q2: 3.4.70-1]), incest ('incestuous sheets' [Q1: 2.70]), potentially adultery ('that adulterate beast' [Q2: 1.5.42]), and possibly even murder ('almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king and marry with his brother' [F: 3.4.28-9]). This reading will be concerned with Hamlet's and the play's representations of Gertrude's sexuality and age, and with subsequent responses to those representations in performance. As I proceed through my reading of the play and its stagings, however, it will become clear that

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<sup>75</sup> *Hamlet* exists in three texts, Q1 (*The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke* [London: 1603]); Q2 (*The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. : Newly imprinted and enlarged* [London: 1604]); and *The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*, in F. Care has been taken in this chapter to avoid prioritising one text over the others, as it remains an editorially moot point which of the three *Hamlets* is the most authoritative; furthermore, there are differences between the texts which will on occasion prove useful to my readings. As such, I move between and quote across all three. For lineation I follow the relevant text taken from the three-text edition, *Hamlet*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, *The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series*, 2 vols (London: Thomson Learning, 2006). A range of theories have been proposed to account for the differences between the three *Hamlets*, including revision, touring, the possible circulation of plays in manuscript form, court as opposed to 'popular' performance, and 'literariness'. See Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Andrew Gurr, 'Maximal and Minimal Texts: Shakespeare v. The Globe', *Shakespeare Survey*, 52 (1999), 68-87; *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, *The Arden Shakespeare: Second Series* (London: Thomson Learning, 2005), pp. 18-74; Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship and Authorship in Early Modern England: Buggeswords* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 99-113; Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2000); see also *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, I, pp. 74-86. I will not attempt to 'solve' these problems; they are stated in order to provide a context for the importance of a sense of multiplicity when approaching both the *Hamlets* and their Gertrudes. For more on the difficulties with the *Hamlets*, see Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts*; Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 396-402; Steven Urkowitz, "'Well-sayd olde Mole": Burying Three *Hamlets* in Modern Editions', in *Shakespeare Study Today: The Horace Howard Furness Memorial Lectures*, ed. Georgianna Ziegler (New York: Ams Press, 1986), pp. 37-70; and Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass, 'The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 59: 4 (2008), 371-420.

*Hamlet*'s/Hamlet's anxieties of sex and age cannot be entirely distinguished from the broader sense of shame, disgust, and guilt surrounding Gertrude's character. As in my reading of *King John*, the focus of my attention is on one female character only and the treatment of her ageing sexuality by the play, its critics, its directors, and its performers. A different reading could have considered the ways in which the play's representation of female sexuality in later life speaks to Hamlet's discomfort with the sexuality he reads into the character of Ophelia, a much younger woman: *Hamlet* is a play in which femininity is always suspect. By concentrating solely on Gertrude, however, I allow for commonalities to be found between the depiction and reception of the ageing woman in *Hamlet* and those of ageing women in *Antony and Cleopatra* and in the other plays studied by this thesis. In this way, a sense emerges of the characterisation of Gertrude and her vilification by Hamlet (and *Hamlet*'s critics) as being one strand of a broader theme of antipathy and unease at work in representations of ageing women across Shakespeare's plays and their present-day performance and reception.

Gertrude's age matters to any reading of *Hamlet* because it matters, across each of the three plays, to Hamlet. Q1's Hamlet claims of Gertrude that 'appetite with you is in the wane; / Your blood runs backward now from whence it came' (11.51-2), suggesting the loss of blood in old age predicted by early modern physiology. For the Hamlets of Q2 and F, 'at [Gertrude's] age / The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble' (F: 3.4.68-9). Hamlet's Gertrude has 'a matron's breast' (Q1: 11.54) and 'a matron's bones' (F: 3.4.74), so old and cold-blooded that she is 'frost itself' (Q2: 3.4.85). For Hamlet, Gertrude's remarriage and the sex life he imagines for her are entirely incompatible with the age he ascribes to her; the lecherous Gertrude he conjures is a woman who breaches the laws of nature, one who is sexually uncontained despite her age. Hamlet imagines her as an animal, sub-human in her desires, 'honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty' (F:

3.4.84-5); in her reported acts she seems, like Cleopatra, to defy early modern theories of age and cooling blood:

Rebellious hell,  
 If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,  
 To flaming youth let virtue be as wax  
 And melt in her own fire, [...]  
 Since frost itself as actively doth burn,  
 And reason pardons will.  
 (Q2: 3.4.80-6)

Gertrude's supposed sexual activity as recounted by Hamlet defies explanation – 'You cannot call it love, for at your age / The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble' – yet for her son it is horribly fascinating: he imagines Claudius to 'Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse' (F: 3.4.167), and to '[paddle] in your neck with his damned fingers' (Q2: 3.4.183).

For Hamlet, then, his mother is an ageing or elderly woman engaged in a disturbing, highly sexual relationship. As I will shortly demonstrate, the texts provide no firm evidence regarding the 'actual' or 'intended' age of Gertrude, problematising her son's account and rendering him an unreliable reviewer of his mother's performance. Similarly, while Hamlet's vision of 'the rank sweat of an enseamed bed' (F: 3.4.83) has proven compelling to generations of performers and critics, there is no evidence in any of the three texts for his claims. As a married couple Claudius and Gertrude may be expected to be sexually intimate, however (unlike in *Antony and Cleopatra*) the *Hamlets* offer no hint of a publicly physical relationship nor of sexual undertones to their conversation. Hamlet's most supportive ally in his reading of Gertrude is the ghost of Old Hamlet, who

describes his former wife as polluted ‘garbage’ (Q2: 1.5.57), speaking of the ‘royal bed of Denmark’ as ‘A couch for luxury and damned incest’ (F: 1.5.82-3); unfortunately, not only is the Ghost necessarily an untrustworthy narrator but his account of Denmark as a steaming sexual stew is unsupported elsewhere in the play.<sup>76</sup>

A further point of departure between *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet* regarding age and sex is the fact that while the later play leaves chronological age entirely ambiguous, causing as we have seen some strain for recent performers, the three texts of *Hamlet* offer some numbers for calculating Gertrude’s supposed age.<sup>77</sup> Each text, unfortunately, has a different mathematics. The Gertrude of Q2 is, by 5.1, mother to a son of some thirty years of age, the gravedigging Clown stating that:

Of the days i’th’ year I came to’t that day that our last King Hamlet  
overcame Fortinbras. [...] It was that very day that young Hamlet was  
born[...]. I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

(Q2: 5.1.135-53)

F is more ambiguous: the Folio Clown’s claim that ‘I have been [sixteen] here, man and boy, thirty years’ (F: 5.1.159-60) may imply that Hamlet is just sixteen years old, the

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Levin has described the narrators of Gertrude’s sexuality – Hamlet and the Ghost – as unreliable and the character herself as sexually elusive: Richard Levin, ‘Gertrude’s Elusive Libido and Shakespeare’s Unreliable Narrators’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 48: 2 (2008), 305-26. Ghosts were untrustworthy figures in early modern English culture. The literature on contemporary spirit-belief pre- and post-Reformation is wide; a brief relevant selection might include Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Thomas Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge: CUP, 2000); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).

<sup>77</sup> Also unlike *Antony and Cleopatra*, the most likely source for Shakespeare’s *Hamlets*, François de Belleforest’s *Histoires Tragiques*, makes no mention of the age of Gertrude, the Gertrude-character. Belleforest’s Hamlet-story, itself derived from Saxo Grammaticus’s *Historiae Danicae*, was anonymously translated into English as *The Hystorie of Hamlet* (London: 1608) and is available in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Volume VII Major Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 8 vols, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 81-124.

gravedigger having arrived at Elsinore as a boy of fourteen.<sup>78</sup> Q1 entirely omits the Clown's speech on his length of service. For the second indication of Hamlet's age in F and Q2 5.1, Hamlet's childhood friend and court jester Yorick's having lain 'i'th earth three and twenty years' (Q2: 5.1.163-4), Q1 substitutes 'this dozen year' (Q1: 16.86), suggesting a more youthful prince. The three gravedigging scenes, then, paint a confused picture of Gertrude's son's age: is he sixteen, thirty, or somewhere in between? And, accordingly, how old is his mother? The play-within-the-play scenes offer slightly firmer, although equally distinct, senses of Gertrude's age. The Q1 Player Duke and Duchess, thought closely to approximate Old Hamlet and Gertrude – 'There is a play tonight wherein one scene they have / Comes very near the murder of my father' (9.52-3) – have been married forty years ('Full forty years are past – their date is gone – / Since happy time joined both our hearts as one' [9.98-9]). Q2 and F have the Player King and Player Queen married thirty years, coinciding with the Clown's Q2 account of Hamlet's birth. Using conservative estimates, then, the Gertrude conveyed by the texts is a woman aged somewhere between her mid-forties at minimum, her late sixties – taking the example of Q1's Player Duchess, and allowing for marriage into the late twenties – at most.<sup>79</sup>

The gap between the play's ambiguity and Hamlet's absolutism regarding Gertrude's age generates a tension in both the text and, as we will see, its performances. This tension is first made manifest in F/Q2 1.2 in a brief textual crux which speaks of larger issues at work across *Hamlet*. Hamlet's speech in which he tells of having 'that within which passeth show' (F: 1.2.83), is in its Q1 version addressed to Claudius ('My lord, 'tis not the sable suit I wear [...] [2.33]). The F and Q2 speeches are addressed to

<sup>78</sup> Thompson and Taylor amend the Folio's 'sixteene' to read 'sexton'; in addition, they insert a comma after F's 'man and Boy' where none is present in the original text.

<sup>79</sup> 'The mean age of marriage for women in early modern England was at least twenty-six' (for queens of England, the average age was twenty-three as measured between the reigns of Henry IV and Mary I): Laurence, pp. 31-2.

Gertrude, and they differ in the terms in which Hamlet hails his mother: the Folio names her as ‘good mother’ (1.2.75) while Q2 terms her ‘cold mother’ (1.2.77). Publicly to describe his mother as ‘cold’ would be insulting, hence each of five editors who use Q2 as their copy-text for *Hamlet* choose to emend the original printed text’s ‘coold’ to F’s ‘good’.<sup>80</sup> Concerns of credibility underlie these editors’ changes, with Cyrus Hoy’s textual notes, for instance, stating that his interventions were made on the basis of suspected compositors’ error.<sup>81</sup> Whether confusion on the grounds of palaeography amid spelling variants such as ‘good’, ‘goode’, ‘cold’, ‘colde’, ‘coold’, and ‘coolde’ could account for such an error is unclear; however lower-case secretarial ‘c’ and ‘g’ are so unlike as to render Hoy’s explanation improbable. Furthermore, a later use of ‘good mother’ at F 3.4.28, Q2 3.4.26, and Q1 11.16 is uniform across the three texts, making ‘cold mother’ a unique slip. That ‘coold’ holds additional age-related implications makes it more interesting for our investigation. Q2’s ‘coold’ Gertrude, a character with a son aged thirty, provides the first possible reference to Gertrude’s age in the *Hamlets* and the first opportunity for editors, actors, readers, directors, and audiences to reflect on the terms in which she is narrated and addressed by Hamlet. In performance, the common contemporary association of ‘old’ and ‘cold’ would have encouraged audiences to mark Gertrude as ageing, should ‘cold mother’ have been the variant spoken. As a disturbance in the texts ‘good’/‘cold’ is relatively minor, yet it demonstrates the tenuousness of Hamlet’s articulation of his mother’s age and gestures forward towards the broader uncertainties of Gertrude’s ageing sexuality at work across the *Hamlets*.

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<sup>80</sup> *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: Updated Edition*, ed. Philip Edwards, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, eds. Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey (Harlow: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1990); *William Shakespeare: Hamlet*, ed. Cyrus Hoy, 2nd edn, Norton Critical Editions (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992); *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins.

<sup>81</sup> *Hamlet*, ed. Hoy, pp. 102-3.

Hamlet's anguish over Gertrude's age is most prominent later in the play, following the court performance of 'The Mousetrap'. His fury peaks in F/Q2 3.4, Q1 scene 11, as he admonishes his mother over her supposed guilt. There are a number of significant differences between the texts of Q2, F, and Q1; however, these speeches in which he accuses Gertrude of possessing an unnatural, brutish aged sexuality (Q2: 3.4.51-86, F: 3.4.53-79, Q1: 11.51-4, 11.24-42) are among the greatest points of difference. At this moment in the plays, the strain of Hamlet's attempt to state clearly his idea of Gertrude's age ('appetite with you is in the wane; / Your blood runs backward now from whence it came'; 'Frost itself'; 'a matron's bones') and her sexuality ('let virtue be as wax' [F: 3.4.75]) fractures the texts: Q2's speech is nine lines longer than F's, and Q1's version is split across two speeches, the shorter of which contains the material on age (11.51-4).

While Q1 rewords and abbreviates much of the F and Q2 material, the lines in this scene which are present in Q2 but absent from F (Q2: 3.4.76-9) are not echoed in Q1 and have presented interpreters with significant difficulty. Hamlet's 'Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, / Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all' (Q2: 3.4.76-7) has proven particularly problematic; Michael Boyd and John Caird both cut the lines in their productions of *Hamlet*.<sup>82</sup> Philip Edwards's editorial note to the lines claims that 'The difficulty of extracting meaning from this passage must support the theory that Shakespeare himself was dissatisfied with it'.<sup>83</sup> Rather than understand the resistance of the lines as an indication of their author's dissatisfaction, however, we can read them as a further instance of textual stress brought on by the tensions surrounding an ambiguously aged, ambiguously sexed Gertrude. The lines are a kind of anti-articulation, Hamlet's words tangling as he struggles to fit his still-vital mother to the story of aged disintegration

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<sup>82</sup> *Hamlet*, dir. Michael Boyd (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2004); *Hamlet*, dir. John Caird (London: The National Theatre [Lyttelton], 2000).

<sup>83</sup> *Hamlet*, ed. Edwards, p. 189.

and sexual excess he tells. There is an echo in the lines of Jaques's description of oldest male age ('Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything' [2.7.165]), itself a reworking of contemporary old age physiology. Rescripting Jaques's theory of male old age in an attempt to account for the uncertainly-aged and female Gertrude, the meaning bends into senselessness; two lines later, at 'Rebellious hell', Q2's metre shudders under the strain of the speech.

Gaps and fractures in Hamlet's representations of Gertrude across the play's three texts advance an ambiguous, unfixd, incomplete sense of the character. Where Cleopatra is established by means of her anxiety-inducing breach of age expectations, the character of Gertrude is composed and reviewed by others within the *Hamlets*; she is defined and articulated in terms of her relationships. Gertrude rarely speaks about herself; the majority of what we think we know about the character is inferred from others, particularly her son. Hamlet is said to be her 'joy and half-heart' (Q1: 2.30), and she is Claudius's 'sometimes sister, now our Queen' (F: 1.2.8); she is passively 'Taken to wife' with no indication in the texts as to her feelings on the marriage. Following the abrupt conclusion of F/Q2 3.2's play-within-the-play, the audience is told by Guildenstern that the Queen is 'in most great affliction of spirit' and that Hamlet's 'behaviour hath struck her into amazement' (Q2: 3.2.304-18); this is despite Gertrude seeming more concerned for her husband's anger than for her own: 'Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended' (F: 3.4.10). Even the Ghost has a greater responsibility in speaking Gertrude than the character herself, naming her 'my most seeming-virtuous Queen' (Q2: 1.5.46), warning Hamlet that 'amazement on thy mother sits!' (Q2: 3.4.108), and detailing a guilty Gertrude: 'leave her to heaven, / And to the burden that her conscience bears' (Q1: 5.65-6).

If, as Prescott explained, today's theatre critics 'mediat[e] and circulat[e] performance in the public sphere', the F/Q2 3.2 play-within-the-play scene is the point at

which Hamlet comes closest to approximating a present-day theatre critic as well as a director in his staging and interpretation of Gertrude's past and present behaviours. In this scene, Gertrude's gaze is offered up to the audience through Hamlet's eyes: 'look you how cheerfully my mother looks' (F: 3.2.122-3). While other characters addressed by this thesis – Mistress Quickly, Paulina, Volumnia, Eleanor, and, as we will shortly see, Margaret – direct or narrate a play's action, *Hamlet's* uncertainly-aged Gertrude becomes the subject of her son's direction. The play itself, a performance of '*The Murder of Gonzago*' (Q1: 7.391-2), is commissioned by Hamlet to be performed before the King and Queen; Hamlet himself adjusts the text, inserting for the players 'a speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen lines' (Q2: 2.2.477). The play is intended to 'catch the conscience of the King' (F: 2.2.600) and narrates Hamlet and the Ghost's version of the old King's murder and Gertrude's 'hasty marriage' (Q2: 2.2.57) for the court and for *Hamlet's* audiences. Hamlet, 'as good as a chorus' (Q1: 9.143), speaks the action of the play-within-the-play much as he declares Claudius to be 'frighted with false fire' (F: 3.2.257). Figuring himself as an interpreter of performances within *The Murder of Gonzago* ('she'll keep her word' [Q2: 3.2.225]) and within *Hamlet* itself, Hamlet's perspective on the events of 3.2 has proven tempting for his successors. Revivals of *Hamlet* tend to accept the protagonist's descriptions of his mother as truth. Michael Boyd's 2004 *Hamlet* at Stratford-upon-Avon featured a Player Queen who doubled Siân Thomas's Gertrude, with hair, makeup, and jewellery mirroring the Queen's; Steven Pimlott's 2001 production similarly mirrored the Player and true Queens. Such decisions in staging reinforce Hamlet's point of view, strengthening his sense of Gertrude as a grossly oversexed, worryingly aged, demonstrably foolish, and guilty character.

Unlike the authoritatively-voiced old mothers of the previous chapter, then, this uncertainly aged, supposedly sexually uncontained mother is to a great degree voiced by

others. Even when Gertrude does speak independently, her character is hazily drawn. Under the duress of Hamlet's accusations and violence – 'What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me – / Help, help, ho!' (F: 3.4.22-3) – she tells of her cracked heart and guilty soul, yet such claims are unreliable when made under coercion ('These words like daggers enter in mine ears' [F: 3.4.86]). Gertrude's words throughout the play tend to demonstrate her concern for her son rather than reflecting on her own condition; she has no soliloquies. Q1's scene 14, which forwards a caring and motherly Gertrude who is increasingly suspicious of her husband – 'I perceive there's treason in his looks / That seemed to sugar o'er his villainy' (Q1: 14.10-11) – has no corresponding presence in F or Q2, and tends not to be performed.<sup>84</sup> *Guardian* theatre critic Michael Billington has described the role as 'underwritten'; Judi Dench, as we saw, has complained about Gertrude's paucity of lines.<sup>85</sup> According to Dench, 'you just have to make up your mind about [Gertrude]': making our minds up about Gertrude, however, typically seems to entail accepting claims for which the text provides no evidence. Demonstrating the tendency to rely on the problematic views of the protagonist-reviewer, Joanna McCallum, playing Gertrude opposite Mark Rylance as Hamlet, commented in interview that 'Mark has said much of what happens in the play is caused by Gertrude's behaviour – maybe her adultery but certainly her incest'.<sup>86</sup> Gertrude, not the murdering Claudius, here is found to be the source of *Hamlet's* tragedy in a misogynistic rehearsal-room conversation in which the male actor-director dictates a reading of an ambiguous female character to her performer.

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<sup>84</sup> Matthew Warchus included the scene in his 1997 production; reviewing the play, Benedict Nightingale referred to it as 'a spurious episode'. *Hamlet*, dir. Matthew Warchus (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1997); Benedict Nightingale, 'Madness in this method', *The Times*, 10 May 1997.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Billington, 'Hamlet', *Guardian*, 4 June 2009  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/jun/04/review-theatre-hamlet-jude-law>>.

<sup>86</sup> Joanna McCallum, 'Rehearsal Notes: 1', *Rehearsal Notes for Hamlet (Gertrude)* (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2000) <<http://www.globe-education.org/communities/Gertrude/bulletins/rehearsal-notes-1>> [Accessed 1 September 2011]. *Hamlet*, dir. Giles Block (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2000). Rylance was also Artistic Director of the Globe at the time of his playing Hamlet.

Considering the texts alone, already one sees that it is time to start talking of *Hamlets*, rather than *Hamlet*. We ought also perhaps to start discussing multiple, uncertain Gertrudes, uncontained Gertrudes who exceed a single definition.<sup>87</sup> Among the Gertrudes articulated by directors and critics of the play are guilty Gertrudes – ‘She has to be taken through a process of repentance towards absolution’ – foolish Gertrudes – ‘a beaming, fond, foolishly naive and, later, frantic Gertrude’ – sexy Gertrudes – ‘a glamorous, sex-obsessed Gertrude’ – and variously-aged Gertrudes: ‘Gertrude is matronly rather than majestic’.<sup>88</sup> The uncertainties of her age in the face of Hamlet’s ugly rhetoric have caused difficulties in the casting of productions of the play. Seven recent major UK *Hamlets* have filled their title roles with actors aged between thirty and forty years old.<sup>89</sup> Of these seven productions, the difference in age between the actors playing Gertrude and those playing her son has ranged from as few as ten years to as many as twenty-six. Judi Dench, who played the role in 1989 at the National Theatre at fifty-five, has discussed the difficulties she found in claiming Gertrude’s body as her own and establishing her relationship with her son:

I don’t think I have ever got her right. I didn’t feel that I could ever have been Daniel Day-Lewis’s mother – I had no problem with him, but just felt that the audience wouldn’t believe in the relationship. I didn’t feel that I looked right in the costumes or on the set [...]. When I did it for

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<sup>87</sup> Such a step has been suggested by Ellen J. O’Brien and Dorothea Kehler, Kehler noting that Gertrude ‘impresses critics as the site of greatest difference between the variant texts’. Ellen J. O’Brien, ‘Revision by Excision: Rewriting Gertrude’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 45 (1992), 27-35; Dorothea Kehler, ‘The First Quarto of *Hamlet*: Reforming Widow Gertred’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46: 4 (1996), 398-413 (p. 398).

<sup>88</sup> Gregory Doran in conversation with Paul Allen on *Hamlet*, 4 August 2008

<[http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/multimedia/transcripts/ham\\_0808\\_01\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/multimedia/transcripts/ham_0808_01_transcript.pdf)> [Accessed 9 May 2009]; Kate Bassett, ‘This Hamlet is not a palpable hit’, *Independent on Sunday*, 7 May 2006; Charles Spencer, ‘An unforgettable and most lovable Hamlet’, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 April 2004 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3616060/An-unforgettable-and-most-lovable-Hamlet.html>>; Dominic Cavendish, ‘Hamlet’, *Time Out*, 14 June 2000.

<sup>89</sup> *Hamlet*, dir. Adrian Noble (London: The Barbican Theatre, 1992); dir. Block; dir. Caird; dir. Boyd; *Hamlet*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Courtyard Theatre, 2008); *Hamlet*, dir. Michael Grandage (London: Wyndham’s Theatre, 2009); *Hamlet*, dir. Nicholas Hytner (London: The National Theatre [Olivier], 2010).

radio in 1992 I felt I was able to make more sense of it, and I could believe I was Kenneth Branagh's mother.<sup>90</sup>

For Dench, removing her own ageing body from sight in a radio reading of the play enabled a more 'believable' performance of the ambiguously aged Gertrude, one to which 'looking right' became irrelevant.<sup>91</sup> Imogen Stubbs, who played Gertrude at the Old Vic in 2004 in an unusually 'youthful' production, expressed serious reservations about being cast in the role:

I had been a little taken aback when [Trevor Nunn] told me he wanted me to play Gertrude, which isn't exactly the role most women would like their husbands to be picturing them in. [...] [O]n stage I don't think I even look quite as old as I am, and I am still too young off it to look convincingly like the mother of the sort of experienced classical actor who usually gets the title role. [...] [I]t was a bit like the shock of being offered Blanche Dubois.<sup>92</sup>

Like Dench, Stubbs's concerns were twofold: uncertainty about Gertrude's aged state, and anxiety regarding the relationship with the actor playing Hamlet, against (and by) whom Gertrude would be defined. For Stubbs, however, there was a further, very personal and sexual layer of implication associated with playing Gertrude. Her remarks seem to suggest that Gertrude, as an older character, is necessarily sexually redundant, a fact which she feels reflected poorly on the sexual status of the actor herself. Like the actors interviewed in advance of playing the title roles in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Stubbs understood there to be a direct link between the age of the character performed and the age of the performing actor. Her age-anxiety was resolved by Nunn, her then husband, 'explaining that he did not

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<sup>90</sup> Dench, pp. 209-10. Dench played Gertrude in *Hamlet*, dir. Richard Eyre (London: The National Theatre [Olivier], 1989) and in *Hamlet*, dir. Kenneth Branagh (London: BBC Radio Three, 1992).

<sup>91</sup> Dench was born in 1934.

<sup>92</sup> Imogen Stubbs, 'Gertrude', in *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today: The Actor's Perspective*, ed. Michael Dobson (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 29-39 (pp. 29-31). *Hamlet*, dir. Trevor Nunn (London: The Old Vic Theatre, 2004). Nunn's production featured Ben Whishaw, aged twenty-three, as Hamlet.

want a dowager Gertrude, that he thought it would be really exciting to have someone who is still sensuous, who looks young enough to have another child, to be involved in a passionate relationship'.<sup>93</sup>

Stubbs's words reveal a further aspect of *Hamlet* in performance which we have also noted already in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and to which I return below: the implausibility, even impossibility, of the sexually active ageing woman, resolved in this case by having Gertrude played by a younger-looking actor. Traditionally, readers, actors, and directors of the play have tended to trust Hamlet's views on Gertrude, accepting his account of her age and her sexual indiscretion. Nunn's remarks on the excitement to be generated by the idea of a Gertrude who wasn't a 'dowager', like the average age (fifty-four) of actors playing Gertrude in the other recent productions discussed above, indicate how surprising his youthful staging was. Barbara Jefford believed Hamlet's account of a sexually insatiable Gertrude ('she [...] desperately needs it'), and as Dorothea Kehler has noted, 'despite [Gertrude's] textual decorum' and the unreliability of both Hamlet and the Ghost, 'theatrical representations of Gertrude' have tended to suggest her lasciviousness.<sup>94</sup> Kehler describes how, despite the Queen having 'no provocative lines', directors typically choose to stage a licentious, and eventually guilt-ridden, Gertrude.<sup>95</sup> Such a Gertrude is indeed common currency: Benedict Nightingale wrote in 1992 of Jane Lapotaire's Gertrude that, 'as befits her temperament, [she] inhabits a red bedroom'.<sup>96</sup> Nightingale's understanding of Gertrude's 'temperament' receives no elaboration, the assumption being that his readership will have a pre-existing understanding of Hamlet's mother as highly sexed. A *Times* editorial in 2008 on David Tennant's performance as Hamlet wrote that 'There are more connections between *Doctor Who* and *Hamlet* than meet Gertrude's

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<sup>93</sup> Stubbs, p. 31.

<sup>94</sup> Dorothea Kehler, *Shakespeare's Widows* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 155-6.

<sup>95</sup> Kehler, *Shakespeare's Widows*, p. 154.

<sup>96</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Princely and noble in lunacy', *The Times*, 21 December 1992.

wanton eye', taking her wantonness as fact.<sup>97</sup> Phyllis Rackin goes so far as to praise Claudius and Gertrude's marriage as a paragon of twenty-first century sexuality, reading deeply into the play's ambiguities: 'even in middle age they seem to enjoy the shared sexual passion which is now regarded as a healthy achievement and the hallmark of a successful marriage'.<sup>98</sup> So accepted is this idea of a sexually lively, wanton Gertrude that Howard Barker's 2002 reworking of *Hamlet*, *Gertrude (The Cry)*, built its narrative around her supposed nymphomania.<sup>99</sup> Kehler has argued that much popular opinion on Gertrude emerges from the *Hamlet*-education delivered in schools, still largely derived from the now widely discredited criticism of A. C. Bradley.<sup>100</sup> A more fundamental, though associated, problem, is our tendency to trust Hamlet's perspective on the play over the broader picture drawn by the texts more generally. Hamlet's opinions infect our own, obscuring the ambiguity of the three *Hamlets* and their variously aged, ambivalently sexed Gertrudes.

Our trust of Hamlet has provoked an anxiety in the play's staging and reception reminiscent of what we have seen in *Antony and Cleopatra*, with productions mirroring Hamlet's frustrations in their struggle to hold both age and sex in balance in the character of Gertrude. If Gertrude is to be considered sensual, it would seem, her age must be minimised; if she is to be visibly ageing, her sexuality either must be undermined or vigorously punished. Penelope Wilton, who at the age of sixty-three played the oldest recent mother of a Hamlet in his thirties, downplayed sexuality in her performance: 'there isn't much trace of sexual longing for Gertrude'; '[Wilton] has been made to look desperately dowdy'; 'Penelope Wilton's Gertrude looks far too much like Jacqui Smith,

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<sup>97</sup> 'Prince Who', *The Times*, 6 August 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 136.

<sup>99</sup> Howard Barker, *Gertrude (The Cry) And Knowledge and a Girl (The Snow White Case): Two Plays* (London: Calder Publications, 2002).

<sup>100</sup> Kehler, *Shakespeare's Widows*, pp. 156-7. A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1904).

the outgoing Home Secretary, in a series of unwise jackets and ugly bell bottoms'.<sup>101</sup> Two productions in particular manifested interesting effects of this effort to maintain an equilibrium of the apparently incongruent female age and sexuality in performances of Gertrude. Trevor Nunn's 2004 production at the Old Vic delivered, as we have seen, an unusually 'youthful' *Hamlet*, drawing on the frequent textual references to the protagonist's youth, his university career, and the uncertainties of age across the three texts. The lead role was played by twenty-three-year-old Ben Whishaw, and Imogen Stubbs played Gertrude at forty-three. Forty-three, it was felt in 2004, was sufficiently youthful for sex still to be plausible. In his review, Michael Dobson felt it worth reminding readers that Stubbs's looks, while youthful, were 'highly maintained'; nonetheless it was thought she would 'undoubtedly have turned the heads of many of Hamlet's peers had she ever visited his Wittenberg hall of residence'.<sup>102</sup> Charles Spencer praised Stubbs's 'glamorous, sex-obsessed' Gertrude as 'outstanding'; Michael Billington, equally enamoured, suggested that the production drew out her son's 'callowness' at several moments, 'as when Hamlet tells Gertrude that at her age, "the heyday in the blood is tame"'.<sup>103</sup> In a movement mirroring the turn to youth we witnessed at work across productions of *Macbeth* and *The Winter's Tale*, Nunn's well-received *Hamlet* balanced Gertrude's supposed sexual activity with her supposed age by leaning on sex at the expense of years – and at the expense of Hamlet. It seems that a younger Hamlet, while fresh and surprising, made for a less trustworthy character: as Michael Dobson described

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<sup>101</sup> Maxwell Cooter, 'Hamlet (Donmar)', 4 June 2009

<<http://www.whatsonstage.com/reviews/theatre/london/E8831244105558/Hamlet+%28Donmar%29.html>>; Henry Hitchings, 'No denying strength of Jude Law's Hamlet', *Evening Standard*, 4 June 2009 <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/review-23703643-no-denying-strength-of-jude-laws-hamlet.do>>. Michael Coveney, 'First Night: Hamlet', *Independent*, 4 June 2009 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/first-night-hamlet-wyndhams-theatre-london-1696528.html>>.

<sup>102</sup> Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2004', p. 294.

<sup>103</sup> Spencer, 'An unforgettable and most lovable Hamlet'; Michael Billington, 'Hamlet', *Guardian*, 28 April 2004 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2004/apr/28/theatre>>.

him, Wishaw's Hamlet was 'tedious' and 'terminally spoilt', as for Paul Taylor he was 'snivelling'.<sup>104</sup>

The conflict of sexuality and age as it emerges in present-day performances of Gertrude was also visible in Matthew Warchus's 1997 production of *Hamlet* at Stratford. Records of this production exist in two states in the RSC archives at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Two videos were made, one recording the production as it was performed at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre with Diana Quick in the role, and a second recording the production in its Newcastle residence, with Susannah York playing Gertrude. The earlier, Quick performance leaned very heavily on Gertrude's supposed sexual profligacy; from the first, dressed in a low-cut red silk gown, she flirted deeply with Claudius. Later in the play, waiting beside a rumpled bed for Hamlet's arrival, she wore a white silk nightgown and dressing gown with bare legs, emphasising her vulnerability alongside her sexuality. Watching the second, Susannah York performance of the role, one was struck by how significantly the character's sexuality had been toned down. In the opening scene, York's Gertrude wore a much more conservative full-skirted pink dress with no visible cleavage, and did not flirt with Claudius; the bedroom scene found her in opaque black tights under her nightgown and dressing gown. Similarly, meeting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Susannah York wore a skirt suit with a long skirt and black tights; Quick had worn a much shorter skirt, again with bare legs. Taken as a whole, these changes sharply reduced the production's emphasis on Gertrude as a sexual being during the Newcastle residency. The effects begin to look particularly interesting when one realises that Quick played the role at the age of fifty, while York played it at fifty-nine. Across nine years of actors' ageing, the

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<sup>104</sup> Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2004', p. 294; Paul Taylor, 'Hamlet', *Independent*, 1 June 2004 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/hamlet-old-vic-london-734085.html>>.

performance of a Gertrude who promoted sex seems to have become too much for the production to bear.

The pressure placed on the performed play by taking Hamlet's account of his mother's withered age and rampant sexuality as fact has generated fascinating effects as directors and performers attempt to negotiate the ambiguities of the play's Gertrude and the unreliable certainties of Hamlet's. The son's sense of his mother's unlooked-for sexuality in late life is closely linked to his more generalised claim of her guilt. As we have seen, for Hamlet as for those who accept his reviews and readings of his mother's behaviour, Gertrude is guilty of an unspeakable 'act'. The play is unclear as to whether Gertrude's guilt lies in the murder of Old Hamlet, in adultery while he lived, in a failure to stay chaste when widowed, or simply in overly-hasty remarriage; arguments may be and have been made for each. A. C. Bradley's highly influential yet deeply problematic assertions on Gertrude's character include the statement that while 'she was false to her husband while he lived [...] she was *not* privy to the murder'.<sup>105</sup> Demonstrating Bradley's lasting impact on the play in performance, director Gregory Doran has stated that 'As far as Gertrude and Claudius are concerned, you have to decide: did they start their affair before the murder of Old Hamlet? Was that murder therefore partly a crime of passion?'.<sup>106</sup> Describing the marriage as an 'affair', and reading the 'closet scene' as 'modelled on the confessional', Doran was convinced of a guilty, perhaps even murderous, Gertrude. Nicholas Hytner's 2010 production suggested an adulterous Gertrude, complicit in murder by virtue of her silence. Paul Stegner has read the play as structured around imagery of confession, repentance, and guilt; responding to performances of Gertrude, theatre critics

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<sup>105</sup> Bradley, p. 166. For Bradley's reading of Gertrude as foolish, people-pleasing and a drunk, see *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 166-8.

<sup>106</sup> Gregory Doran in conversation with Paul Allen.

seem predisposed to agree.<sup>107</sup> Christian M. Billing wrote in 2009 that ‘[Jude Law’s] Hamlet tried [...] to convince his mother of the truth, and the error of her ways’; John Peter looked in vain for Joanna McCallum’s ‘diseased conscience’ in 2000; Ian Shuttleworth found that Clare Higgins’s Gertrude ‘may even have been complicit in the old king’s murder’; and Charles Spencer spoke of Penelope Wilton’s ‘sexual shame’.<sup>108</sup> For Spencer, Gertrude’s coming to terms with her guilt is associated with her ageing: ‘Jane Lapotaire ages harrowingly before our eyes as Gertrude, a beautiful woman reduced first to neurotic dismay and then unspeakable grief’.<sup>109</sup> Age continues to underpin Gertrude’s (sexual) guilt in the *Hamlets* as they are performed today; both her age and her guilt have been punished violently on stage.

While the performance of a guilt-ridden Gertrude has become a near-universal trope of productions of *Hamlet*, guilt is never freely admitted by Gertrude, save for an unreliable confession extracted under duress:

O Hamlet, speak no more.  
 Thou turn’st mine eyes into my very soul,  
 And there I see such black and grained spots  
 As will not leave their tinct.  
 (F: 3.4.79-82)

The pressure the text puts Gertrude under in the closet scene with Hamlet is amplified in present-day performance; even more so than in *Antony and Cleopatra*, a vein of anger

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<sup>107</sup> Paul D. Stegner, “‘Try what repentance can’”: *Hamlet*, Confession, and the Extraction of Interiority’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 35 (2007), 105-29.

<sup>108</sup> Christian M. Billing, ‘Hamlet’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 27: 4 (2009), 646-56 (p. 654); John Peter, ‘All power, no glory’, *Sunday Times: Culture*, 18 June 2000; Ian Shuttleworth, ‘Hamlet’, *Financial Times*, 8 October 2010 <<http://cachef.ft.com/cms/s/2/1f8d723c-d2fa-11df-9ae9-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1VNIh42D8>>; Charles Spencer, ‘Hamlet’, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 June 2009 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/charlesspencer/5442250/Hamlet-at-Wyndhams-Theatre-review.html>>.

<sup>109</sup> Charles Spencer, ‘A Hamlet of hidden mysteries’, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 December 1992.

throbbing through the play and associated in this scene with the articulation of Gertrude's 'Rebellious' ageing sexuality is met with physical violence in performance. Mark Rylance drew his sword on Joanna McCallum's Gertrude in the closet scene at the Globe in 2000, as did Simon Russell Beale's Hamlet against Sara Kestelman's Gertrude in 2004; Rory Kinnear drew a knife on Clare Higgins in 2010, grabbing her by the throat. Kenneth Branagh enjoyed Jane Lapotaire's fear in 1992 as he brandished his dagger at her, and Samuel West pointed a gun at Marty Cruickshank as Gertrude in 2001. Gertrude is not merely threatened in productions of *Hamlet*, however; a violent manhandling of the mother by her son is very typical of present-day performances of the closet scene. Gertrudes are thrown to the ground, shaken, dragged to their feet, pushed and pulled, flung on to chairs and beds, their hair is pulled, they are shouted at from close range; many of the tropes of recent performances mirror those of contemporary representations of interrogations of suspected criminals. Gertrudes are beaten or abused into submission: Steven Pimlott's 2001 production had Samuel West grope his mother between her legs in a painfully protracted seven seconds of sexual molestation as he spoke of 'the ulcerous place' (Q2: 3.4.145).<sup>110</sup> Kenneth Branagh simulated the rape of his mother and David Tennant's Hamlet twisted Penny Downie's arm as he flung her on the bed, Downie crying out in pain. Jane Lapotaire's skirts were lifted and her legs groped at 'a matron's bones', the actor sobbing and crying as Hamlet flung her about the stage.<sup>111</sup>

Disturbingly, Gertrude is often played as encouraging the sexual violence acted upon her. Performers of the role scream, cry, and yelp, yet almost always reach for their sons, stroking Hamlet's face as he shouts insults, often touching his lips from a kneeling

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<sup>110</sup> Timed from the recorded production video, on archive at SCLA, catalogue number RSC/TS/2/2/2001HAM1.

<sup>111</sup> Peter Holland has criticised such performances of violence in *Hamlets*, accusing them of being 'designed more as theatrical effect than as credible facet of character'. See Holland, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 1992-1993', *Shakespeare Survey*, 47 (1994), 181-207 (p. 184), and Peter Holland, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 1994-5', *Shakespeare Survey*, 49 (1996), 235-67 (p. 40).

position of submission (achieved after having been thrown to the floor or bed), seeming to beg for more abuse despite claiming to wish for ‘no more’ (Q1: 11.50). This performance choice jars, unless the scene is intended to be understood to demonstrate a masochistic Gertrude seeking to exorcise her sexual guilt. Recent productions by Adrian Noble, Steven Pimlott, Matthew Warchus, Michael Boyd, Gregory Doran, and Giles Block each manifested this pattern of violence, fear, and encouragement; Janet Suzman’s 2006 Baxter Theatre Centre production at Stratford was significantly less abusive towards Dorothy Ann Gould’s Gertrude, yet the only other major female-directed *Hamlet* for the RSC, Buzz Goodbody’s 1975 production, also invoked violence and submission.<sup>112</sup> Recalling her performance as Gertrude opposite Derek Jacobi in 1979, Brenda Bruce felt no discomfort at the level of rough, sexual physicality inserted into the closet scene: ‘the more I put my hands up to cover my ears, the more Hamlet knocks me about. He pulls my hands down and forces the words into my ear, and he makes love to me and he bumps me around the stage. It partly disgusts her, yet it’s compelling’.<sup>113</sup>

Today the violent punishment of Gertrude is so commonplace as to be entirely un concerning to, and even welcomed by, critics. Susannah Clapp began her review of Nicholas Hytner’s 2010 production by announcing that ‘It has one of the best closet scenes ever: with Clare Higgins as a raunchy, bibulous Gertrude dishevelled into a tousled heap of wretchedness’.<sup>114</sup> For Paul Taylor Tennant’s manhandling of his mother was ‘deeply affecting’, generating sympathy for Hamlet; for Charles Spencer the scene had ‘a thrilling

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<sup>112</sup> Goodbody’s prompt book notes that ‘Ham. grabs her + pushes her onto chair. [...] Gert on knees, takes Ham’s head in hands. [...] Ham slaps Gert’. Prompt book on archive at SCLA, catalogue number RSC/SM/1/1975/HAM1-2. *Hamlet*, dir. Buzz Goodbody (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Other Place, 1975). When Simon Russell Beale’s *Hamlet* was comparatively gentle to his mother (Sara Kestelman), John Gross was disappointed: ‘Beale’s *Hamlet* is too nice. [...] He plays down both *Hamlet*’s cruelty [and] his soldierly qualities. There is too much sorrow in his reproaches to his mother, and not enough scalding anger’. Gross’s reaction indicates that reviewers now expect an abusive *Hamlet*. John Gross, ‘Sweet and sour *Hamlet*’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 September 2000.

<sup>113</sup> Angela Pitt, *Shakespeare’s Women* (New Jersey, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981), p. 198.

<sup>114</sup> Susannah Clapp, ‘*Hamlet*; A Number; Enlightenment; Faust’, *Observer*, 10 October 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/oct/10/hamlet-a-number-enlightenment-faust-review>>.

raw power’ in 2008, while in 2009 it was praised as ‘almost too raw to watch’.<sup>115</sup> In their assessments of productions of *Hamlet*, theatre critics re-speak the violence acted upon Gertrude. Through praise or criticism they deem her mistreatment to be not only acceptable but necessary, rendering such performances still more likely in the next major production and demonstrating their power in shaping the tone and message of performed Shakespeare. Nicholas de Jongh was disappointed in 1997 by ‘Diana Quick’s unusually becalmed Gertrude’, arguing that ‘there’s not enough pain’ in her performance.<sup>116</sup> A rare eyebrow was raised by Maxwell Cooter in 2009 – ‘Hamlet almost throttles Gertrude in the bedroom scene’ – however on the whole filial violence is considered to be part of the ‘package’ of a present-day *Hamlet*.<sup>117</sup> There is nothing in the texts subsequent to the murder of Polonius to encourage such a staging.

A second, less physical manifestation of the violence acted upon the character is the trope of an alcoholic Gertrude which recurs across present-day modern dress productions of *Hamlet*. Gertrudes frequently are performed as having a taste for alcohol, threatening to render her an impossible character to take seriously: productions vary in whether they open with Gertrude already swigging liberally, or whether they delay the onset of drinking until later in the play, as tension mounts. Adrian Noble had Jane Lapotaire perform a guilt-ridden Gertrude from the opening scene, consuming copious amounts of wine as Claudius announced their marriage. Alcohol was used here and in other productions as a prop to indicate Gertrude’s consciousness of her guilt of sex, age, and bad judgement, sidestepping the ambiguity of the text through stage business in support of Hamlet’s diagnosis of his mother. Trevor Nunn’s 2004 production similarly had Imogen Stubbs ‘resorting to drink’

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<sup>115</sup> Paul Taylor, ‘Doctor Who? Tennant captivates as Hamlet’, *Independent*, 6 August 2008; Charles Spencer, ‘Thrills abound in Doctor Who Hamlet’, *Daily Telegraph*, 6 August 2008; Spencer, ‘A vulnerable Jude Law’.

<sup>116</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, ‘Shots go astray as Hamlet gets his gun’, *Evening Standard*, 9 May 1997.

<sup>117</sup> Cooter, ‘Hamlet’.

as a coping mechanism long before the third act's play-within-the-play.<sup>118</sup> Nicholas Hytner directed an alcoholic Gertrude who drank heavily from the play's opening, with Clare Higgins 'as a puffy-faced lush, gargling back whisky, [and] teetering on the edge'; for Charles Spencer this 'sensual, raddled alcoholic' was 'drinking to forget her own guilt'.<sup>119</sup> A fourth production, Greg Doran's 2008 *Hamlet*, depicted a Gertrude who 'let the strain of events break her composure' only in private moments, as in the closet scene, which opened with Penny Downie smoking and drinking whiskey.<sup>120</sup> Downie did not begin the play as a heavy public drinker: for Spencer she was performing 'Gertrude's decline from high society lady to abject terror and exhausted, alcoholic remorse'.<sup>121</sup>

Gertrude's supposed alcoholism is associated with her age: in recent years, middle-aged women's drinking has become a national sore point. The figure of the wine-soaked 'lush' who relies on alcohol to wind down after a tough day has become recognisable as an older, usually affluent woman. An anti-drinking campaign aimed at older women was launched in Britain in 2008 shortly before Downie took to the stage.<sup>122</sup> Productions of *Hamlet* which perform an alcohol-dependent Gertrude are engaging with present-day thinking on the older woman's Achilles heel; equally, however, they are cued by a prompt late in the texts around which various performances have been built. Certain performative

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<sup>118</sup> Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2004', p. 294.

<sup>119</sup> Quentin Letts, 'Hamlet's a hoodie we want to hug', *Daily Mail*, 8 October 2010 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1318713/Hamlets-hoodie-want-hug-.html>>; Charles Spencer, 'Hamlet', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 October 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8050155/Hamlet-National-Theatre-review.html>>.

<sup>120</sup> Laura Grace Godwin, 'Revenge Backwards, and in Heels: *Hamlet* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, England, Summer 2008', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26: 4 (2008), 115-31 (p. 124).

<sup>121</sup> Spencer, 'Thrills abound'.

<sup>122</sup> See articles by Denis Campbell, 'Women: the hidden risks of drinking', *Observer*, 24 February 2008 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/feb/24/drugsandalcohol.health1>>; James Slack, 'Now middle-aged women are being targeted in anti-drink campaign', *Daily Mail*, 25 February 2008 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-517930/Now-middle-aged-women-targeted-anti-drink-campaign.html>>; Melanie Reid, 'Middle-class women hit bottle hardest', *The Times*, 18 December 2009 <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/scotland/article6961153.ece>>; Rebecca Smith, 'Middle aged women drinking more than in their teens', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 April 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/7543907/Middle-aged-women-drinking-more-than-in-their-teens.html>>.

choices must be made in Q1 scene 17, Q2 and F 5.2, regarding ‘the poisoned cup’ (Q2: 5.2.275) intended by Claudius to be Hamlet’s downfall, should Laertes’s venom-tipped sword fail to do the deed. The spiked cup of wine – ‘the King drinks to Hamlet’ (F: 5.2.225) – causes the eventual death of both Claudius and Gertrude, forced down Claudius’s throat by Hamlet: ‘Come, drink – here lies thy union, here!’ (Q1: 17.97). Gertrude dies at her own hand, consuming the poisoned wine in what has proven to be a highly ambiguous moment:

*Gertrude*      [...] The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

*Hamlet*        Good madam.

*Claudius*     Gertrude, do not drink.

*Gertrude*     I will, my lord. I pray you pardon me.

*Claudius*     It is the poisoned cup! It is too late.

(Q2: 5.2.271-5)

Gertrude’s intention and understanding at this moment, and the tone in which she prays the King to pardon her, have been performed in various ways. Noble’s production deemed the draining of the cup to be the very purposeful act of an alcoholic who no longer cared about others’ opinions: Claudius’s ‘Gertrude!’ caught the attention of all present, and the Queen’s ‘I pray you pardon me’ was slowly drawn-out and bitterly scornful. There was no sense that she was aware of the wine’s contents, however; the drinking was a symptom, rather than a statement of intent. Giles Block’s 2000 production brushed over the moment with a light touch, Joanna McCallum chuckling bemusedly as she quaffed; Gertrudes Diana Quick and Susannah York similarly passed the moment by without concern, as did a merry Marty Cruickshank in Steven Pimlott’s production. As in Noble’s production, however, Janet Suzman’s 2006 *Hamlet* had Dorothy Ann Gould reject Claudius’s order

with bitter scorn; Clare Higgins dismissed her husband in what was played as a drunken fog in Hytner's 2010 production.

A third option which has been brought out in performance is to deliver Gertrude's 'I will, my lord' as a deliberate, knowing act of suicide. The lines are one of a very few moments across the three playtexts in which Gertrude speaks for herself, freely and without submission; they provide a window onto the ambiguities and uncertainties of the play which the Queen's narration by others so easily obscures. Many directors as we have seen have downplayed the significance of the lines. Michael Boyd and Greg Doran, however, had Siân Thomas and Penny Downie use them as an opportunity for the ultimate self-assertion. Thomas's Gertrude was suspiciously observant of Claudius throughout the fencing match, realising the contents of the wine and the full truth of her son's account in the closet scene. Her consumption of the drink, followed by a tender embrace with Hamlet, was a defiant suicide. Downie's drinking was similarly purposeful: having risen from his chair to tell her not to drink, Claudius's intentions and the wine's poison were made clear. Going ahead with the drinking was a decisive act and a conscious choice of death.

A performance of suicide does not sit entirely comfortably with Gertrude's apparent surprise later in the scene as the effects of the poison begin to take hold – 'O my dear Hamlet, / The drink, the drink – I am poisoned' (F: 5.2.264-5). Nor is a suicide a problem-free response to the open-endedness of the lines. The act may be read as a powerful statement of self-determination, yet it is also the ultimate acceptance of the discourse of guilt through which Gertrude has been narrated by Hamlet and the Ghost. To stage the drinking as a suicide constitutes a final act of violence upon Gertrude's ambiguous, anxiety-inducing character.

Gertrude is variously negotiated across present-day revivals of *Hamlet*. When staging the play we seek certainty, accepting Hamlet's claims of his mother's age and anachronistic sexuality; when that certainty fractures under the weight of the play's attendant anxiety, we respond with the anger we find in the text, beating Gertrude and transforming her into a sometimes-suicidal alcoholic. A final strain of response to the character which is most clearly legible in reviews of the play in performance – a strain indicative of what can happen to an ageing Shakespearean woman after the curtain has fallen, as we saw in the previous chapter – is that of silence. Perhaps older, perhaps sexually vital, Gertrude's apparent incorporation of age and sexuality continues to threaten to such a degree that critics prefer to avoid her. For all her importance in providing a point of origin for Hamlet's earliest rage – 'But two months dead – nay, not so much, not two' (F: 1.2.136) – Gertrude often goes barely mentioned, or is entirely ignored, in reviews of *Hamlets*. Benedict Nightingale used just two words ('baffled, stricken') to describe Penny Downie's Gertrude, preferring to give a more detailed account of the Player Queen staged by Hamlet; in 2001, having described Rosencrantz and Guildenstern individually, Nightingale referred only to the Ghost's ensuring 'that his son doesn't rape his ex-wife'.<sup>123</sup> For Quentin Letts the role was an irrelevance: 'Penelope Wilton is rather wasted as Gertrude'.<sup>124</sup> More demonstrative still of our unease with Gertrude are those reviews which fail to speak of her at all. Paul Taylor's two-page spread in the *Independent* reviewing Doran's *Hamlet* analyses characters including Horatio and Fortinbras, but lacks any mention of Gertrude. Susan Irvine, reviewing the same production for the *Sunday Telegraph*, assessed the performance of the Clown but found no space to talk about the Queen. Christopher Hart's two pages in the *Sunday Times* on Doran's *Hamlet* also ignored

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<sup>123</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Quantum leap to a great classical role is just what the Doctor ordered', *The Times*, 6 August 2008; Benedict Nightingale, 'Hamlet', *The Times*, 4 May 2001.

<sup>124</sup> Quentin Letts, 'Jude Law survives slings and arrows with a "lucid, excellent" performance as Hamlet', *Daily Mail*, 4 June 2009 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-1190716/Jude-Law-stuns-critics-lucid-excellent-performance-Hamlet.html>>.

Penny Downie; four years earlier, Paul Taylor's two pages on Boyd's production neglected to mention Siân Thomas's performance.<sup>125</sup> Stephen Fay, Susannah Clapp, and Michael Coveney ignored Joanna McCallum's Gertrude in 2000; Nick Curtis forgot about Downie in 2009; and in 1992 Michael Billington found nothing to say about Jane Lapotaire's Gertrude.<sup>126</sup> In a trope which speaks to the silence surrounding Eleanor witnessed in the previous chapter, many of these reviews (like Paul Taylor's 2000 piece, which also made no comment on Gertrude) were printed alongside official production images of Hamlet and Gertrude during the closet scene.<sup>127</sup>

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Over four centuries after they were first written, present-day revivals of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet* continue to speak to and of the early modern anxieties of age and sex written into the plays. The figure of the sexually active and desirable ageing woman proves highly problematic in the plays and their stagings. *Antony and Cleopatra* attempts to represent a character who breaches early modern expectations of age while anxiously, concurrently subverting that representation. Performance responds by subjecting Cleopatra to violence and humiliation, and critics ensure in their reviews that the myth of ageing female desirability remains impossible to perform. While in *Antony and Cleopatra* we

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<sup>125</sup> Taylor, 'Doctor who?'; Susan Irvine, 'Hamlet Who?', *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 August 2008; Christopher Hart, 'Extra special Tennant', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 10 August 2008; Paul Taylor, 'A Dane for all seasons', *Independent*, 29 July 2004.

<sup>126</sup> Stephen Fay, 'Beautiful but underpowered', *Independent on Sunday*, 18 June 2000; Susannah Clapp, 'A soldier to cry on', *Observer*, 18 June 2000; Michael Coveney, 'Great fun from top to Bottom', *Daily Mail*, 23 June 2000; Nick Curtis, 'Tennant is better than ever in Hamlet', *Evening Standard*, 8 January 2009; Michael Billington, 'Hamlet', *Guardian*, 21 December 1992.

<sup>127</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Fresh and daring, Rylance's prince creates a rapport that nears genius', *Independent*, 10 June 2000.

witness, through the text, its staging, and its reception, the endless re-articulation of a legendary character made memorable through her upheaval of age theory, in *Hamlet* we observe an anti-articulation. Gertrude is a character about whom the text tells us little. Hamlet's claims of her old age and anachronistic sexuality challenge the play and its performances; as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, age and sex prove impossible to hold together in a single staging. The resulting tension in the performed play sees the abuse and even the silencing of Gertrude. Both plays, finally, stage the containment of the ageing female character's sexuality.

Watching *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* in performance, and observing how those performances are recorded and remembered, we recognise the lasting constraints on what a Shakespeare play is allowed to say about sex and the ageing woman. Working in the archives of performed Shakespeare delivers a sense of how prescriptions of appropriate female ageing have altered, and how they have remained unchanged, between the early modern period and today. At the same time, such work makes clear the limits of performance scholarship by calling attention to the always-incomplete archive and the inevitably disappearing performance. In my final chapter I will consider the links between the archive itself and the figure of the remembering old woman in a study of the character of Margaret of Anjou as depicted in *Richard III*.

## *Chapter Five*

### *Repetition of What Thou Hast Marred: Memory and the Ageing Woman*

Recalling his turn as Margaret in all-male company Propeller's 2010-11 production of *Richard III*, Tony Bell reflected on how his tall stature and deep voice may have aided his performance.<sup>1</sup> For Bell, Margaret was 'asexual', 'not really a woman'; his depiction of Margaret was intended to be one of a 'fearful man-woman' who existed in a state beyond age and seemingly beyond womanhood, a sexless harridan version of female ageing who spoke to previous chapters' readings of Volumnia, Eleanor, and Paulina.<sup>2</sup> In an interview which demonstrated much of the misogyny, suspicion, and even fear directed towards powerful ageing women in Shakespeare, Bell described his Margaret as 'an empty shell', a non-entity in sex and gender terms. 'Not really a woman', then, Bell's 'empty' Margaret was defined as masculine: in interview, Bell found his physicality as a notably tall male actor to have assisted his performance of a character who elsewhere has been described in extra-human terms as 'something tribal, something prehistoric'.<sup>3</sup> For another performer of the role, Fiona Bell, there was 'an "otherness" about Margaret' that set her aside from the other women of *Richard III*, something she described as 'supernatural'.<sup>4</sup> Penny Downie, remembering her turn as Margaret in Adrian Noble's RSC production, gave perhaps the fullest account of this shared sense of Margaret's 'difference' in her description of how the company grappled with the character's age in rehearsal:

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<sup>1</sup> *Richard III*, dir. Edward Hall (Propeller: 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Private interview with Tony Bell, 15 January 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Penny Downie, 'Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*', in *Players of Shakespeare 3: Further essays in Shakespearian performance by players with the Royal Shakespeare Company*, eds. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 114-39 (p. 137).

<sup>4</sup> Fiona Bell, 'Joan of Arc in Part 1 of *Henry VI*, and Margaret of Anjou in Parts 1, 2, and 3 of *Henry VI* and in *Richard III*', in *Players of Shakespeare 6: Essays in the Performance of Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 163-83 (pp. 165-71).

We talked a lot about age, too, of course; fifty-five became seventy-five, which wasn't a lot of use to me as a 34-year-old. Then finally Adrian Noble came up with the idea that she is 200 years old and of course that provided the key to it and one could see her as this ageless figure of moral nemesis, who brings on to the stage the entire Wars of the Roses and who has herself been purified by suffering to play this final moral role.<sup>5</sup>

As a '200 year old', Margaret may reasonably be described as Shakespeare's oldest female character, and has been read as such: 'Shakespeare's women [...] range in age from the youthful, joyous Juliet to the wizened, bitter Margaret'; 'If ancient sorrow be most reverend, / Give mine the benefit of seniory' (4.4.35-6).<sup>6</sup> Richard is the first to address her, describing her as 'Foul wrinkled witch' (1.3.164) and, later, 'hateful, withered hag (1.3.212); her 'actual' age, or the age we are to understand her to have reached, goes undefined, yet the 'seniory' she claims would determine her age to be greater even than that of the Duchess of York, mother to Richard III and widow of Richard Duke of York, who has herself seen 'Eighty odd years of sorrow' (4.1.95). The unique challenges she poses in performance reach beyond her implied age to encompass her distinction as the only character present across each of the three *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, bearing in her wake a freight of performative, historical, and textual memory: 'when she walks on in the third scene of *Richard III* it is as if she brings with her all the memories of everybody's blackest deeds in the battles of the past'; '[S]he's kind of a ghost of the past who haunts the Yorks with her curses'.<sup>7</sup>

Less celebrated yet similarly elderly, the outraged and world-weary Duchess also carries memories in her wake. Described by one critic as, like Margaret, a 'cursing crone',

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<sup>5</sup> Downie, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> Irene G. Dash, *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Downie, p. 135; Al Pacino on Queen Margaret, in *Looking for Richard*, dir. Al Pacino, (Los Angeles, CA: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 1996).

the king's mother at once mirrors Margaret and yet is discernibly different to her, her memories more personal and less cosmic. Appearing in four scenes, double the number in which we encounter Margaret, the Duchess in part functions as one member of a collective, the oldest incarnation of a schema of femininity deployed across *Richard III* and one from which Margaret is to a great extent aloof.<sup>8</sup> Women in *Richard III* are ritual mourners.<sup>9</sup> In a scene such as 4.1, which brings the child daughter of Clarence, the youthful Lady Anne, the widowed Queen Elizabeth, and the aged Duchess together on stage as a travelling collective, all stages of a woman's life are represented. In staging the breadth of the female lifespan in the context of lamentation, 4.1, like 2.2, 2.4, and 4.4, suggests that the role of women in *Richard III* is to carry the memory of the dead in their wake, speaking their accusations and their grief in the face of Richard's machinations. This role reaches fruition in the two elderly women of the play, with the Duchess and in particular Margaret serving as the play's chroniclers. While the Duchess is the oldest member of the travelling mourning group of women of all ages, in other ways she is as sharply individualised as Margaret, carefully positioned as Richard's mother to testify to the 'grievous burden' (4.4.168) of her son's youth, and furnished with the mother's unique prerogative among those closest to the tyrant king to speak truth and memory to power.

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<sup>8</sup> Reviewing Sam Mendes's 2011 *Richard III*, Andrew Billen wrote of an 'alternative court of women' at work in the play. Andrew Billen, 'Richard III', *New Statesman*, 1 August 2011. *Richard III*, dir. Sam Mendes (London: The Old Vic, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> See Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Political Drama: The History Plays and the Roman Plays* (London: Routledge, 1988); Nina S. Levine, *Women's Matters: Politics, Gender, and Nation in Shakespeare's Early History Plays* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998); Thorne; Patricia Phillippy, *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002); Ric Knowles, 'Encoding/Decoding Shakespeare: *Richard III* at the 2002 Stratford Festival', in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, pp. 297-318, especially pp. 313-4; Martha Kurtz, 'Rethinking Gender and Genre in the History Play', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36: 2 (1996), 267-88; Mason; Paige Martin Reynolds, 'Mourning and Memory in *Richard III*', *ANQ: A quarterly journal of short articles, notes and reviews*, 21: 2 (2008), 19-25; Charney, p. 9; Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (New York, NY: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 135-53. Rackin, 'Anti-Historians', and Phyllis Rackin and Jean E. Howard, *Engendering A Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), both acknowledge the impact of mourning women in speaking an alternative history in *Richard III* yet argue for the female characters' ultimate disempowerment in the play.

*Richard III* is a play dealing deeply in memories: their articulation, their provocative impact, their custodians, and their lacunae. In its writing and its performance, memories are created, tended, and employed to devastating effect. Throughout, old women serve as the cornerstone of this work of remembering. This chapter will explore how the old woman figure in *Richard III* at once demonstrates and challenges early modern understandings of the workings of human memory; looking at recent performances of the play and, in part, its *Henry VI* affiliates, we will witness the ways in which today's productions respond to and rework the old woman's mnemonic role to stage a new, contemporary understanding of the task of remembrance as it is carried out by women in *Richard III*.

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Memory in early modern England was thought to be a function of one's physicality and health, its quality directly associated with the foods eaten, lifestyle lived, and age reached. Memory was tangible and localised; specifically, memory's situs was in the anterior brain: 'Memorie therefore hath his seat in the hinder part of the head in the third Ventricle'.<sup>10</sup> Gratarolo's *Castel of Memorie*, translated and first printed in London in 1562, laid out a dietary plan incorporating a range of spices, herbs, and meats (as well as the more questionable 'Turpentine') which could be consumed to improve the memory by heating the body temperature. His prescriptions were based on the contemporary Galenic body of the humours, a body in which 'forgetfulnes [was] the daughter of coldenes'.<sup>11</sup> On

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<sup>10</sup> Guglielmo Gratarolo, *The Castel of Memorie*, trans. William Fulwood (London: 1573), sig. B1<sup>r</sup>. See also William Basse, *A Helpe to Memory, and Discourse* (London: 1620), sig. B4<sup>v</sup>: '[memory] lodgeth in the hindermost closet and chamber of the Braine'.

<sup>11</sup> Gratarolo, sig. B<sup>v</sup>.

this understanding, one would expect old age to be thought to be the harbinger of forgetfulness in the period, being as we have seen cold in nature, and given that ‘coldnesse hindereth the mouing necessary to the Memory’.<sup>12</sup> For du Laurens, absent-mindedness in age was an inevitable consequence of physiological breakdown: ‘all the actions of the bodie and minde are weakened and growne feeble, the sences are dull, the memorie lost, and the judgement failing’.<sup>13</sup> Gratarolo, too, accepts old age as inevitably forgetful, but bases his conclusions on a different cause:

Also the varietie of cares, and the heape of busynesses is hurtefull, the tumultuous reading of diuers volumes or bookes is also noyous. I suppose this is the chief cause why age should be forgetfull: because the power or strength of mynde is ouerthrowne with the multitude of thinges.<sup>14</sup>

For Gratarolo, the sheer mental strain imposed by the volume of things to be known renders forgetfulness in old age unavoidable.

The extant early modern literature of memory and age thus sets out an understanding of senescence in which forgetfulness should seem inevitable, one in which the elderly should be found to be reliably absent-minded. The drama of the period concurred, to an extent: Peele’s *The Old Wiue’s Tale*, for instance, staged an old woman ‘narrator’ or tale-teller, set up for comic purposes as frustratingly forgetful in her storytelling: ‘O Lord I quite forgot’; ‘O I forget’.<sup>15</sup> There is a second strand of thought running counter to this, however, one in which the aged person is a repository of history, recounting tales (like Peele’s ‘Gammer’) of times past and guarding the memory of the dead:

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<sup>12</sup> Gratarolo, sig. B<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Du Laurens, sigs. 2A3<sup>v</sup>-2A4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Gratarolo, sig. Gv<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Peele, *The Old Wiues Tale*, sig. B1<sup>v</sup>.

I found them winding of Marcello's corpse;  
 And there is such a solemn melody  
 'Tween doleful songs, tears, and sad elegies:  
 (Such as old grandames, watching by the dead,  
 Were wont t'outwear the nights with).<sup>16</sup>

In this tradition, the memory is kept sharp in old age not simply as a result of a temperate, heat-friendly diet ('such medicines as cause warmenes as wel without as within the bodie are to bee ministred') but also by means of sheer practice and repetition. For Gratarolo, seeking to explain the old person's sometimes prodigious memory in the face of the 'multitude of thinges' to be known and experienced, 'extreme olde men do well remember auncient things, because they haue often pondered eyther them or the like'.<sup>17</sup> Cicero's diligent narrator in *The Booke of Olde Age* declares that 'to exercyse my memorye wythall [...] what soe euer I haue harde, spoken or done the daye before, I call to remembraunce and debate the same with myselfe in the euenynge'.<sup>18</sup> For Cicero, old people 'remember al suche thinges as they esteme & set store by'.<sup>19</sup> Memories must be cared for and tended if they are to be remembered, and repeatedly called to mind in order to keep them fresh and accessible in old age: 'You muste haue an often and dayly cogitacion or thinkinge of the same thyng [...]. Nor let the feare of erringe keepe you backe from disputinge'.<sup>20</sup>

Repetition and rehearsal are the keys to memory in this view, and the woman who had spent a lifetime nursing her memories was best positioned to deliver them to great dramatic effect.

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<sup>16</sup> Webster, *The White Devil*, 5.4.51-55.

<sup>17</sup> Gratarolo, sig. B6<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> *The Worthye Booke of Old Age*, sig. D1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> *The Worthye Booke of Old Age*, sig. B5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Gratarolo, sig. F1<sup>v</sup>.

In *Richard III*, Shakespeare plays with this idea of practice and repetition as the guarantors of good memory by making old women such as the Duchess and, especially, Margaret its keepers. Both women force the play, its characters, and its audiences to remember the histories which underlie the play's present. In addition, however, both old women remember forwards, uttering curses and delivering predictions based on their memories of past events which, as we will see, serve to shape the events of the play and its performances. Finally, the forgetfulness threatened by old age – 'the memorie [...] faileth and waxeth daylye worse and worse' – is seen to threaten the reliability of the women's memories, Margaret's failure to recall her own complicity in the bloody events she recounts casting her proclamations in particular into doubt. Competing memories at work in the play destabilise the old women's narratives and call their roles as chroniclers into question, even as today's performances seek to reaffirm their positions as the keepers of *Richard III's* past and, as we will see, its future.

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In its opening lines, 'Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York' (1.1.1-2), *Richard III* proclaims itself to be a play with a past, dwelling on the Henry VI reign and plays even as it announces a 'perfect summer' of a future ahead. Approaching the plays, theatre critics, directors, and actors have often preferred to consider the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* as a four-part epic rather than as individual theatrical units. Nicholas de Jongh has stated unequivocally that '*Richard III* is fully understood if we see *Henry VI Part III* first', and Michael Billington has written that

‘If you are going to do the plays, you should also do them as a complete set, incorporating *Richard III*’.<sup>21</sup> Such ‘serial’ productions of the plays in succession are most commonly seen at the RSC, although there have been major cycles produced elsewhere: two productions of the *Henry VI* plays in sequence without *Richard III* took place prior to the RSC’s foundation, and there have been a number of cycles produced in theatres and acted for television by other companies over the past half-century.<sup>22</sup> The three *Henry VI* plays,

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<sup>21</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, ‘Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3’, *Evening Standard*, 11 August 2006; Michael Billington, ‘When three become one’, *Guardian*, 16 December 2000. De Jongh had felt the same five years earlier, writing that he had ‘never quite realised before that the way to achieve true understanding and enjoyment of [*Richard III*] is to see it after watching three parts of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*, or at least the third of this neglected trilogy’: Nicholas de Jongh, ‘Richard III’, *Evening Standard*, 27 April 2001.

<sup>22</sup> *Henry VI Part 1*, dir. Frank Benson (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1906); *Henry VI Part 2*, dir. Frank Benson (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1906); *Henry VI Part 3*, dir. Frank Benson (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1906); *Henry VI Part 1*, dir. Douglas Seale with Barry Jackson (Birmingham: The Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1953); *Henry VI Part 2*, dir. Douglas Seale with Barry Jackson (Birmingham: The Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1953); *Henry VI Part 3*, dir. Douglas Seale with Barry Jackson (Birmingham: The Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 1953); *Henry VI*, dir. John Barton and Peter Hall (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1963); *Edward IV*, dir. John Barton and Peter Hall (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1963); *Richard III*, dir. John Barton and Peter Hall (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1963); *Henry VI Part 1*, dir. Terry Hands (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1977); *Henry VI Part 2*, dir. Terry Hands (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1977); *Henry VI Part 3*, dir. Terry Hands (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1977); *Henry VI Part One*, dir. Jane Howell (London: BBC Television, 1983); *Henry VI Part Two*, dir. Jane Howell (London: BBC Television, 1983); *Henry VI Part Three*, dir. Jane Howell (London: BBC Television, 1983); *Henry VI: House of Lancaster*, dir. Michael Bogdanov (The English Shakespeare Company, 1987); *Henry VI*, dir. Adrian Noble (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1988); *Edward IV*, dir. Adrian Noble (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1988); *Richard III*, dir. Adrian Noble (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1988); *Henry VI Part 1*, dir. Michael Boyd (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2000); *Henry VI Part 2*, dir. Michael Boyd (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2000); *Henry VI Part 3*, dir. Michael Boyd (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2000); *Richard III*, dir. Michael Boyd (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Swan Theatre, 2001) (these productions were revived in 2006-7 with Katy Stephens replacing Bell as Margaret and as Joan of Arc); *Henry VI*, dir. Barrie Rutter (Northern Broadsides: 2006); *Edward IV*, dir. Barrie Rutter (Northern Broadsides: 2006). On the BBC films, see Schafer, *Ms-Directing Shakespeare*, pp. 169-75. On the Birmingham Repertory Productions, see Stuart Hampton-Reeves, ‘Shakespeare, *Henry VI* and the Festival of Britain’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, pp. 285-96; see also Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, Shakespeare in Performance (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 41-53. Michael Dobson’s parallel analyses of the RSC and the English national football team goes some way towards explaining the popularity of ‘serial’ productions of the histories at Stratford: as he notes, ‘the RSC, though in fact perpetually reinventing itself to cope with fresh cultural conditions, makes much of its continuity with a supposedly glorious past’ (p. 31). As the title of the 2000-1 season in which Boyd’s cycle was first performed – ‘This England’ – indicates, productions of Shakespeare’s histories, like the RSC itself, are frequently asked to speak to England’s present state in the light of, and through, its supposed pasts. Michael Dobson, ‘Watching the Complete Works Festival: The RSC and Its Fans in 2006’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 25: 4 (2007), 23-34; see also Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, in which the three plays are termed ‘arguably Shakespeare’s most English works’ (p. 1); and see Emma Smith, ‘“Freezing the Snowman”: (How) Can We Do Performance Criticism?’, in *How to Do Things With Shakespeare: New Approaches, New Essays*, ed. Laurie Maguire (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 280-97 (p. 286), and *King Henry V*, ed. Smith, on the history and politics of *Henry V* in performance.

when they are staged at all, tend to be structured as a ‘series’ of histories, or, indeed, are heavily cut so as to reduce their number to a more manageable two (often including a putative ‘*Edward IV*’ play), with the pair then frequently concluded as a trio by a production of *Richard III*. *Richard III* itself experiences no such crisis of identity, having been performed solo in 1992, 1995, 1998, and 2003 at Stratford, in 2003 at the Globe, in 1990 at the National Theatre, and in 2011 at the Old Vic.<sup>23</sup>

To approach the four plays as though they were conceived, written, and performed in sequence by an artist with a grand plan for a four-part series, is problematic. G. K. Hunter has argued that the *Henry VI* plays could just as profitably be read and staged as ‘plays in their own right’, yet as we have seen these plays are more usually approached sequentially, often in partnership with *Richard III*.<sup>24</sup> A significant amount of evidence supports an alternative approach, one which understands *The First part of the Contention* and *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke* to have been written prior to *The first Part of Henry the Sixt*, available only in F.<sup>25</sup> Sequential readings furthermore avoid asking whether the commercial success of the *Contention* and *True Tragedie* may have spurred

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<sup>23</sup> *Richard III*, dir. Sam Mendes (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Other Place, 1992); *Richard III*, dir. Steven Pimlott (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1995); *Richard III*, dir. Elijah Moshinsky (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1998); *Richard III*, dir. Sean Holmes (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2003); *Richard III*, dir. Richard Eyre (London: The National Theatre [Lyttelton], 1990); *Richard III*, dir. Barry Kyle (London: Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, 2003); *Richard III*, dir. Mendes. A solo production of the third part of *Henry VI* was staged in 1994 (*Henry VI: The Battle for the Throne*, dir. Katie Mitchell [Stratford-upon-Avon: The Other Place, 1994]). This successful production demonstrated the capacity of 3 *Henry VI* to stand alone as an internally coherent play, its violence speaking to the bloody contemporary Yugoslav civil war. See Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, pp. 168-85. For the presentist representation of Queen Margaret in twentieth-century productions of 3 *Henry VI*, including Mitchell’s, see Randall Martin, “‘A Woman’s generall: what should we feare?’: Queen Margaret Thatcherized in Recent Productions of 3 *Henry VI*”, in *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries in Performance*, ed. Edward J. Esche (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2000), pp. 321-38.

<sup>24</sup> G. K. Hunter, ‘The Royal Shakespeare Company Plays *Henry VI*’, *Renaissance Drama*, 9 (1978), 91-108 (p. 92).

<sup>25</sup> For surveys of this evidence and associated scholarly arguments, see *King Henry VI Part 1*, ed. Edward Burns, *The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series* (London: Thomson Learning, 2000), pp. 67-73, and *King Henry VI Part 2*, ed. Ronald Knowles, *The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series* (London: Thomson Learning, 1999), pp. 106-21. See Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare’s Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002) for an argument in favour of sequential, or ‘tetralogy’, readings. I refer to the three *Henry VI* plays throughout this chapter as 1 *Henry VI*, 2 *Henry VI*, and 3 *Henry VI* for the reader’s ease only; it should not be thought that I assume the plays to have been composed or conceived of sequentially.

the composition of *1 Henry VI*, now widely accepted to have been a collaborative work.<sup>26</sup> Whatever the truth of the first writing and performance of the *Henry VI* plays, scholars now generally agree that *Richard III* was written and originally staged with the completed *3 Henry VI* in mind.<sup>27</sup>

My reading of *Richard III* finds old women, and in particular Queen Margaret, to do much of the work of remembering the events of the *Henry VI* plays for a *Richard III* audience, with the histories of *Henry VI* being remembered by, through, and against them.<sup>28</sup> Margaret's *Richard III* role is ahistorical, a Shakespearean innovation; the historical Margaret plays no part in the chronicles of the reign drawn upon as source material by the playwright.<sup>29</sup> Two likely dramatic sources of Shakespeare's play, Thomas Legge's widely-known Cambridge University play *Richardus Tertius* and the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III*, stick more closely to the historical record in not featuring

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<sup>26</sup> Suggested collaborators have included Thomas Nashe, George Peele, and Robert Greene – see *King Henry VI Part 1*, ed. Burns, pp. 73-82, '1 Henry VI' in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, pp. 217-8, and *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Volume III Earlier English History Plays: Henry VI, Richard III, Richard II*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 31-5. 2 and 3 *Henry VI* have also faced questions over their authorship: see *King Henry VI Part 2*, ed. Knowles, pp. 111-21, and *King Henry VI Part 3*, eds. John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen, *The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series* (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), pp. 44-9. For the sake of simplicity and given that my arguments are not author-centred, I will assume each of the *Henry VI* plays to have been written by Shakespeare.

<sup>27</sup> *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, ed. John Jowett, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) p. 3; *King Richard III*, ed. James R. Siemon, *The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series* (London: Thomson Learning, 2009), p. 45; *King Richard III: Updated Edition*, ed. Janis Lull, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 4. This chapter will not concern itself overly with arguments over the dating of the plays in writing nor in their first performances, accepting an order of composition of 2, 3, and finally *1 Henry VI*, followed by *Richard III*, as the most likely.

<sup>28</sup> *Richard III*, ed. Jowett makes frequent reference to Margaret's function as rememberer throughout the introductory material; he notes, for instance, that '[b]ecause [Margaret] preserves the past and makes it actively meaningful during the course of the play, she in effect preserves the future' (p. 45). Other scholars have argued over whether female characters in Shakespeare's history plays ever hold any real or sway over the unfolding of the action: on this, see Rackin, 'Anti-Historians'; Schwarz; Kurtz; and Rackin and Howard.

<sup>29</sup> Shakespeare's chronicle sources have been identified as Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London: 1548), and Holinshed's *Chronicles*. For more, see *Narrative and Dramatic Sources [...] Volume III; Richard III*, ed. Siemon, pp. 51-67; *Richard III*, ed. Jowett, pp. 12-23. See however Patricia-Ann Lee, 'Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39: 2 (1986), 183-217 for a discussion of the ways in which the Elizabethan reputation of Margaret of Anjou developed and may have influenced Shakespeare's writing, particularly with reference to the *Henry VI* plays.

Margaret.<sup>30</sup> The Duchess of York is, like Margaret, absent from both the chronicle and dramatic source materials, yet she reappears in Shakespeare's play; that both elderly women are written into *Richard III* to play significant roles strongly suggests a special function for female age in the play. That function, in my reading, is one of remembrance, the figure of the elderly woman invoked in order to synthesise the workings of memory in the play.<sup>31</sup> In her extreme age, surviving past her looked-for death into what Fiona Bell has termed 'another plane of consciousness', Margaret is best positioned to serve as the play's linchpin of memory; existing in a near-ghostly state ('Even an audience member familiar with the chronicles might not know who this alien figure is [...] Margaret comes as it were from beyond the grave') she plays a choric, Senecan role, bearing witness to the revenges staged for the acts she recounts.<sup>32</sup> Taking the advice of Cicero and Gratarolo, Margaret practises her memories in *Richard III*, repeating and re-speaking past events and dragging the play's histories into the light. Throughout, she is found to be at the heart of the play's work of writing and staging its own history: 'But repetition of what thou hast marred: / That will I make, before I let thee go' (1.3.165-6).

Even before she first enters, Margaret's name is used to anchor the play's memories:

#### Queen Margaret saw

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Legge, *Richardus Tertius* (1579), performed at St. John's College, Cambridge, and circulating in manuscript thereafter (see *Richard III*, ed. Siemon, pp. 67-8) and Anon., *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third* (London: 1594).

<sup>31</sup> As Alexander Leggatt writes, 'Margaret embodies most vividly a process that goes on all through the play'. Margaret is not the only rememberer in *Richard III*; as I will show, however, she is the axis around which the play's remembering turns. Leggatt, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Bell, p. 179; *Richard III*, ed. Jowett, pp. 45-8. See also Thorne, p. 110; Marcus, p. 94; Phillippy. Bell's reference to 'another plain of consciousness' suggests that the oldest Margaret occupies a state which has been described by Emily R. Wilson as 'tragic overliving' (Wilson, *Mocked With Death*). For Wilson, 'tragic overliving' is a trope of tragedy in which '[e]xcessive life is presented as a kind of living death' (p. 5); as we will see below, both Margaret and the Duchess could be said to survive into an unlooked-for living death. On the Senecan influence at work in the depictions of *Richard III*'s women, including Margaret, see *Richard III*, ed. Jowett, pp. 23-4; Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources [...] Volume III*, pp. 235-9; *Richard III*, ed. Siemon, pp. 76-7; Grene, p. 118, p. 153; M. L. Stapleton, "'I of Old Contemptes Complayne": Margaret of Anjou and English Seneca', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 43: 1-2 (2006), 100-33.

Thy murd'rous falchion smoking in his blood,  
 The which thou once didst bend against her breast [...]  
 (1.2.93-5)

These lines, delivered by the widowed Anne, wife of Prince Edward, are spoken to Richard in the presence of *'the corpse of Henry VI'* (1.2.0). Henry's body is brought onto the *Richard III* stage to initiate the play's remembering with a reference to events depicted in 3 *Henry VI*; despite the presence of the body, *Richard III* chooses to anchor its memories of the earlier play in what 'Queen Margaret saw', finding in her a certain authority. Drawing out this sense of history, memory and observation as being at the heart of the meaning of Margaret in *Richard III*, Sam Mendes's 1992 production inserted a small piece of stage business occurring before her first line was delivered. Margaret was revealed sitting silently in the throne as 1.3 opened, scurrying into the shadows as Queen Elizabeth and the court entered. By bringing Margaret's entrance forward by more than one hundred lines and staging it in this way, Mendes subtly established the sense of remembered entitlement resting on the person of the elderly woman, the loss of the throne she once occupied silently remembered. Concurrently, it begins the play's work of staging Margaret as an onlooker of history, her observing presence, like Webster's 'old grandames, watching by the dead', signifying histories at once past and still unfolding. Shakespeare's text has Margaret slip onto the stage unnoticed at 1.3.110; unaware of her watchful presence, Richard remembers, through Margaret, a history still earlier than Anne's by asking of Queen Elizabeth, 'Was not your husband / In Margaret's battle at Saint Albans slain?' (1.3.129-30). Margaret, in the meantime, immediately begins to arrange and present her version of *Richard III's* past, performing the role of ancient rememberer and witness in asides to the audience. Responding unheard to Elizabeth's complaint ('Small joy have I in being England's queen' [1.3.109]), she claims that 'Thy honour, state, and seat is due to me' (1.3.112), another

reference to events represented in *3 Henry VI*. She ‘do[es] remember’ Richard’s forgotten ‘pains’ ‘too well’, articulating them for the audience: ‘Thou killed’st my husband Henry in the Tower, / And Edward, my poor son, at Tewkesbury’ (1.3.118-20). Prompting our recollections at 1.3.126 as she remembers the ‘much better blood’ spilled by Richard in the past, she further colours his pious invocation of ‘what I have been, and what I am’ (1.3.133) with her ‘A murd’rous villain, and so still thou art’ (1.3.134). Once revealed to the stage, Margaret continues her historiography: ‘I am Queen [...] by you deposed’ (1.3.161-2); ‘A husband and a son thou ow’st to me, / And thou a kingdom; all of you allegiance (1.3.167-68);

Rivers and Dorset, you were standers-by,  
 And so wast thou, Lord Hastings, when my son  
 Was stabbed with bloody daggers. God I pray him,  
 That none of you may live his natural age  
 (1.3.207-10).

Bursting from the shadows into the light in Mendes’s 1992 production, Margaret’s declaimed memories were greeted with groans of exasperation by the assembled court; the sense of a past beyond the bounds of this stand-alone production was strengthened by this cast’s early performance of an apparently pre-existing weariness with Margaret’s excessive speech and seemingly tiresome, endless recollections.

Margaret’s memorial function is sustained across the play. In her second, final scene she juxtaposes memories of incidents occurring earlier in *Richard III* with those of events depicted in the *Henry VI* plays: ‘Plantagenet doth quit Plantagenet; / Edward for Edward, pays a dying debt’ (4.4.20-1);

I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him;  
 I had a Husband, till a Richard killed him.  
 Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard killed him;  
 Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him [...]  
 Thou hadst a Clarence too, and Richard killed him.  
 (4.4.40-6);

‘Thy Edward, he is dead, that killed my Edward; / Thy other Edward dead, to quite my Edward’ (4.4.63-4). Even when offstage, Margaret continues to serve as the chronicler of *Richard III*, filtering and shaping remembrance in the play. Rivers and Grey remember her words as they face death:

*Gray*            Now Margaret’s curse is fall’n upon our heads,  
                          For standing by when Richard stabbed her son.  
  
*Rivers*            Then cursed she Hastings; then cursed she Buckingham;  
                          Then cursed she Richard. O remember, God,  
                          To hear her prayer for them now as for us.  
 (3.3.14-8)

Hastings, too, remembers the old Queen: ‘O Margaret, Margaret! Now thy heavy curse / Is lighted on poor Hastings’ wretched head’ (3.4.92-3). Later, Elizabeth reiterates Margaret’s words (‘Die, neither mother, wife, nor England’s queen’ [1.3.206]) in the form of a warning to her son:

Go, hie thee! Hie thee from this slaughterhouse,  
 Lest thou increase the number of the dead,  
 And make me die the thrall of Margaret’s curses:

‘Nor mother, wife, nor counted England’s queen’.

(4.1.43-6)

In the final act Richard’s betrayed former ally Buckingham remembers Margaret’s predictions and re-articulates her lines:

Thus Margaret’s curse falls heavy on my neck.

‘When he’, quoth she, ‘shall split thy heart with sorrow,

Remember Margaret was a prophetess’

(5.1.25-7)

Remembrance through Margaret is still being conducted at the close of the play, the conquering Richmond recalling in his ‘The day is ours. The bloody dog is dead’ (5.8.2) the old Queen’s earlier ‘Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I plead, / That I may live and say, ‘The dog is dead’ (4.4.77-8).

The practice of memory Margaret carries out is not confined to events already past by the time *Richard III* opens. Margaret shapes theatrical futures and afterlives, her methods and language of memorialising mirroring that of the play’s other old female character, the Duchess of York. Joan of Arc’s response in *I Henry VI* to York’s ‘enchantress, hold thy tongue’ (‘I prithee, give me leave to curse awhile’ [5.4.13-4]) anticipates both Margaret’s ‘O let me make the period to my curse’ (*Richard III*, 1.3.236) and the elderly Duchess of York’s ‘I pray thee, hear me speak’ (*Richard III*, 4.4.180). There are strong memories of Margaret at work in the characterisation of the Duchess. The elderly Duchess – ‘Enter the old Duchess of York’ (2.2.0); ‘Eighty odd years of sorrow have I seen’ – is Margaret’s shadow, as well as her counterpart, inserting Margaret’s presence and memory into scenes from which she is otherwise absent. *Richard III*’s

Margaret has survived the looked-for death of her 3 *Henry VI* character – ‘O, kill me too!’ (3*H6*, 5.5.41) – to be revived ahistorically in a state at once distinct from and associated with earlier iterations of herself. Like Margaret, the Duchess too outlives her expected death and survives as we will see into an extreme old age of mnemonic and, eventually, supernatural power.

Productions of *Richard III* have tended to stage the Duchess, early in the play, as younger than Margaret and neither bitter nor soaked in the history of past griefs.<sup>33</sup> Sean Holmes’s 2003 production, for instance, performed a wild and unearthly, near inhuman Margaret; Cherry Morris’s Duchess, while sorrowing in 2.2, was at first a recognisable and approachable grandmother-figure. As *Richard III* unfolds through blood and mourning, however, the Duchess increasingly comes to resemble the old Queen, ageing through grief into a Margaret-like state. Liebler and Shea write of the Duchess that, ‘[I]earning from Margaret, moving beyond her function as Richard’s mother, she becomes a crone-in-training; she takes on Margaret’s position’.<sup>34</sup> Like Margaret, she is resurrected, outliving her promised death (‘I [go] to my grave, where peace and rest lie with me’ [4.1.94]). Both survivals age their subjects into ‘another plain of consciousness’, a ghostly state of mourning, memory, and prophecy. The Duchess states that ‘many miseries have crazed my voice’ (4.4.17), echoing an earlier Margaret’s ‘Oft have I heard that grief softens the mind, / And makes it fearful and degenerate’ (2*H6*, 4.4.1-2). Her dreamlike speech of mourning and memory in 4.4, delivered without clear referent, describes Margaret as well as the Duchess herself:

Dead life, blind sight, poor mortal living ghost,

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<sup>33</sup> Barry Kyle’s 2003 production was an exception. Kyle’s Margaret carried no walking stick, did not have whitened hair, and was not bent with age. His Duchess, however, used a stick to hobble around the stage and struggled to stand up from a sitting position.

<sup>34</sup> p. 94.

Woe's scene, world's shame, grave's due, by life  
usurped,

Brief abstract and record of tedious days.

(4.4.26-28)

Like Margaret, the Duchess has become an embodied history or 'record of tedious days', a chronicle of the play's bloody past: 'Accursed and unquiet wrangling days, / How many of you have mine eyes beheld?' (2.4.54-5). Margaret's 'Bear with me' (4.4.61), apologetically addressed to the Duchess in a surprising interruption amid the passionate speeches of the scene, seems to indicate a recognition of something of herself in the other elderly woman; unlike Margaret, however, the Duchess does not function to synthesise through her memories the experiences of other plays and past performances. Rather, the Duchess's recollections are of Richard's past, a series of firmly maternal memories of a history beyond the bounds of either *Richard III* or the *Henry VI* plays. Like the older mothers of Chapter Three, the elderly Duchess is afforded a wide berth in her speech:

He was the wretched'st thing when he was young,

So long a-growing, and so leisurely,

That if his rule were true he should be gracious.

(2.4.18-20)

Like Volumnia and Eleanor, the Duchess's right to speak, eventually acknowledged by Richard, is located in her status as a mother: 'Art thou my son? [...] Then patiently hear my impatience' (4.4.155-7). When she remembers history, it is a maternal history of her son's life and development, a personal, family history located beyond the confines of any of the plays in which Richard appears, one loudly and publicly articulated:



The Duchess, just as Margaret did, demands of Richard permission to speak – ‘O let me speak! / [...] I will be mild and gentle in my words’ (4.4.160-1) – remembering the earlier ‘O let me make the period to my curse’ (1.3.236). In production, the Duchess like Margaret is occasionally blocked in such a way as to stand separate and apart from the play’s other, younger female characters, emphasising her distinction in age. Sam Mendes staged her ‘Accursed and unquiet wrangling days, / How many of you have mine eyes beheld?’ as a soliloquy in 1992, framing her as engaged, like Margaret, in a lonely reckoning with history and memory.

In every moment of performance a problematic disappearing act takes place. Performance vanishes even as it is experienced, leaving archivists, students of performance, and theatre historians with the tricky task of trying to assemble and define something of the performance’s meaning and its lasting impact. Rather than bemoan the impossibility of ever fully recapturing the entirety of a moment of performance, Aleksandra Wolska has sought to understand theatre as ‘an art of becoming’.<sup>35</sup> For Wolska, performance lives on in its material relics (including the bodies of actors), relics which bear the marks and memories of the performance in their wakes.<sup>36</sup> Below, I consider Margaret’s collection and utilisation of the materials and relics of past performances across recent productions as she speaks her memories. In *Richard III*, the ‘art of becoming’ staged by the Duchess is that of the articulation of her character in a form which increasingly approximates Margaret’s own as the play proceeds. One performance of grief and memory remembers another; both elderly women become the ‘poor mortal living ghosts’ of the Duchess’s lamentation, their histories haunting the play. Their ages embody and remember the pasts they have borne witness to, as they memorialise past brutalities and predict the play’s inevitable conclusion: ‘Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end’ (4.4.195).

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<sup>35</sup> Wolska, pp. 83-5.

<sup>36</sup> On this, see also Hodgdon, ‘Shopping in the archives’.

Much of the memory-work in *Richard III* is conducted through the two elderly women's, and in particular Margaret's, use of ritualistic curses, curses which at once recall past events and anticipate future revenges.<sup>37</sup> The cursing of the aged Margaret in part unleashes the events of *Richard III*, the play affording supernaturalism an agency equal to that of Richard's machinations; her threats set in motion a pattern of destruction which cleanses Richard's England and readies it for Richmond's eventual conquest.<sup>38</sup> 1.3 initiates Margaret's ritualistic curse-work, the old woman weaving invocations through her articulation of memory; remembrance and cursing collaborate in her first two lines in her response to Queen Elizabeth's statement of her 'Small joy' in being 'England's queen' (1.3.110): 'And lessened be that small, God I beseech him, / Thy honour, state, and seat is due to me' (1.3.111-2). Margaret achieves more in *Richard III* than an objective 'repetition of what thou hast marred' would suggest, shaping the play's future through her curses, many of which hit their mark over the course of a staging: 'Though not by war, by surfeit die your king' (1.3.194); 'Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales, / [...] Die in his youth' (1.3.195-7); 'Thyself, a queen, for me that was a queen, / Outlive thy glory like my wretched self' (1.3.199-200); 'God I pray him, / That none of you may live his natural age'. Addressing Richard at last – 'Stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me' (1.3.213) – her curses reach their apex:

The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul.  
 Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st,  
 And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends.  
 No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,

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<sup>37</sup> Associating Margaret's curses with the early modern practice of purposeful repetition she engages in, Alexander Leggatt notes that Margaret's 'cycle of cursing involves keeping the past alive' (p. 45).

<sup>38</sup> See Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) in which she argues for Margaret and the other women of the play as working to establish a male successor to Richard (see especially pp. 104-5).

Unless it be while some tormenting dream  
 Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils.  
 (1.3.219-224)

Even this last, lengthy, finely-detailed curse is borne out in the fifth act as Richard is abandoned by Stanley and visited in his sleep by the ghosts of his victims, damning him to defeat in battle with Richmond the following morning at Bosworth.

Many recent productions of *Richard III* have found magic to be the best explanation for the success of much of Margaret's cursing, explicitly performing 1.3 as an instance of witchcraft, perhaps part-prompted by Richard's 'Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?' and his 'Have done thy charm, thou hateful withered hag'. Sean Holmes's 2003 production had Sheila Reid draw an invisible magic circle with her gnarled stick before beginning to curse; the thin walking stick was used like a wand or staff to aid the delivery of her 'charm'. Sam Mendes's 1992 production had a doddering Cherry Morris cast a circle in 1.3, this time of sand, drawn around the table at which the court sat. The slow beating of a drum and the dimming of stage lights demanded that the audience acknowledge the magic at work in the curses; the spell was broken when the lights snapped back to full strength and the drumming ceased at Richard's 'Margaret' at 1.3.231. The object of each of Margaret's execrations swayed and crumpled to the stage floor as they fell under her influence in Pimlott's 1995 production, deeply malevolent music again playing heavily on an obvious supernaturalism. Not every *Richard III*, but most, find witchcraft in the curses of the aged Margaret: Richard Eyre's 1990 production featured Susan Engel as Margaret 'hold[ing] out a crucifix as she walks round laying her curses on the guests' during what was framed as Elizabeth's 1.3 dinner party, suggesting her corrupted faith or black magic.<sup>39</sup> Dark religious symbolism was again at play in Mendes's 2011 production, with Gemma

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Playing the field', *Independent*, 27 July 1990.

Jones's Margaret marking a series of wooden doors with crosses as each curse was fulfilled.

The interaction of magic and memory in *Richard III* is complex. As she performs magic, Margaret remembers; remembering, she shapes history forward, while concurrently performing memories of the *Henry VI* plays, in which magical women – Joan of Arc, Margery Jordan – played powerful, pivotal roles. Like Margaret, the Duchess, too, learns to deliver her memories in a witchy way. Speaking her last lines of the play, the Duchess takes up Margaret's vocabulary of curses, calling down 'God's just ordinance' (4.4.184) on her son.

[...] take with thee my most heavy curse,  
 Which in the day of battle tire thee more  
 Then all the complete armour that thou wear'st.  
 My prayers on the adverse party fight,  
 And there the little souls of Edward's children  
 Whisper the spirits of thine enemies,  
 And promise them success and victory.  
 (4.4.187-94)

Her curse's eventual fulfilment, like her premonition of the ghosts' appearing to Richmond to 'promise [him] success and victory' in 5.3, confirms her Margaret-like state. Margaret speaks her memory project in a rich register of curses seemingly invested with supernatural power. Like the Queen, the Duchess's curses ultimately achieve a magical authority: in performance, Richard 'shakes like someone who has been cut to the core' on finding himself in receipt of her malediction.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Taylor, 'When a king gets the hump', *Independent*, 28 July 2003.

In *Richard III*, then, the workings of memory are entrusted to elderly women, their age lending them an authority in recollection which seems to run counter to Gratarolo's claim that 'forgetfulness is the daughter of coldenes'. Forgetfulness in old age nonetheless plays a part in the women's remembering: Margaret is troubled by what she forgets and is challenged in *Richard III* by other competing rememberers, most notably Richard himself. An incident from Holmes's 2003 production illustrates the threat Richard poses to Margaret's recollections. Interrupting her remembering with a memory of his own, Richard invokes 'The curse my noble father laid on thee – / When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper' (1.3.171-2), describing how '[thou] gav'st the Duke a clout / Steeped in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland' (1.3.174-5). Proclaiming his father's curses to be 'all fall'n upon thee' (1.3.177), Henry Goodman pulled from his pocket a blood-soaked handkerchief. Holding it aloft, Goodman's Richard proclaimed himself to be a keeper and collator of *Richard III's* 3 *Henry VI* history, dangerously undermining Margaret's memorial authority.

The battle between Richard and Margaret for ownership over *Richard III's* memories spans productions. In interview, Tony Bell indicated the ways in which he and Richard Clothier, playing Margaret and Richard respectively in *Richard III*, embodied their company's past as its two oldest, longest-serving actors. Bell understood his performed encounters with Clothier as, in part, a 'battle for stage space' and theatrical ascendancy, declaring his Margaret to be 'a match for Richard'. Bell's account of the theatrical antagonism at work between the performing actors speaks to the struggle for memorial completeness and authority at work in *Richard III* between the play's oldest women and Richard himself. The sense of the play and its old women as being haunted by alternative, unwelcome memories is most clearly demonstrated in 1.3, Richard announcing himself as a competing rememberer soon after Margaret delivers her first line: "'Tis time to speak; my

pains are quite forgot' (1.3.117). Margaret's series of asides – 'A murd'rous villain, and so still thou art'; 'Which God revenge!' (1.3.137); 'High thee to hell for shame' (1.3.143) – are spoken in response to Richard's memories; his speech of recollection may be fractured and undermined by Margaret's interjections, yet his remembrance remains, speaking back to the old woman's mnemonic role and threatening unruly disorder to her careful historiography. Margaret's claims to the throne, made with reference to crimes committed in the play's past, are quickly replied to by Richard's rival memories:

*Margaret*      This sorrow that I have by right is yours,  
                          And all the pleasures you usurp are mine.

*Richard*        The curse my noble father laid on thee –  
                          When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper,  
                          And with thy scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes [...]

(1.3.169-173)

Richard's response is strengthened by the supporting recollections of Hastings, Rivers, Dorset, and Buckingham, each of whom strikes a blow at what begins to emerge as Margaret's uncomfortably politic and subjective remembering:

*Hastings*        O, 'twas the foulest deed to slay that babe,  
                          And the most merciless that e'er was heard of.

*Rivers*            Tyrants themselves wept when it was reported.

*Dorset*            No man but prophesied revenge for it.

*Buckingham*    Northumberland, then present, wept to see it.

(1.3.180-4)

Margaret's response to the challenge of the events evoked by Richard and forgotten by her is to deliver her lengthy speech of curse-memories, silencing the assembled court with the force of her rhetoric. Even here, however, she is haunted by Richard, her project of remembering the past and shaping the future interrupted by him:

*Margaret*     [...] Thou rag of honour, thou detested –  
*Richard*        Margaret.

Troubling Margaret's efforts to remember the past and speak future histories, alongside the threats posed to her preferred memories, is the failure of some of her curses. Among her most forceful is her wish that Queen Elizabeth should 'Die, neither mother, wife, nor England's queen'; the subsequent survival of Elizabeth's daughter to forge a union of peace in her marriage to Richmond ensures that this curse is only imperfectly realised. A succeeding curse, directed at 'Rivers and Dorset' in the hope that 'none of you may live his natural age', fails to dispose of Dorset who survives to fight on the side of Richmond in the fifth act and is not said to be among the 'men of name' (5.5.12) killed in the battle. 1.3 is not the only location in which Margaret's memory finds itself worried by the unavoidable ghosts of its own forgetfulness and the alternative memories posed by others. In 4.4, as we have seen, the Duchess of York achieves a Margaret-like state, at one point challenging the old queen's now-revenged reminiscences of *Henry VI* horrors with memories of her own: 'I had a Richard too, and thou did'st kill him; / I had a Rutland too, thou holpst to kill him' (4.4.44-5). Margaret's response is sharp and fast: 'Thou hadst a Clarence too, and Richard killed him. / From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept / A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death' (4.4.46). Here the old women turn on each other, one calling forth an alternative, excessive set of memories to disturb the narrative of the other, and in doing so

threatening the veneer of authority in memory that the play has furnished both of them with.

Performance, too, has challenged Margaret's remembrance, involving other characters in chronicling of the events of past plays. Henry Goodman's use of the bloodied handkerchief as an artefact of history is one example, discussed above; W. Stephen Gilbert called attention to a different yet interesting feature of Elijah Moshinsky's *Richard III* when he noted that 'The Yorkists speak with a Northern brogue'.<sup>41</sup> Gilbert understood the effect of accent primarily to bear upon class in Moshinsky's production. In my reading, however, the use of accent to distinguish between rival court factions speaks to the play's prehistory of Lancastrian-Yorkist strife. Anna Carteret's French accent as Margaret operated outside this dynamic. While it recalled the old queen's French roots and hence, subtly, her *I Henry VI* association with Joan of Arc, Carteret's accent did not allow her to locate herself in relation to the play's Wars of the Roses history to the same extent as did Robert Lindsay's 'Northern brogue' as Richard, undermining her memorial function while defining her as an outsider in this court. Michael Boyd's four productions posed the most serious of recent performative challenges to Margaret as chief chronicler, the director emphasising the presence of ghostly memories and reincarnations of earlier incidents across each play. Boyd's stages were visited by the ghosts of the dead: 'Actors did not just play two roles; they played their second role still dressed as the ghost of a previous character'.<sup>42</sup> Not all of Boyd's revenants immediately took up new roles, instead quietly haunting the unfolding performances: for Alastair Macaulay, 'these slow-pacing livid shades [kept] making us hear

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<sup>41</sup> W. Stephen Gilbert, 'Theatre: Richard III', *Daily Express*, 31 October 1998. Productions of *Richard III* by Northern Broadsides, in which all actors performed in their natural Northern accents, have not had the same distinguishing effect; instead, they have functioned to '[reclaim] Shakespeare in a piece of cultural annexation that reappropriated high culture and its geographical polarity'. Holland, *English Shakespeares*, p. 152.

<sup>42</sup> Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, p. 194.

how much the plays speak of those who have died and, notably, have been killed'.<sup>43</sup> Boyd's ghosts usurped Margaret's role as rememberer and exceeded her efforts to contain the play's histories within her practised narrative. Props were also used in Boyd's productions to materialise memory: dying, Richard produced the same stones which his father, as Duke of York, had earlier utilised to demonstrate his claim to the English throne.<sup>44</sup> Under threat in recent performances as in the text of *Richard III*, then, the old woman remains an imperfect repository of history.

While the ghosts haunting Margaret's memories are real and do much to disturb our confidence in her remembering, it remains nonetheless true that Margaret is the most vociferous narrator of history in *Richard III* and its most reliable rememberer, shades of her character having borne witness across four plays to the greatest number of past events. When challenged, her response – the articulation of further memories, layered on top of her earlier recollections – always serves to silence her attackers, the onslaught of her practised memories proving sufficient to quiet those who would threaten her authority. Even the barrage of remembrance introduced by Richard and bolstered by Hastings, Rivers, Dorset, and Buckingham in 1.3 is suppressed by Margaret's quick and expansive response:

What? Were you snarling all before I came,  
 Ready to catch each other by the throat,  
 And turn you all your hatred now on me?  
 Did Yorks dread curse prevail so much with heaven,  
 That Henry's death, my lovely Edward's death,  
 Their kingdom's loss, my woeful banishment,  
 Should all but answer for that peevish brat?  
 (1.3.185-91)

<sup>43</sup> Alastair Macaulay, 'Henry VI Parts 1, 2, and 3', *Financial Times*, 11 August 2006.

<sup>44</sup> Noted by Michael Billington, 'Henry VI/Richard III', *Guardian*, 27 April 2001.

She continues, the court now silenced, for a further twenty lines before Richard's eventual interruption. Even a series of productions such as Boyd's chose to place the old Margaret of *Richard III* at the heart of the processes of memory worked out across the plays: Michael Billington understood Fiona Bell's performance of Margaret in 1.3 to be the 'most extraordinary expression' of Boyd's aesthetic of ghostly remembrance.<sup>45</sup> Again, for Alastair Macaulay, 'Boyd's masterstroke comes in having the same actor play both Joan of Arc and Henry VI's wife Margaret'.<sup>46</sup> Margaret's authority in memory is shaken in *Richard III*, attention called to its lacunae and age-related absences, yet it is never wholly displaced.

3 *Henry VI*'s Richard complained that Margaret ought not to be allowed 'live to fill the world with words' (5.5.42). Both the Margaret depicted in *Richard III* and the play's Duchess of York do indeed live to fill the play with spoken memories, as we have seen. Memory resides in objects as much as words, however; theatre archives of staged plays contain more than texts, storing old costumes and props alongside their documents, programmes, prompt books, and newspaper reviews. Delivering his memory in response to Margaret's, Henry Goodman's Richard employed a bloodied handkerchief. To a greater extent than Richard, however, Margaret has served across recent productions as an archivist of theatre history, materialising memory by bringing on stage with her objects which bear a freight of meaning.

Working in the RSC archives, Barbara Hodgdon has used costume to trace the movement of performative memory across productions and between actors.<sup>47</sup> Objects on stage and held in the archives remember the events which occurred within a performance and, as Hodgdon demonstrates, occasionally reach into a production's prehistory to

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Billington, 'Richard III', *Guardian*, 24 January 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Macaulay, 'Henry VI'.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, 'Shopping in the archives'.

remember other performances, other actors, and other plays. Recent productions of *Richard III* have costumed the elderly Margaret in such a way as to remember her earlier, militant *Henry VI* incarnations: Sheila Reid wore Victorian dress in Sean Holmes's distinctly Edwardian production, her bustle, like her unbuttoned soldier's jacket, marking her as a relic of a warlike past and insinuating the history behind the stand-alone production.<sup>48</sup> Steven Pimlott's production had Cherry Morris enter 1.3 in full mourning, veiled and dressed in black, her costume attesting to the deaths which had taken place prior to the play's beginning. As this stand-alone *Richard III* proceeded, the Duchess and Queen Elizabeth too donned mourning, all three women presenting in identical costume in 4.4. Each woman archived her history of grief; by making painfully clear the association between untimely death, grief, and the garments of mourning, Pimlott's 4.4 shone a light backwards on Margaret's 1.3 appearance, remembering both the earlier scene and the character's inferred past. Tony Bell admitted (despite his sense of Propeller's *Richard III* as a 'stand-alone production') that the Queen's militancy – Margaret as 'warrior-woman' – had played on his mind: his Margaret wore a red rose, symbol of Lancastrian history, in her hat.<sup>49</sup>

Productions of *Richard III* following stagings of the *Henry VI* plays have used effects of costume in a similar way, as a means of having Margaret carry or wear on her person the play's, and the productions', pasts. Michael Boyd's *Richard III* had Fiona Bell and Katy Stephens as Margaret wear the same long, black gown of mourning as was worn in *Henry VI Part 2* and *Part 3*, the garment registering the passage of time in its dirty, damaged state. Boyd's production, like other 'serial' and stand-alone productions of the

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<sup>48</sup> Dominic Cavendish noted of Holmes's production that '[w]e're in an Edwardian playhouse', Michael Billington describing a 'would-be civilised Edwardian court'. Dominic Cavendish, 'Lurching from brilliance to battiness', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 2003  
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3599280/Lurching-from-brilliance-to-battiness.html>>; Michael Billington, 'Richard III', *Guardian*, 28 July 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Tony Bell.

plays, however, also found Margaret's project of remembrance to benefit from having a prop on stage as a mnemonic aid. In 2001 and 2007 Boyd had the *Richard III* Margaret carry a tattered bag with her. Having cast some grains of sand about in 2001 as she cursed the court, Fiona Bell waited to address Richard before emptying the bag on to the centre of the stage at 'thou shalt hear me'.<sup>50</sup> The bag was revealed to contain the rotting bones of Prince Edward, a 'grisly set of relics' of the son 'stabbed with bloody daggers' at the conclusion of *3 Henry VI*.<sup>51</sup> As the other cast members present on stage moved away in horror – 'All scatter out away from bones' – this Margaret found herself alone at the centre of the stage, all attention focused on her as she began slowly to assemble the bones into a



*Figure 4:* Katy Stephens as Margaret clutching the assembled skeleton of her son in 2007. Image is from <[http://hopeparkerson.blogspot.com/2008\\_05\\_01\\_archive.htm](http://hopeparkerson.blogspot.com/2008_05_01_archive.htm)> [Accessed 25 January 2011]. Production photograph by Ellie Kurtz (2007).

<sup>50</sup> The detail of the sand was removed for the 2007 performance.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Richard III', *Independent*, 25 January 2007 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/richard-iii-courtyard-theatre-stratforduponavon--none-onestar-twostar-threestar-fourstar-fivestar-433609.html>>.

recognisable skeleton while delivering her curses.<sup>52</sup> The body of the dead Edward (so frequently invoked throughout the scene in Margaret's language) thus was realised on the stage, temporarily installed as a museum piece lovingly curated by the Queen. For Paul Taylor, the performance 'transmit[ed] a creepy sense that the past will not be buried'.<sup>53</sup> For Michael Billington, this piece of stage business was 'the most extraordinary expression' of 'the secret of Boyd's production [...]. He never lets us forget that [*Richard III*] is not an isolated melodrama but is rooted in the Roses rivalry'.<sup>54</sup>

A second recent example from performance further demonstrates the audience impact that Margaret's archiving of the props of history has had. Barry Kyle's 2003 Globe *Richard III* played up humour, the audience laughing loudly at Kathryn Hunter's description of Linda Bassett's Margaret as a 'foul wrinkled witch'.<sup>55</sup> All laughter ceased, however, once Bassett unfolded the rag she had carried on entering 1.3. Utilised by Bassett throughout the scene as a substitute for the presence of the history she referenced – at 'Edward my son' (1.3.197), for instance, she gestured with the still-folded prop towards Yolanda Vazquez's Queen Elizabeth – the material eventually was revealed to be Edward's bloodied tunic, held aloft as a long-nursed token of grief at 'Witness my son' (1.3.265). This audience recognised something of weight in the presentation of the tunic and the articulation of Margaret's devastation: the power of the prop and the emotional performance of memory it supported was made clear when they burst into a spontaneous round of applause as Bassett stalked off the stage at her condemnation of 'all of you to God's [hate]' (1.3.302).

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<sup>52</sup> The cast reaction was recorded in the prompt book, archived at SCLA, catalogue number RSC/SM/1/2006/RI31.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, 'Richard III'.

<sup>54</sup> 'Richard III', 2007.

<sup>55</sup> A DVD of the performance to which I refer is available in the archives at SGLA.

Through the use of props and costumes, recent Margarets have materialised in performance the project of remembrance which the character carries out across the text of *Richard III*. Brian Walsh has conducted a reading of 5.3, the scene in which the spirits of Richard's victims appear to both Richard and Richmond as they sleep, remembering the Duchess's prayer as they promise victory in the following day's battle to Richmond and a despairing death to the tyrannical King.<sup>56</sup> For Walsh, writing on the meaning of the play as performed on the early modern stage, *Richard III*'s ghosts serve to embody history, rendering it physical, visible, and ultimately theatrical, serving as a consciously circumscribed 'visual and auditory version of the past'.<sup>57</sup> The stage properties used by recent Margarets to represent the bodies of the dead do something similar today, symbolising and embodying the past to which Margaret refers. Carol Rutter has demonstrated the potential for stage objects, including bones, to remember beyond themselves into a play's inferred past and imagined future.<sup>58</sup> Rutter's objects carry with them the stories of past events and serve to generate visions of possible future performances. In this way, Margaret's bone-work fixates an audience, pulling onlookers into *Richard III*'s past and staging a rehearsal of the court's future in death. Bearing skulls, bones, heads, and bloodied tunics in her wake, Margaret curates imagined and staged pasts.

Carrying death with her, both in the props she conveys around the stage and in her physically aged state, the old woman in *Richard III* cannot help but body forth the play's memories. Concurrently, as we have seen, the gaps in her remembrance serve to undermine her, revealing her to be a somewhat untrustworthy narrator of history and unreliable keeper of the past. The play's movement to enact and contain history and memory through the

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<sup>56</sup> Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 139-77.

<sup>57</sup> Walsh, p. 156. Walsh argues that the staged ghosts further embody the early modern sense of history as theatrically constructed (and hence unreliable).

<sup>58</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, "'Her first remembrance from the Moor': actors and the materials of memory", in *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance*, pp. 168-206.

figure of an old woman thus is tensely realised; this tension is mirrored, as I will now demonstrate, in the play's efforts to forget the old woman and, at the same time, its insistence on remembering her.

Margaret's retirement from the play is as sudden as her 1.3 appearance was anachronistic. Remembering Richard's revelation of 'Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous' (1.1.32), her soliloquised announcement that 'Here in these confines slyly have I lurked, / [...] A dire induction am I witness to' (4.4.3-5) is succeeded by her statement that she 'will to France, hoping the consequence / Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical' (4.4.6-7). Exiting 4.4 having installed Queen Elizabeth as her successor in cursing –

Now thy proud neck bears half my burdened yoke –  
 From which, even here, I slip my weary head,  
 And leave the burden of it all on thee.  
 (4.4.111-3)

– Margaret declares herself redundant as chronicler of the *Richard III* court: 'These English woes shall make me smile in France' (4.4.115). The Q and F texts of the play script no further appearances for Margaret once she exits at 4.4.125, her promise of retreat apparently kept. The Duchess, too, suddenly absents herself from *Richard III* following 4.4, concluding her role with a powerful maternal condemnation delivered to her son: 'Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end; / Shame serves thy life, and doth thy death attend' (4.4.195-6). The play thus moves to forget its elderly female characters following the conclusion of the fourth act, fulfilling the curses of Margaret and the Duchess in their absence. Paige Martin Reynolds has noted that the departures of all female characters from

*Richard III* take place only ‘once the dead are able to speak for themselves’.<sup>59</sup> By arguing for the ghosts’ appearance to the sleeping Richard in 5.3 as embodying the remembrance conducted by women earlier in the play, however, Reynolds’s argument indicates that the vanishing of the play’s female characters – their containment – is incompletely effected. As we have seen, the elderly women’s memories speak the play forward as well as remembering it backwards; Margaret’s recollections and curses are quoted in her absence, even in the fifth act following her apparent departure. The effort made by the written play to forget Margaret is unconvincing, her presence sustained; in recent performances, too, the play has proven unwilling to let the old queen go.<sup>60</sup>

Although Margaret vanishes from the text after 4.4, the play insists on her lasting influence, memory, and power across *Richard III* to its closing moments. Many recent productions of *Richard III* have chosen to extend the sense of Margaret as custodian of the play’s memories by having her appear in scenes in which she was not originally written as being present. The choice tends to be made in the light of Margaret’s cursing; the Queen’s return, at unlooked-for moments, serves as a performative device underlining the enactment of cosmic justice. Steven Pimlott’s 1995 production, for instance, had Margaret stroll unseen past Hastings, unsuspecting of his own impending doom, as he gloated that ‘This day those enemies are put to death’ (3.2.99). For Peter Holland, this Margaret ‘became the

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<sup>59</sup> Reynolds, p. 24. Reynolds’s reading has the female characters embody a specifically post-Reformation, Protestant gendering of mourning, the *Richard III* women’s mourning ‘maintain[ing] the memory of the dead’ (p. 20); the women’s disappearance, completed by Elizabeth’s final exit at 4.4.361, is succeeded by the 5.3 animation of the spirits of Richard’s victims, rendering their mourning/memory roles no longer necessary in her argument. On the disappearing women of *Richard III*, see also Levine, and Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*.

<sup>60</sup> There is an earlier performance history of *Richard III* in which Margaret in particular suffers from heavy cutting: see *Richard III*, ed. Jowett, p. 85, for three influential productions which excised her role completely, and see Hugh M. Richmond, *King Richard III, Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) for a more extended account. On cuts to the women’s roles see Rackin and Howard, *Engendering a Nation*, pp. 25-6; Knowles, ‘Encoding/Decoding Shakespeare’ (pp. 313-4); Randall Martin, p. 323; and Marliss C. Desens, ‘Cutting Women Down to Size in the Olivier and Loncraine Films of *Richard III*’, in *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes*, ed. Grace Ioppolo (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), pp. 260-72.

play's memory of the longer sweep of history'.<sup>61</sup> Sam Mendes's 1992 production had gone further, having Cherry Morris as Margaret appear onstage as each target of her curses met his fate; nineteen years later, in 2011, Mendes's Old Vic production had Gemma Jones reappear to mark crosses on the row of doors which formed the stage wall as each black prayer was answered. Morris was regularly visible standing in a doorway above the stage in the earlier production, intoning snatches of her curses as each victim faced death; the fifth act had Margaret present above once more, observing the fulfilment of Richard's doom. She descended to appear before the battling Richard in 5.5, 'distracting him and precipitating his death', remembering for the audience and for the King her promise of heaven's 'grievous plague', to be 'hurle[d] down' when his 'sins be ripe' (1.3.214-7).<sup>62</sup> According to one reviewer, 'this Richard is shown to be on the point of winning the final hand-to-hand combat, until Margaret wanders in, mesmerises him and seals his doom'.<sup>63</sup> Morris's was a performance which denied the Queen's supposed return to France and ensured that the tropes of her remembering and her causing things to happen were seen through to the production's end. Richard Eyre's 1990 production, too, had Margaret's physical presence exert influence in the fifth act: Susan Engel as Margaret, 'now eerily rejuvenated, perambulates Richard's nightmare on the eve of Bosworth Field, still parading the crucifix and now laughing in silent demented triumph'.<sup>64</sup> Engel's Margaret was never as old in Eyre's *Richard III* as Joyce Redman's Duchess, performing ageing madness in contrast to Redman's wrinkled, bent, elderly woman. Here, 'rejuvenated', she waxed younger as Richard approached death.

Margaret's unscripted returns to remember and bear witness to the unfolding of the play's tragic 'consequence' have been received so positively in recent times that one critic

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<sup>61</sup> Holland, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 1994-5', p. 260.

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, 'Spiderman Richard rises above a web of intrigue', *Evening Standard*, 12 August 1992.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Taylor, 'King of comedy', *Independent*, 13 August 1992.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, 'Playing the field'.

bemoaned a director's failure to code her uncanny power in this way: 'As the number of Richard's victims mount, [Elijah Moshinsky's] production disappointingly does nothing to underline visually how they are part of the same pattern: the stealthy fulfilment of Queen Margaret's prophetic curses'.<sup>65</sup> Moshinsky's compromise was to stage Margaret's sudden reappearance in the play's final moments, having her observe Richmond's crowning and proclamation of peace from a standing position while the other actors knelt. Anna Carteret's silent observance at the edge of the stage marked her out as separate and apart from the reverent English, a spectator of history rather than a partaker in it. Richmond's self-mythologising in the play's final moments – 'God and your arms be praised, victorious friends!' (5.7.1); 'We will unite the white rose and the red' (5.5.19) – suffered from Margaret's presence; watching, one wondered whether the aged Queen had further memories to speak in contradiction to Richmond's remembering forward to 'the time to come' (5.7.33). The return of Carteret's Margaret not only called attention to her preternatural capacity to shape the unfolding and interpretation of the play's events ('a prophetess finally seeing her dreams realised'), but served to destabilise what Benedict Nightingale had claimed, in a review of Mendes's 1992 production, to be the 'moral and religious logic' at work in the play.<sup>66</sup> The meaning of this production, finally, resided in the ancient Queen.

John Peter disapproved of Moshinsky's staging. His discomfort with Margaret's return – 'no other director would bring on this great villainness of the early history plays to glory with us in Richard's defeat' – found its basis in a memory taken from the *Henry VI* plays and, seemingly, in memories of other Moshinsky productions.<sup>67</sup> As such, disputing

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Ugly discontent – why, that will do nicely, sir', *Independent*, 30 October 1998.

<sup>66</sup> Liz Burcher, 'A citizen determined to be king', *Stratford Herald*, 29 October 1998; Benedict Nightingale, 'Rise and fall of a depraved clown', *The Times*, 13 August 1992.

<sup>67</sup> John Peter, 'Shadow of a king', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 1 November 1998. In response to Peter it is worth reminding the reader that Moshinsky's was a stand-alone *Richard III*.

the performance of Margaret as rememberer, Peter's review continued the old Queen's memory work. In present-day performance Margaret's memory-function has come to exceed the play itself; her status as an archive of productions, plays, and even props reaches outward into broader public spheres.

Demonstrating yet again the difficulty many newspaper critics apparently experience with the figure of the old and ageing woman on today's Shakespearean stages, reviews of *Richard III*s by Michael Billington, Nicholas de Jongh, Charles Spencer, Quentin Letts, Benedict Nightingale, and Paul Taylor have all neglected to assess the play's old women characters, performances of Margaret in particular being met with silence.<sup>68</sup> Alastair Macaulay's review of Michael Boyd's *1, 2, and 3 Henry VI* paid significant attention to the younger Margaret, yet his later review of Boyd's *Richard III* lacked any mention of the older character.<sup>69</sup> Despite this frequent oblivion in critical reviews of the play in production, however, Margaret's legacy of memory continues to unfold as theatre critics today often remember performances of *Richard III*, and of Richard, through her language. De Jongh criticised Henry Goodman's Richard as 'more loudly buzzing housefly than hideous "bottled spider" or "bunch-backed toad"'; he repeated his description of Richard as a 'bottled spider' in 2007.<sup>70</sup> Both phrases reference Margaret's 1.3 execrations. The same year, the *Daily Mail*'s Quentin Letts referred to Richard as a 'bloody dog' (remembering Margaret through Richmond), despite neither he nor de Jongh having mentioned Cherry Morris's old Queen in their pieces.<sup>71</sup> In 2011, reviewing Mendes's

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<sup>68</sup> Billington, 'Richard III', 2003; Nicholas de Jongh, 'Richard III', *Evening Standard*, 24 January 2007; Charles Spencer, 'A Richard stuck in the past', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 October 1998; Quentin Letts, 'Richard III', *Daily Mail*, 24 January 2007; Quentin Letts, 'Richard III: Showmanship supreme, but, alas, Spacey is hardly Olivier', *Daily Mail*, 30 June 2011 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2009719/RICHARD-III-Showmanship-supreme-alas-Spacey-hardly-Olivier.html>>; Benedict Nightingale, 'Richard III', *The Times*, 25 January 2007; Taylor, 'When a king gets the hump'.

<sup>69</sup> Macaulay, 'Henry VI'; Alastair Macaulay, 'Richard III', *Financial Times*, 25 January 2007.

<sup>70</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, 'Richard III, the evil-lite version', *Evening Standard*, 24 July 2003; de Jongh, 'Richard III', 2007.

<sup>71</sup> Letts, 'Richard III'.

*Richard III*, Letts again lacked a mention of Gemma Jones's Margaret; despite this, he wrote that 'There is much to admire, not least the curse-fest of the language – Richard is a "bottled spider", a "hedgehog", a "poisonous bunch-backed toad", an "elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog"'.<sup>72</sup> All but 'hedgehog', delivered by Anne at 1.2.101, are words derived from the 1.3 Margaret. Charles Spencer, too, in his review which neglected to discuss Margaret, noted of Robert Lindsay's Richard that 'We get the "poisonous bunch-backed toad" look all right, with a face of horrid pallor, a disgustingly withered hand strapped up with leather, and a full, old-fashioned hump'.<sup>73</sup> Elaine Williams remembered Margaret even as she neglected to account for her performance, as she recalled Northern Broadsides's Conrad Nelson 'as the "spider", the "bunch-backed toad"'.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, while Christopher Hart did succeed in acknowledging Katy Stephens's 'fantastically witchy' Margaret, he too re-spoke her language to describe Jonathan Slinger's 'performance of "this poisonous, bunch-back'd toad"' as 'not so much toad or scheming spider as an eager puppy'.<sup>75</sup> In newspaper reviews, now residing in the theatre archives at Stratford and London, the play continues to be chronicled through Margaret. The lasting effect of Margaret's language on theatrical memories of *Richard III* is clear in the performance space: we not only remember Richard through Margaret but, as productions such as those directed by Sam Mendes, Steven Pimlott, Barry Kyle, and Bill Alexander for the RSC have shown, we imagine and perform Richard's physicality through Margaret's account of him as 'bunch-backed' and 'spider', Antony Sher in particular having played an arachnid Richard, supplementing his legs with four crutches to lend himself a spider-like

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<sup>72</sup> Letts, 'Showmanship supreme'.

<sup>73</sup> Spencer, 'A Richard stuck in the past'.

<sup>74</sup> Elaine Williams, 'Plain speaking', *Times Educational Supplement*, 12 May 2006.

<sup>75</sup> Hart, 'Richard III'.

appearance.<sup>76</sup> Margaret's language of memory, her curses, predictions, and execrations stick in the mind. Remembering forwards, she shapes productions yet to come even as she memorialises incidents, plays, and productions already past.

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Across the written and performed *Richard III*, Margaret and the Duchess's statuses as witnesses to and rememberers of the play's past is established and maintained, the play refusing, despite its occasional hesitation, to forget its old women. A project of historical containment and control, something which we have seen at work across each of the ageing female characters studied by this thesis, is enacted by the play through the elderly Margaret in particular. Like history itself, Margaret is haunted by the ghosts of those memories she has chosen to omit from her record, unacknowledged gaps in her remembrance shadowing her excessive years and speech. As problematic an historian as she proves, however, the play tersely insists upon her as the linchpin of the memory-project it stages. While her lines have been cut in performance and her significance often overlooked by reviewers, Margaret demands to be heard, returning unexpectedly to haunt the play's later scenes, practising and repeating her memories, figuring her lasting control over events through a performance of witchcraft, and narrating our present-day public image of the crippled king. It is to the old woman as repository of memory, 'abstract and record', finally, that we have entrusted our Shakespeare. Her insistent, urgent, yet still problematised presence across the

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<sup>76</sup> *Richard III*, dir. Bill Alexander (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1984). Simon Russell Beale, Kevin Spacey, David Troughton, and Kathryn Hunter each also played a humped or physically twisted Richard in accordance with Margaret's descriptions.

play and its afterlife in many ways parallels the position of the anxiety-inducing yet tenaciously present old female character across today's performed Shakespeare as a whole.

## *Conclusion*

This thesis has conducted a study of Shakespeare's old and ageing female characters as written, performed, and received in early modern and present-day England. It has aimed to recover a sense of the old woman's place and function in Shakespearean drama, and of her treatment on today's stages. At all points in the thesis the question of the work now being carried out by Shakespeare's ageing women has been key: how do we respond to the older female characters today, and how do we use them to speak our present-day ideas about female ageing? Frequently, I have found the concerns and anxieties associated with ageing women in early modern England to be re-performed in present-day theatres and written anew in the public sphere of newspaper criticism today.

Across the plays considered by the thesis, old women have been thought to be unruly and unruly women have been presumed old. The old woman's surfeit of years has been figured in her excessive body, power, speech, and sexuality; the written and performed plays in which she features have insisted on the containment of that excess, silencing the character, condemning her, punishing her, and attempting to hide her from view. The second chapter found magic, which would seem to afford the old woman a great deal of power on stage, to prove itself to be an instrument of containment. In the third chapter, I located in the old Shakespearean mother an early modern speech-prerogative which was responded to in the plays and their performances with anxiety and silence. The fourth chapter explored the plays' uneasy representation of the sexuality of ageing women and the fraught responses to that sexuality generated in today's performances and receptions. The work of suppressing the ageing woman carried out by the written, performed, and received plays has not been conducted without struggle, however. As I

demonstrated in the fifth chapter, the power afforded the old woman as rememberer, however strained, figures the lasting irrepressibility of the ageing female character, her influence, and, increasingly, her resurgent visibility.

I want to use these concluding remarks to briefly consider the idea of visibility on today's Shakespearean stages. The thesis began by discussing Harriet Walter's 2006 and 2010 exhibitions of photographs, which were designed to call attention to what Walter perceived as a crisis in the visibility of ageing women in the theatre, one believed by Lyn Gardner to be reflected in the trend she identified for 'younger Gertrudes and Lady Macbeths'. Approaching visibility through a character recently played by Walter, *Much Ado About Nothing*'s Beatrice, I want in these final pages to ask two questions: what can the performance of an older Beatrice tell us about our present-day attitudes towards women's ageing as exercised through Shakespeare, and what can the very idea of an 'older Beatrice' reveal about the relationship between characters and actors on today's stages?

Beatrices traditionally have been performed as examples of sharply funny, vivacious, and youthful femininity: '[Peggy] Ashcroft [...] included touches of girlish freshness and gaucherie [in the role]'.<sup>1</sup> Described, like Eleanor, as an 'Ate' who 'speaks poniards', Beatrice is famous for her outspoken wit and long has been a popular character in performance; two major productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* were staged in London in 2011 alone.<sup>2</sup> In recent decades a shift has occurred in the performance of the character. Writing in 2003, Angela Stock identified a trend originating in the 1970s of Beatrices being played by actors 'considerably older than Hero and Claudio, even middle-

<sup>1</sup> *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. John F. Cox, Shakespeare in Production (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> *Much Ado About Nothing*, dir. Josie Rourke (London: Wyndham's Theatre, 2011); dir. Jeremy Herrin (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2011). A more recent production took place at the Old Vic in 2013: *Much Ado About Nothing*, dir. Mark Rylance (London: The Old Vic, 2013).

aged'.<sup>3</sup> Recent major productions have featured actors aged between forty (Eve Best performing at the Globe in 2011) and fifty-eight (Zoë Wanamaker at the National Theatre in 2007) in the role.<sup>4</sup> For critics reviewing these productions, as in the productions discussed in Chapter Four, the ages of the actors' bodies appear directly linked to the ages they infer the performed characters as being. Reviewing Wanamaker's performance, Charles Spencer remarked that 'the age of the actors actually adds to the pleasure and the point of the piece'.<sup>5</sup> For Carol Rutter the production, with its Beatrice and Benedick 'past middle age, thick in the waist and lumpy with emotional scar tissue', was 'glorious'.<sup>6</sup> Today's critics approve of these seemingly older Beatrices.

Productions which stage an older Beatrice would seem to be making a positive contribution to the visibility of the ageing woman in today's theatres by affording actors such as Walter a platform from which to remain visible in a romantic lead role into middle age. The choice of staging is not entirely spontaneous: lines such as 'What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?' (1.1.97), 'I thank God and my cold blood' (1.1.106-7), and 'I

<sup>3</sup> *Much Ado About Nothing: Updated Edition*, ed. F. H. Mares and updated Introduction by Angela Stock, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 55. The trend is thought by Stock and by Penny Gay (*Shakespeare's Unruly Women*, pp. 159-62) to have begun with productions directed by Ronald Eyre (1971) and John Barton (1976) which featured Elizabeth Spriggs aged forty-one and Judi Dench aged forty-two respectively playing Beatrice. *Much Ado About Nothing*, dir. Ronald Eyre (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1971); *Much Ado About Nothing*, dir. John Barton (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> *Much Ado About Nothing*, dir. Nicholas Hytner (London: The National Theatre [Olivier], 2007). Walter played the role in *Much Ado About Nothing*, dir. Gregory Doran (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2002). Catherine Tate was forty-three playing Beatrice at Wyndham's Theatre in 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Much Ado About Nothing: Happiness in the last chance saloon', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 December 2007 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3670024/Much-Ado-About-Nothing-Happiness-in-the-last-chance-saloon.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Shakespeare Performances in England (and Wales), 2008', *Shakespeare Survey*, 62 (2009), 349-85 (pp. 361-2). Since the first submission of this thesis, a *Much Ado About Nothing* has been staged at the Old Vic which featured Vanessa Redgrave and James Earl Jones as an elderly Beatrice and Benedick. Unlike the productions mentioned above, this *Much Ado* was poorly received, with critics using language such as 'appalling', 'hideous', and 'cruel and unusual punishment' to describe it. There was little agreement as to whether the ages of Beatrice and Benedick as performed contributed to the fiasco (while Charles Spencer wrote that it 'takes a bit of effort to accept a Beatrice who often seems like a mad old bat', for Michael Billington 'the general incompetence of the staging' was the primary culprit), yet in general the sense is that a limit has been reached with *Much Ados* beyond which an 'older' staging may no longer be found helpful or revelatory. *Much Ado*, dir. Rylance; Susannah Clapp, 'Much Ado About Nothing, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Herd', *Observer*, 21 September 2013; Charles Spencer, 'Much Ado About Nothing', *Telegraph*, 20 September 2013; Michael Billington, 'Much Ado About Nothing', *Guardian*, 20 September 2013.

know you of old' (1.1.118) could indicate Beatrice and Benedick to be a mature couple with a past. There is also a sense, however, of Beatrice's supposed age as finding its foundation in the character's unbridled speech – Stock, for instance, writes that 'her banter is not that of a girl'.<sup>7</sup> Responding to her unruly speaking – 'In faith, she's too curst' (2.1.18); 'I cannot endure my Lady Tongue' (2.1.238-9) – today's directors and critics assume Beatrice to be ageing in a manner which echoes Leontes's constitution of Paulina as old in response to her tale-telling in 2.3 of *The Winter's Tale*.

While Paulina, like Gertrude, is described as old within the early modern play itself, Beatrice's shift towards later life has been at least partly imposed in recent productions, age appearing to be today's easy explanation for a female character's challenging behaviour. Something similar may be witnessed at work across recent productions of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Directors have reacted to Katherine's status as the elder of two sisters by casting noticeably older, middle-aged actors in the role as compared to the much younger actors typically playing Bianca.<sup>8</sup> Problematic female characters regularly are assumed to be older than their quieter counterparts: consider *King Lear*'s Goneril and Regan, often played as though old enough to be Cordelia's mother.<sup>9</sup> Gardner's claim of a fall in the ages of recent Gertrudes and Lady Macbeths paradoxically speaks to the same sense of female age as troubling today's theatres: directors invoke age to explain a character's provocation, or attempt to blunt the challenge an ageing character poses by having her played by a younger actor.

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<sup>7</sup> *Much Ado*, ed. Mares, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> See for example *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Conall Morrison (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Courtyard Theatre, 2008); *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Phyllida Lloyd (London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2003). A 2012 *Taming* had Lisa Dillon aged thirty-four playing the role of Katherine: *The Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Lucy Bailey (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> See for example Richard Eyre's 1997 *King Lear* and David Farr's 2010 *King Lear*, both of which featured middle-aged Gonerils and Regans opposite more youthful Cordelias. *King Lear*, dir. Richard Eyre (London: The National Theatre [Cottesloe], 1997); *King Lear*, dir. David Farr (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Courtyard Theatre, 2010).

An age which is imposed in response to challenging female behaviour, even when it is warmly received in performance, is an age which still betrays the anxieties revealed across the course of this thesis. Despite the lip-service occasionally paid towards staged female age – ‘[Judi Dench is] our greatest national treasure’; ‘Wanamaker’s dazzling, fiftysomething Beatrice’ – it appears that today’s critics, directors, and even performers retain a significant proportion of the anxiety towards the older woman which we have found expressed in early modern writing.<sup>10</sup> Even Wanamaker’s Beatrice, so praised in 2007, did not escape a hint of anxious condemnation: like many recent, guilty Gertrudes, this older Beatrice had ‘a slight drinking problem’ and ‘seem[ed] to be medicating her disappointment with constant recourse to the bottle’.<sup>11</sup> Any visibility for the older woman on stage which is achieved through the ageing of a character, then, tends to take place at the expense of the character herself.

In this thesis, I have avoided overly focusing on the ages of the actors playing a given character, concentrating on the ways in which age has been performed of late rather than the bodies doing the performing. Nevertheless, Imogen Stubbs’s relief on realising that she would be playing a young, sexy Gertrude, like the nervousness of ageing actors playing Antony or Cleopatra, demonstrate the sense which exists in today’s theatres of a tight link between the body of the character and the body of the actor. As Beatrice’s actors age I, like the reviewing critics quoted above, understand the part itself to have aged in parallel. This linkage of acting body and written role underpins Walter’s anxious sense at the age of fifty-two that her days playing Shakespeare may be coming to an end: ‘I mean

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<sup>10</sup> Cochrane; Nicholas de Jongh, ‘Middle-aged lovers make much the biggest waves’, *Evening Standard*, 19 December 2007 <<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/theatre/review-23428591-middle-aged-lovers-make-much-the-biggest-waves.do>>.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Nightingale, ‘Much Ado About Nothing’, *The Times*, 19 December 2007 <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/stage/theatre/article3070806.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/theatre/article3070806.ece)>; Spencer, ‘Much Ado About Nothing’.

what parts am I going to do? I adore Shakespeare, how am I going to do him now?'.<sup>12</sup> As Walter ages, the roles she is to play must age too.

This sense of the direct association between acting body and acted character was not always so predominant, however. While today actors such as Stubbs and Walter monitor their bodies' ageing through the roles they find themselves allowed to play, nineteenth-century performance traditions articulated a very different and more permissive approach to ageing through Shakespeare. An instructive case is that of Helena Faucit, who first played Beatrice opposite Charles Kemble's Benedick in 1836 aged nineteen; she played the role again at ages twenty-six, forty-one, fifty-seven, and finally sixty-two. Louisa Mordaunt (later Nisbett) played Beatrice in productions from 1830 to 1849, aged between eighteen and thirty-seven; Ellen Tree began playing Beatrice in 1836 aged thirty-one, with a final performance opposite Charles Kean in 1865 aged sixty.<sup>13</sup> The nineteenth-century theatre, it seems, distinguished between actor and character in a way now largely foreign on today's stages; to a greater degree than today, characters had an existence divorced from the bodies which performed them. The ageing body of the actor adapted to the role performed, rather than the role being understood to age in concert with the body which realised it. In terms of the visibility of the older female actor, however, while she may have been more physically 'present' on nineteenth-century stages, counterintuitively her ageing body may be said to have disappeared from view, subsumed by the character played. Rather than representing a period of heightened visibility for ageing actors, then, for this era of performance the focus on the characters played may have rendered their ageing actors' visibility moot.

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<sup>12</sup> Platform recording with Harriet Walter, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> On these actors and their performances, see *Much Ado*, ed. Cox, pp. xvi-xvii.

Nineteenth-century performance provides us with a new way of thinking about female ageing, older female actors, and visibility in the theatre, and reminds us of the centuries of Shakespearean performance straddling the early modern period and the present day which have not been studied by this thesis. Today, female actors continue to struggle with the implications of age for their careers. Interviewed in 2011 in the wake of the release of Julie Taymor's *The Tempest* in which she played Prospera (a female Prospero), Helen Mirren bemoaned 'the paucity of parts [Shakespeare] wrote for older women. "I don't want to play Gertrude, [...] I want to play Hamlet"'.<sup>14</sup> Indicating the lack of consensus on the way forward, however, in 2002 Walter had remarked that such a Hamlet-performance would be 'an exercise of ego, which I'm not prepared to quite admit. [...] I don't think that having a woman play [Hamlet] would bring that much light to [the play]'.<sup>15</sup> Disagreements in the conversation on the direction in which older female performance should be moving are thickened by the fact that some critics disparage the discussion altogether. Writing on 2010's *Juliet and Her Romeo*, a play which attempted to address the question of the (in)visibility of the aged on today's stages by reworking *Romeo and Juliet* as a love tragedy set in late life, Jane Edwards concluded her largely negative review on a sarcastic note:

[the] production must, however, bring hope to our older actresses, who are always complaining about the dearth of good parts. After Judi Dench

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<sup>14</sup> Ryan Gibley, 'Helen Mirren: "I want to play Hamlet!"', *Guardian*, 3 March 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/mar/03/helen-mirren-interview-the-tempest>>. *The Tempest*, dir. Julie Taymor (Burbank, CA: Touchstone, 2010). Mirren also delivered a version of these remarks in an interview with Simon Schama: 'I want to do Shakespeare and there aren't many parts. I'm not interested in Volumnia or Gertrude'. Simon Schama, 'Helen Mirren talks to Simon Schama', *FT Weekend*, 26 February 2011. Penny Gay would support Mirren's thinking, having argued for the female performance of traditionally male roles: Penny Gay, 'Changing Shakespeare: new possibilities for the modern actress', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, eds. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), pp. 314-26.

<sup>15</sup> Platform recording with Harriet Walter, 2002. For a collation of female performances of Hamlet, see Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

as Titania and Siân Phillips as Juliet, what next? Vanessa Redgrave as Little Orphan Annie?<sup>16</sup>

In the face of such criticism, Walter's struggle to prioritise and publicise older women in the theatre is as important as Mirren's campaign to ensure that performance not be limited by gender nor age. Both actors' thinking, however, betrays a forgetfulness which this thesis has striven to overcome. It has been my argument that the old and ageing women of Shakespeare's drama are more numerous, more interesting, and more dramatically important than we have historically allowed for. Our failure to recognise that fact, itself a product of the long-standing urge towards the containment and silencing of female age, remains the most significant barrier to the visibility of the older woman in today's staged Shakespeare.

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<sup>16</sup> Jane Edwardes, 'Juliet and Her Romeo at the Bristol Old Vic', *Sunday Times: Culture*, 21 March 2010 <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/stage/theatre/article7065838.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/theatre/article7065838.ece)>.

## *Appendix One*

### Decibel Intensity of English Phonemes<sup>1</sup>

'oh'	[hoard]	o:	29 db
'o'	[god]	o	28 db
'ah'	[hard]	a:	26 db
'au'	[haul]	au	26 db
'ai'	[high]	ai	26 db
'uh'	[hub]	^	26 db
'eh'	[herb]	ə:	25 db
'a'	[had]	a	24 db
'oo'	[hood]	u	24 db
'e'	[head]	e	23 db
'i'	[hid]	i	22 db
'ooh'	[who]	u:	22 db
'ee'	[heed]	i:	22 db
'w'	[why]	w	21 db

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<sup>1</sup> Converted from Fry, p. vi, p. 127.

'r'	[rye]	r	20 db
'y'	[you]	j	20 db
'l'	[lie]	l	20 db
'sh'	[shy]	ʃ	19 db
'ng'	[king]	ŋ	18 db
'm'	[my]	m	17 db
'ch'	[chide]	tʃ	16 db
'n'	[nigh]	n	15 db
'j'	[jive]	dʒ	13 db
'shj'	[measure]	ʒ	13 db
'z'	[zoo]	z	12 db
's'	[sigh]	s	12 db
't'	[tie]	t	11 db
'g'	[guy]	g	11 db
'k'	[kite]	k	11 db
'v'	[vie]	v	10 db
'th'	[thy]	ð	10 db
'b'	[buy]	b	8 db
'd'	[die]	d	8 db

'p'	[pie]	p	7 db
'f'	[fie]	f	7 db
'th'	[thigh]	θ	-

θ is the lowest-intensity English phoneme; all other decibel intensities are expressed on a scale relative to θ.

Fry notes that 'The diphthongs, which are not entered in the [original] table, may be taken as having approximately the intensity level of their starting point vowels' (p. 127). I have included the 'ai' and 'au' phonemes relative to the Chapter Three discussion in my table, following Fry's suggested intensity levels.

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