

Depth, Significance, and Absence: Age-Effects in New British Theatre

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In view of Judith Butler's assertion that identity as an effect is generated by "cultural apparatus" (*Gender Trouble* 199), this article interrogates the age-effects generated by early twenty-first century mainstream British theatre. To analyze the complex ways in which age is played out on the British stage—which seem at once both to challenge and to reiterate long-standing assumptions about age—it examines five productions seen in the autumn/winter season of 2011/12. It considers to what extent these productions disrupt the generation of normative age-effects and explores the often contradictory consideration of age in the "multiple realities of performance" (Lipscomb "The Play's the Thing" 117). This exploration enlists the theories of Butler and others, including Anne Basting, who proposes a model of performance that enacts the body in its "temporal depth" (*Stages of Age* 22); Anca Cristofovici, who offers a conceptualization of the aged body as "significant form" ("Touching Surfaces" 275); and Kathleen Woodward, who ponders the psychic crisis resulting from a rejected, and therefore absent, reflection of the aging body (*Aging and its Discontents* 53–71). Viewing the staging of age through the lenses of "depth," "significance," and "absence" exposes the meanings of specific age performances and uncovers the age-effects of a theatre responding to the changing context of an aging Britain.

The reconceptualization of identity as an effect, that is, as produced or generated, opens up possibilities of "agency" that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed.

(Butler, *Gender Trouble* 201)

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* proposed the notion that gender "as an effect" is generated by "cultural apparatus" (199). Age studies scholars have elaborated on Butler's ideas, extending them to examine ways in which age is similarly produced as an effect.¹ How might older people and those—such as writers, artists, performers and photographers—who

construct age through social, mediatized, and/or representative acts, generate age-troubling effects? Media images and performances of old age are part of a generating economy, which, as Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick point out, “represent[s] bodies which become increasingly fixed and inflexible as they move towards the end of the life course in terms of the range of cultural messages they are allowed to depict” (11). Such representations exert a powerful influence on the ways subjects might conceptualize and consequently perform their age or aging, thus generating an *effect of age*. As E. Ann Kaplan has noted, “[a]ge staging and stereotyping must unconsciously shape such perspectives” (18). The particular characteristics of a real world performance of old age, such as acceptable behavior or wardrobe, are circumscribed by mediated images and performances. In order to expand this narrow range, signs of age “trouble” (*Gender Trouble* xxiv–xxxii)—that is, disruptions to the normative scripts of age—however limited, must be sought or created. Such expressions, gestures, images, speech acts, or performative moments may build incrementally, in the way Butler proposes, towards a displacement of accepted enactments of age and aging, thereby opening up the possibility of agency in modes of self-presentation (202–03). As text introducing the inaugural conference of the European Network in Aging Studies (ENAS) in Maastricht 2011 notes: “Theories of performativity claim that age identities are formed and perpetuated through the repetition of behavioral scripts connected to chronological ages and life stages. Since these repetitions can never be identical to the original scripts, there is room for subversion and change.” In searching for new ways to (continually) re-script old age and aging, it might be appropriate to look, amongst other places, to theatre as a site where disruptive effects might be generated or discovered; as Herbert Blau asserts, “it is *theater* which haunts all performance whether or not it occurs in the theater” (qtd. in Auslander 4). The performative characteristics of theatre might be profitably mobilized to displace the production of normative age-effects.

In the introduction to the Special Issue on “Aging, Narrative and Performance” of *The International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, Aagje Swinnen

and Cynthia Port identify four organizing concepts that can work as tools to connect disciplinary circuits in aging research: “*cultural age*,” “*age as a narrative*,” “*the performativity of age*,” and “*the materiality of age*” (12).² “*The performativity of age*” denotes age as a state of both being and doing; Swinnen and Port note how, in performance studies, there is a slippery and complex interplay between an actor’s and character’s chronological age and such “behavioral norms” as their performance challenges or reproduces. Valerie Barnes Lipscomb claims a special role for theatre as “a research site” where the “critical, narrative and performative turns in age studies” might be profitably interrogated (118). She identifies these as corresponding to “the performative on ... stage, the narrative in the script, and the critical questioning of ageism in the multiple realities of performance” (117). Swinnen and Port note that the boundaries between categories are fluid (13), and I would add that the narrative turn bleeds particularly into the performative, in that narratives are constitutive of identity and therefore contribute to the production of what Butler calls “effects.”

Reflecting Lipscomb’s claims for theatre’s potency as a research site, and keeping in mind Butler’s assertion that “effects” are generated by cultural apparatus, this article aims to interrogate the age-effects generated by early twenty-first century mainstream British theatre. It analyzes the extent to which productions disrupt normative age narratives and to what degree they reproduce a decline narrative (Gullette, *Aged by Culture*), and it explores the often contradictory consideration of age in the “multiple realities” of mainstream British theatre. To analyze the complex ways in which age is played out on the British stage—which seem at once both to challenge and to reiterate long-standing assumptions about age—I will closely examine five productions seen in autumn/winter 2011/12. These are Frantic Assembly’s *Lovesong*, by Abi Morgan (2011); Paines Plough’s *One Day When We Were Young*, by Nick Payne (2011); *Jumpy*, by April De Angelis (2011) and *Jerusalem*, by Jez Butterworth (2009), both Royal Court productions; and Hampstead Theatre’s *The Last of the Duchess*, by Nicholas Wright (2011). In this exploration I will enlist the theories of Butler and others, including Anne Basting, who proposes a model of performance

that enacts the body in its “temporal depth” (*Stages* 22); Anca Cristofovici, who offers a conceptualization of the aged body as “significant form” (275); and Kathleen Woodward, who ponders the psychic crisis resulting from a rejected—and therefore absent—reflection of the aging body (*Discontents* 53–71). John Bull comments that “[m]ainstream theatre is a constant, but it is a constant that is always changing in response to its context” (327). Viewing the staging of age in these plays through the lenses of “depth,” “significance,” and “absence” will expose the meanings of specific age performances and uncover the age-effects of a theatre community that is responding to the changing context of an aging Britain.

AGE IN MAINSTREAM BRITISH THEATRE IN THE 2011/12 AUTUMN/WINTER SEASON.

Screen writer and playwright Abi Morgan has had much to say on the subject of aging: having written the screenplay for the film *The Iron Lady* (2011), which Phillip French called “a study of the process of ageing,” she also wrote the play *27* (2011), for the National Theatre of Scotland, which examines the politics of a scientific study of aging and Alzheimer’s disease and charts the impact of this study on the members of a fading religious community. Morgan said in an interview during the rehearsal process for her age-centered play *Lovesong*, “[w]hat intrigued me is that suddenly at this pivotal moment of 40, I know what it’s like to be a 20 year-old and I’m getting an inkling of what it is to be older.” Lipscomb and Leni Marshall see “the worlds of theatre, dance, and similar media ... turning their attention to the presence of older people, presenting a broader range of ages” (4), and Morgan’s recent output on the subject of aging seems to confirm this.

In a necessarily selective survey of theatre in British mainland venues in the 2011/12 autumn/winter season, I counted twenty-five productions, twenty-two of which were new works, that explicitly highlighted issues of age and/or aging in their publicity or content.⁴ These ranged across different styles of performance and included children’s theatre, such as Pied Piper Theatre Company’s touring production *Great Gran’s Great Games*, by Mike Kenny, in which young Ollie, who reluctantly gives up

his room for his great grandmother, becomes aware of her past sporting achievements at the 1948 Olympic games; RedCape's touring performance *1 Beach Rd.*, which explores poetic links between Alzheimer's disease and coastal erosion; and Tim Price's lyrical examination of Alzheimer's, *Salt Root and Roe*, in which septuagenarian twin sisters drown themselves because one of them has dementia. There were celebrity "evenings with," such as Virginia Ironside's *The Virginia Monologues: Why Growing Old is Great* and *A Round-Heeled Woman*, starring Sharon Gless, which was based on the book of the same name, by and about sixty-six-year-old Jane Juska, who placed an ad in *The New York Review of Books*, saying, "Before I turn 67—next March—I would like to have a lot of sex with a man I like." The play, which opened in London at the Riverside Studios in October 2011 to highly favorable reviews, transferring to the Aldwych Theatre two months later, tells the story of Juska's response to the sixty-three replies and of the sexual adventures that follow. Earlier age-focused productions, mounted in the first years of the twenty-first century, include Laura Wade's 2005 *Colder than Here* (revived at Keswick's Theatre By The Lake in 2012), which examines a family coping with the mother's eccentric preparations for her own funeral; Tim Firth's 2008 adaptation of the film *Calendar Girls*, in which taboos are broken and fame ensues when a group of older women pose nude for a fundraising calendar; Sean O'Connor and Tom Morris's 2010 *Juliet and Her Romeo*, a reworking of Shakespeare's play, set in an old people's home; another adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, Ben Power's 2009 *A Tender Thing* (revived by the RSC in 2012), which examined a couple's journey towards euthanasia; and Mike Bartlett's 2010 *Love, Love, Love* (revived by the Royal Court in 2012), in which Kenneth and Sandra age from their hippy youth in 1967 to prosperous retirement over forty years later. All of these works, considered together with Brad Fraser's 2011 *Five @ Fifty*, about five women battling addiction as they turn fifty, Nell Dunn's 2011 *Home Death*, which explores the politics of end of life care, and another critique of the profligate baby boomer generation, Stephen Beresford's 2012 *The Last of the Haussmans*, suggest that mainstream British theatre is

certainly beginning an exploration into what it means to age in the West in the early twenty-first-century.⁵

Mainstream British theatre's focus on aging, which seems to predate my 2011/12 survey by a few years, might seem to have come about because a number of playwrights, part of the post-war baby boom, are beginning to move into their later midlife and old age in the early twenty-first century. However, only three of the playwrights covered in this article were born before 1960.⁶ It is more likely, therefore, that aging is becoming a widely debated topic as questions arising from an aging population are seen to impact on western economies, especially after the 2008 economic crisis.⁷ Some consistent themes are emerging in the way meanings of age are staged in British theatre: an association of aging with Alzheimer's disease (*27*, *Salt Root and Roe*, and *1 Beach Road*), with euthanasia, assisted dying, or a good death (*Home Death*, *Colder Than Here*, *A Tender Thing*, and *Lovesong*), and with the supposed profligacy of the post-war generation (*Love, Love, Love* and *The Last of the Haussmans*). Through breaking age-related taboos such as elder sex (*A Round-Heeled Woman* and *Calendar Girls*) and a determination to laugh at age-related challenges (*The Virginia Monologues*), some productions offer a tragi-comic view of aging. Considering this emerging focus on age, one might question the degree to which early twenty-first century British theatre reinforces what Gullette calls the "hostile age gaze," or offers a more open range of representations of older age (*Age-wise* 107). In addition, one might question the mechanisms by which theatrical representations produce meanings of age, and the way meanings of age are created through overt or covert narratives. Given the "multiple realities of performance" Lipscomb identifies, can we detect, through the minutiae of performative moments, a troubling of normative age scripts? Finally, and crucially, what age-effects—that is, age identity as culturally generated—can be postulated as resulting from enactments of age on the British stage? To open a discussion of these wide-ranging issues, I offer close examinations of the productions *Lovesong*, *One Day When We Were Young*, *Jerusalem, Jumpy*, and *The Last of the Duchess*.

LOVESONG

Both *Lovesong* and *One Day When We Were Young* use metatheatrical techniques to stage the complexity and multi-temporal experience of aging. Consequently, these works represent a fruitful research site where the narratives and performative possibilities of age can be critically assessed. *Lovesong* tells the story of Margaret/Maggie and William/Billy's marriage from two points in time.⁸ The opening phase of their relationship spans ten to fifteen years, during which Margaret (Leanne Rowe) and William (Edward Bennett) move to America; he sets up his dental practice, she fights to be allowed a part-time job, they struggle with finances, childlessness, threats of infidelity, and his drinking. From the opposite chronological viewpoint we witness the end of their marriage which happens during one week as Billy (Sam Cox) helps Maggie (Siân Phillips), who is terminally ill but not yet bedridden, to end her life. The production's physical theatre style facilitates the staging of these two time zones as fluid; Maggie opens and enters a wardrobe and Margaret comes back out, the older and younger characters pass each other, sit at the same table and handle the same objects across the decades. Although they do not interact in any realistic sense, the couples are viewed relative to each other across time. Margaret gives William a skull for his twenty-eighth birthday, but when Billy brings it down from the loft with other items forty years later, Maggie has no recollection of it. The birthday and the loft-clearing scenes, by happening simultaneously, dramatize memory at the moment of its making and speak to the potency of objects to recall past times.

Scott Graham, in Frantic Assembly's *Lovesong Resource Pack*, cites as influences for this show, among other things, T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and the song "Starlings," by Elbow (6). Both generated elements in the production that link past and present. The latter prompted the use of starlings as a visual and sonic motif, emphasizing the continuity of the marriage and the couple's historical connection with place. The former inspired the peach tree as a feature in the couple's garden.⁹ The tree reveals the developing characteristics of the marriage: the details of its fruiting and maintenance, and who interacts with and

around the tree, express the vicissitudes and routines of the relationship through time, articulating the couple's fluctuating closeness and distance. When they first arrive at the house, they are enchanted by the tree; William, in a performative gesture that constructs his identity as the attentive and eager lover, eats a peach from Margaret's hand, licking the juice as it runs down her arm and then kissing her. His reluctance to re-perform this exuberant, erotic act later, towards the end of the play, signals a time of disconnection at the end of the first phase of their marriage. There is, however, a poignant intervention in this scene by (older) Billy, who, in a hopeless bid to reclaim his role in this coupling, accepts the offer and eagerly eats from (younger) Margaret's hand; the longing and regret he feels for lost opportunities for intimacy is simply and powerfully staged by this interlacing of timeframes. The age-effects produced by this act are in tension: whilst sympathetically revealing the sexual desire of an older man, the eating of the peach reinforces the association of old age with regret and an age-identity that is heavily reliant on memories of the past as opposed to potential action in the future. The shift from the young couple's concern with a dynamic life narrative—property acquisition, career moves, alcoholism, sexual fidelity, and sexual politics are all debated carefully and passionately—to the older couple's narrowed concerns with health-related and petty domestic details supports this latter age-effect. Moreover, in their shift away from a connection with the world, the older couple's story shows no evidence of the now-matured interior life or mutual understanding that we see developing in the younger relationship. As the older couple, Billy is bewildered and Maggie is stoical.

The end of the play, when Maggie takes the pills that will end her life, stages euthanasia in a way that might be considered problematic:

BILLY: There's still so much I have to say.

Silence

Maggie -

MAGGIE: Shh It's all been said. (94–95)

The complexity of emotion in facing death by your own hand or

supporting this decision in your partner is erased by Maggie's performative "shh" which constructs her as the aged stoic; it might be supposed that the agonizing thing about parting in this way is precisely that everything can never have been said. This simplistic end-of-life narrative, embodied in the stoical act of silencing that Maggie performs, risks diminishing the older couple's struggle with separation, which is not staged in as convincing emotional detail as their younger struggle to stay together. Billy does have a petulant, then moving, outburst about losing Maggie: "I will live as someone who used to have a life. Who used to have a life with someone. But that someone isn't here any more. I will live my life as I fucking want. Without you" (79). However, this insight into Billy's deeply felt response to imminent bereavement is portrayed, until the last moment (quoted above), as a reaction of childish rebellion. An "othering" of the aged experience in confronting death is produced here by representing this aged partnership as unsophisticated and the older couple's parting as an uncomplicated act. In *Age-wise*, Margaret Morganroth Gullette writes about the mythical phenomena of the Eskimo on the ice floe as "a fantasy of a society in which social murder, coerced suicide or voluntary self extinction of elderly people as an age class is necessary or even desirable" (22). *Lovesong* stages such a narrative, where Maggie (albeit terminally ill) simply eases herself out quietly, without unseemly agonizing, and the audience is moved to tears. One might question whether assumptions about the ease with which an aged character can take leave of this world might result in dangerous age-effects that diminish the value of a long-lived life and dishearten younger people as well as older viewers. As the performance of *Lovesong* that I attended came to an end with Maggie's death, the youngish man next to me sniffed and wiped his eyes, and as I left the auditorium I heard a teenage girl behind me say, "I don't want to grow old." The cultural norms that present old people in terms of tragic, end-of-life scenarios were restated and re-performed in this drama, producing an age-effect on the young person behind me, such that she saw old age unequivocally as a stage to be feared rather than grown towards.

In her review of *Lovesong*, Lyn Gardner commented that, “while this show may be shamelessly emotionally manipulative with its musical underscoring and videos of rising flocks of starlings, [it is] the manipulation of time that is most heart-stoppingly effective. “Time *is* manipulated with great subtlety through disruptions of linear narrative and enactments of parallel events, which complicate a strictly chronometric conceptualization of time (Baars) and communicate the deep layering of experience that aging brings. In this respect, *Lovesong* holds great potential for reinscribing old age as a stage when a lifetime—precisely because so much of it has been lived through—can become boundlessly fluid. In the latter stages of the play there is a startling love quartet where the older and younger members of the couple become entwined across time, dramatizing an erotic continuum that also challenges taboos of old age and inter-generational sexuality. However, particularly because the old and the young are represented by markedly different bodies, a binary that places youth and age in opposition is reinforced, undermining the admirable performance of supple significance that the older actors’ bodies achieve in much of *Lovesong*. Staging this youth/age binary causes a disruption to the aging continuum, resulting in a discontinuous relationship, where the younger is unrecognizable as the foundation of the older.

The potential of the individual body to reveal a temporal continuum is theorized by Anne Basting. In her book *The Stages of Age*, Basting draws on Butler in seeing the aging process as performative; she develops a “depth model of age,” that is, “a model of age that embraces change” (136; 142; 134). Here the aged body, countering the normative mask of youth in performance, might be seen “in temporal depth” (184; 22). In the chapter “The Body in Depth: Kasuo Ohno’s *Water Lilies*,” Basting analyses the way eighty-seven-year-old Ohno’s performance “entwined a series of Mobius strips of culture, gender, and age,” an eloquent description of the ways in which Ohno achieved a continuous fluidity of effects as he metamorphosed seamlessly between ages, genders, and cultures (134).¹⁰ For Basting, Ohno’s performance of *age* was revelatory:

Throughout the scene, he shifted from an aged person to an infant, rolling playfully on the silk cloth. Resting on his back, as though looking up from a crib, Ohno's fingers reached out and his facial features widened with the curiosity of an infant. As he moved across the piece of silk, Ohno appeared to gradually age until at last he returned to the aged body whose slow, determined steps began the scene. (139)

Basting sees in Ohno's performance a new model for constructing age, "using performance to imagine and embody past and potential changes across time" (141). Basting proposes a new symbolic economy that honors the depth of experience of the aged body, according it the utmost value because it can represent the greatest sum and variety of age.

Whilst Ohno's performance was conceived within Japanese culture and performed in the Butoh style, one that is quite different to the physical theatre style of *Lovesong*, using Basting's model can help illuminate the age-effects of Frantic Assembly's production. The lives already lived by the older characters in *Lovesong* are elucidated "in temporal depth" through the interactions between their older and younger selves. The couple's relationship reflects itself across time, and objects and events are juxtaposed within interlacing timeframes, evoking their passage through history. However, unlike Ohno's performance, this depth of personal history is not inscribed on one body. Consequently, a demarcation rather than a blurring of different life stages is achieved. As Cristofovici points out in her essay "Touching Surfaces," "[o]ld age is defined in relation to youth and thus essentially by what it lacks" (269). In *Lovesong*, the characters' younger and older selves are played by different bodies and the story of a crucial period of their lives is omitted (the later half is obscured). This plays out a binary of pregnant youth and barren age that is counter to the reading of "the body in depth" that Basting proposes: "The depth model of age [helps] shift strict divisions between life stages both in and out of the performance space...divisions that continue to feed the cultural devaluation of aging and the aged" (142). By staging a youth/age binary, *Lovesong* obscures the sense of continuity and fluidity between life stages that the production has gone some way

to establish. Basting asserts: “Not only does the self shift across time, but at any given time, one is a complex amalgam of multiple selves” (136). She further comments, “Ohno’s performance conjures a body that encompasses a lifetime of changes and possibilities at the dense point of overlap between theatrical performance and theoretical performativity” (145). By embodying a youth/age binary and omitting a narrative of aging through and beyond midlife, *Lovesong* falls short of such a performative production of time on the bodies of the actors.

Notably, physical theatre almost exclusively employs youthful performers who are able to achieve extraordinary physical feats. In this respect, the staging of a later-life drama in the physical theatre mode constitutes an extension of the possible cultural positions inhabitable by the older body, and these performances of eloquent suppleness confound expectations as to the expressive possibilities of the older body.¹¹ Keeping in mind Lipscomb’s notion of the “multiple realities of performance”—the meaningful interplay between performance and performers—it could be argued that audiences would find that Philips’s and Cox’s performances fail to achieve the extraordinary youthful physicality often witnessed in previous Frantic Assembly works such as *Hymns* (1999/2005) and *Pool (No Water)* (2006). However, they do represent extraordinary performances by and of the older body.

ONE DAY WHEN WE WERE YOUNG

Whereas *Lovesong* does not stage the temporal continuum that is contained within an individual body, Nick Payne’s play, in which Violet’s and Leonard’s youthful experience of the Second World War determines their future lives, comes closer to a performance of Basting’s “body in depth.” Payne achieves this by using the same two actors to embody these characters across three time periods. *One Day* is a story of frustrated longing and historically anchored experience. The play’s three episodes are set respectively in 1942 in the Hotel Regina, in Bath, during an air raid; in 1963 in The Royal Victoria Park in Bath; and in 2002 in Leonard’s run-down one-bedroom house in Luton. The characters’ identities are fundamentally defined by their historical position: Leonard (Andrew

Sheridan) suffers arrested emotional development due to the trauma of his service as a soldier and prisoner of war. Having been given up for dead, Leonard is not repatriated until 1946, narrowly missing the opportunity to marry Violet (Maia Alexander). As Violet moves forward with a conventional life narrative of marriage and parenthood, Leonard's progress is impeded by the losses he suffers as a consequence of war.

This play is essentially concerned with the passing of time, and, as suggested by the title, both future and past bear heavily on the present. In the first scene, the night before he ships out, Leonard is disturbed by reading a neighbor's diary account of the horrors of the Great War and fears the consequences of his own impending experiences; encountering this history informs and foreshadows Leonard's projected future. Violet promises to wait for Leonard, however, by the second scene we find her married to someone else; having been presumed dead has had a devastating impact on Leonard's future. His quasi-death freezes him in this moment, his body aging but his emotional life arrested. His experience thereafter—a lengthy hiatus—exists outside the conventional progress-narrative that was contingent upon the love relationship we saw developing in the opening scene. It is not until the final scene that a possibility opens up for Leonard to redirect his life, as Violet (now seventy-seven to his seventy-eight) visits after the recent death of her husband. In this narrative of aging, growing older represents a positive transformation: in spite of their now reduced time, and Leonard's failing mental capacity, it is possible for Violet and Leonard to realize happiness.

Director Clare Lizzimore employed a lucid method of staging, not described in the published script: the actors were first discovered on the in-the-round stage, seated at make-up mirrors as if in a theatre dressing room. As the audience entered, the actors were making-up to conjure a 1940s appearance. Maia Alexander (Violet) created an especially elaborate coiffure using curlers and pins. Initially this scene simply appeared to stage a young woman in the 1940s—possibly an actress—and her colleague getting ready, however this device signaled a metatheatrical consideration of age and the performing body. After the first scene, in

which the characters were seventeen and eighteen respectively, the mirror units were returned to the stage and the actors staged a transformation to the thirty-eight/thirty-nine-year-old characters of the early 1960s. The actors' body language as well as appearance underwent a slow transformation from a younger to an older embodiment of character. As false eyelashes were applied and new hairstyles created, fashions changed, gestures and bodies became more contained and less pliable. What was being played out in this interludic space was the technical, performative and psychic process of aging past youth to the edge of the middle years in the space of one toilette. Between Scenes Two and Three the actors aged another forty years, further enacting both the acquisition of bodily restrictions and what Butler calls a "corporeal style" ("Performative Acts" 521), a style which "is never fully self-styled, for living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities" (521). This performance of aging revealed the relationship between an acquired style and the aging body. The actors, signifying the bodily changes of old age, greyed their hair, added glasses and prosthetic belly pouches but also acquired a historically determined old age body-style, characterized by low-status posture and facial expressions, and dressed themselves in ill-fitting corduroys or leisure wear in pastel shades. In concert with the variety of inescapable disabilities that the older body might be subject to, these interludes performed the relentless limiting of possibilities that commonly occurs with age.

While transformed by a stooped stance, more restricted body movements, and an accompanying old-age body style, these older characters still possessed a trace of their younger selves as a foundational—and therefore disruptive—aspect of their being. Witnessing the aging transformation meant that the retained image of the younger characters informed the reading of these present (newly-old) bodies, problematizing the age-effects that were seen to be played out on and within their bodies. Dramatizing aging as an *event* allowed these problems to be thrown into relief as the audience witnessed the body in temporal depth. As Basting points out, "to see the body in depth is literally to

see time across space. It is to witness *the event* of aging, to anticipate the changes the body will produce and to remember changes already passed” (141, my italics). While not replicating the fluidity of Ohno’s seamless transformations backwards and forwards across the life course, the metamorphoses of these bodies from younger to older selves and through stages in between presents a multilayered accretion of successive selves and, by revealing such depth, questions the origins of the body style of the aged subject. Having much *younger* bodies “passing” for old might be seen to subvert Basting’s depth model and lead one to question whether a young body can achieve the same authentic representation of aging that is possible in an older body. This is answered by the assertion that all stage representation is a form of “passing” that might involve class, sexuality, or even gender migrations, as well as changes in age.

One Day and *Lovesong* both explore the losses that are suffered across a life course and neither concentrates on the middle years. It is here, however, that they diverge: *One Day* elucidates the continuum of aging by staging aging “as an event” and offers a hopeful, yet qualified narrative of the resumption of love towards the end of life; *Lovesong*, through a physical theatre performance featuring two vital and physically able older bodies, brings into view a generally unexamined aspect of elder experience, namely the complex history and stoical final days of a marriage. However, by restating the normative binary of youth and age, omitting midlife in the continuum of aging, and by employing “shamelessly emotionally manipulative” devices, *Lovesong* produced a palpably disheartening age-effect in the audience.

AGING THROUGH THE MIDDLE YEARS IN *JERUSALEM* AND *JUMPY*

Aging through midlife is problematically omitted from *Lovesong* and to some extent from *One Day*. However, this life stage is the focus of two recent Royal Court productions: the long-running *Jerusalem* (2009) and *Jumpy* (2011). *Jerusalem* uses the elegiac song by Sandy Denny, “Who Knows Where the Time Goes?” as fifty-year-old Johnny ‘Rooster’ Byron (Mark Rylance) dances with Phaedra, the 15-year-old, soon-to-be-supplanted May Queen. The song continues on, underscoring Byron’s

savage beating by Troy Whitworth's gang, men whom Byron knew well in their youth. The question the song asks is also asked by the central character Hilary (Tamsin Greig) in *Jumpy*. Shocked that the Berlin Wall came down over twenty years ago, Hilary asks, "where does time go?" (81). However, these plays present contrasting midlife narratives and, in so doing, produce gendered age-effects. In both plays the central characters search for significance and body strategies in the face of loss, the passing of time, and diminishing social capital. Both Byron the "gyppo" and Hilary the middle-aged mother of a resolutely independent urban teenager are marginalized and have understood this about themselves all their lives. Byron has always lived on the margins, tax-free, on land he claims is his but to which he has no title. Hilary, a second-wave feminist, one-time protester at Greenham Common, has always known her gender can render her peripheral. Fighting to hang on to her radical politics, she finds "the practical thing of life is more tricky" (63); her hard-won sense of self is assailed as she turns fifty and struggles to come to terms with aging, desire, and her daughter Tilly's sexual(ized) behavior. Tilly uses the word "OLD" as a weapon against her mother, in much the same way that the Flintock thug Troy Whitworth uses the terms "gyppo," "pikey," and "diddicoy" to "other" Johnny Byron (*Jumpy* 85; *Jerusalem* 80-81). Both characters attempt to resist these disqualifications—delivered by a one-time dependent, younger character—in quite different ways, resulting in divergent and gendered age-effects.

In *Jumpy*, Hilary's friend Frances also struggles to find a way to retain her social and sexual significance. She recounts a nightclub incident where she was sure a man was watching her from the other end of the bar, but when she approached, "smiled, looked him straight in the eyes. Dead. Not so much as a flicker. Total reptilian blank" (17). In an attempt to resist becoming what Butler calls "illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate" (*Gender Trouble* viii), she employs an extreme body strategy—performing burlesque—and advocates this as a route for Hilary, after Hilary has left her husband. This has embarrassing consequences. The play frames the burlesque performance as riotously grotesque; at the end

of the first half, Doon Mackichan as Frances presented an outrageous routine with tassels and balloons in a bring-the-house-down, pre-interval finale. Frances's burlesque, a "hi vis" bodily act, re-enacts a hyperbolized image of the desirable feminine and of feminine desire, producing a middle age that masquerades as youth in a patriarchal production of desire.¹² However, as Kathleen Woodward points out, "the mask does not hide old age but ... makes it more visible" (*Discontents* 150). Rather than obscuring middle age and revealing what Cristofovici calls the "poetic body" (290), Frances's burlesque exposes middle age as the "comic body."

Cristofovici uses the phrase "the poetic body" when examining the photographic work *The Giant* (1992), by Jeff Wall. Exploring an aesthetic of the older body that would allow the aged form to be significantly represented, she notes that "Wall ... exposes the body as it is—not as a youthful body but as an *accomplished shape, as significant form*" (275, my italics). Whilst photography lacks a specifically performative dimension, photographs are, in Susan Sontag's words, "a trace, something directly stenciled off the real," "a consumer's relation to events," which can be conceived of as Butler's "cultural significations" (*On Photography* 154; 155; "Performative Acts" 525). Such significations delineate scripts, which in turn inform acts. Peter Brook, asserting the potency of images in the theatre, described Beckett's images as "theatre machines" (65). Viewing the central, animated, images of a play through the lens of Cristofovici's notion of accomplishment, or significance, helps in assessing whether a specific enactment of age might admit the possibility of agency for the older subject. The achievement—or otherwise—of Cristofovici's "accomplished shape" or "significant form" in performance helps differentiate the success of *Jerusalem* and *Jumpy* in offering agentic stagings of age, which might disrupt the normative figure of older age as a site of gradual material disappearance and slow retreat from significance.

De Angelis comments wryly on the falsehood of—as Frances puts it—"ironically deconstructing" burlesque by having Hilary assert, "I won't become a 'fuck-me puppet'" (64). Burlesque is thereby shown to be a bogus route to "accomplished shape," and throughout the rest of

the play Hilary searches for the “significant form” that will offer her agency to enhance—or at least maintain—her socio-cultural capital. Hilary’s struggle against redundancy as a mother and sexual being is analogous to her loss of “core funding” at work (26), and at the play’s denouement the “shape” she finally adopts illustrates her acceptance of unmitigated insignificance. In the penultimate scene, when she mistakenly believes—Tilly having not been home for two nights—that her daughter has been “dumped in a reservoir” somewhere, Hilary, defeated, “*curls up on the floor*” (93; stage direction, 95). The shape she holds on the stage floor is a performative gesture that signals and constructs midlife impotence. The final image of Hilary shows her standing center stage, isolated and calm—a contrast to her usual “jumpy” demeanor. This static acceptance seems emblematic of a future that is blank; Hilary, now back with her husband, having seen Tilly through the difficult years and off to university, plays out the final scene in a narrative of redundancy. Her last line to her half-listening, half-asleep husband is “[a]re you awake?” (99). She is calm now, accepting her insignificance.

The play stages the midlife impasse at the intersection of age and gender. If, as Butler asserts, “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time,” midlife is the moment where the suite of constitutive gender acts that have scripted life up to this point become progressively more ludicrous to play out (“Performative Acts” 523). This was evidenced by the squeals of shock and amusement with which I witnessed the audience responding to Frances’s burlesque. *Jumpy* stages the tipping point where enactments of youthful femininity (including practices of age denial) begin to leave women open to social ridicule, and age scripts only offer a progressive narrowing of signification to the point of disappearance. Given the difficulty of achieving agency to trouble either of these scripts, women in midlife—as Hilary demonstrates—are left adrift mid-stage, the lights fading, within an aging and feminine identity that has been rendered doubly impossible.

While *Jumpy* does not offer an alternative to the impasse of feminine aging, De Angelis does expose it to scrutiny and raises awareness of

the negative social construction of aging femininity. However, the production values of the Royal Court Theatre played against the politics of De Angelis's play, obeying the dominant age economy by employing a forty-four year old "name"—Tamsin Greig—to play a woman aging from fifty to fifty-three.¹⁴ Whilst this six to nine year difference might not seem very large, casting Greig results in a problematic age-effect on two counts: firstly, the audience are encouraged to associate later middle aging with Greig's forty-four year old body, and secondly, this reinforces the "hostile age gaze" in which the signs of age that would have spoken more truthfully about the body aged fifty to fifty-three have been erased. Choosing a younger body over an older one here obscures and devalues the embodied experience of middle age as it is constructed in the West in the early twenty-first century.

Midlife femininity in *Jumpy* contrasts strongly with the staging of midlife masculinity in *Jerusalem*. Johnny 'Rooster' Byron "a man of about fifty," stands bulwark-strong against the civil, chemical, and chronological forces ranged against him (9). The play stages Byron's confrontation with these forces as time runs out on him, and can be read as a representation of the crisis of midlife. Jez Butterworth's achievement, while penetrating on the subject of national identity and the politics of belonging, is also insightful about the poignancy of mortality, juxtaposing an urgent sense of finitude against an ageless, mythological landscape. "Time" is *Jerusalem's* single-word opening line, revealing the play, at its beginning, as a drama concerned with the nature of time and a sense of approaching finality (7).¹⁵ Butterworth contrasts a focused urgency about the progress of time-in-the-now with the evocation of an ancient British culture that continues to permeate the contemporary. Byron is referred to as an "ogre" or a "troll" (30); compared to "King Arthur" (32); in his personal mythology, Byron is born wearing a "black cloak" (49); and in one of his stories, a giant whom he meets near Stonehenge gives him a "golden drum" (58). These allusions sit (comically) alongside references to contemporary phenomena such as "neat Drambuie" (57), Local TV news "BBC Points West" (58), and "trance music" (30). Bound by the

running of the clock and also fighting the longer-term forces of aging as much as he is fighting Kennet and Avon Council's 6:00 p.m. eviction deadline, Byron is presented as both fragile and granite hard, ephemeral and forever. Mark Rylance—rooster-like, head up, chest thrust forward, spine arched, legs firmly planted, and arms cocked open, held slightly behind his body, leaving his torso exposed—conjured an icon of titanic force contained within a battered frame. Byron's damaged left leg is permanently thrown straight out behind him, an inscription of his daredevil past; his gait is halting as a result.¹⁶ This whole creates a performance of a challenged, resolute, aged body permeated by a bedrock psychic strength.¹⁷

Rylance's iconic embodiment of character performs Cristofovici's concept of the poetic body, "a form that ensures the connection between the physical and the psychic self" (290). Butterworth's Johnny Byron is physically and psychically epic; he has found an agency that circumvents the disempowerment of aging by engaging in incredible acts of masculinity that include physical stunts and epic drug-taking. He embodies the figure of the subversive Lord of Misrule and is a weaver of tall tales, through which he places himself at the center of unbelievable heroic narratives. Butterworth constructs a fantasy of aged masculine agency that engages forces beyond the earthbound. Byron is "heavy stone" and possessed of a mysterious and ancient inner potency (45). He establishes this through a repeated act: asking particular characters to look him in the eye. Their reactions confirm his assertion that "[y]ou get close and stare into those black eyes, watch out. Written there is old words, old words that will shake you, shake you down" (49). Empowered by his claim to a place in a genealogy of "Byron boys," his significance is rooted in his psychic association with primeval secrets and a physical connection to the ancient landscape. And yet Byron is completely of his time, achieving a poetic weight by uniting the contemporary and the timeless:

I Rooster John Byron hereby place a curse
Upon the Kennet and Avon District Council
May they wander the land for ever

Never sleep twice in the same bed
 Never drink water from the same well
 And never cross the same river twice in a year. (108)

In Byron we are offered an image of a contemporary, aged hero, possessed of special powers and knowledge, which are derived from his place in a continuum of generations. *Jerusalem* offers a performance not only of Byron's own body-history, but also his genealogical significance; he draws this value from belonging, not to an immediately recognizable civic community, but to an economy of generations, stretching deep into the Byron boys' past and on into the future (embodied in the person of his son Marky). This performance is not only beyond death—as Basting theorized Ohno's performance to be—but also beyond birth (141). As a consequence, the performance achieves that “significant form” of the aged and aging poetic body that Cristofovici claimed “creates a generational continuum within the self” (290). I can attest to the profoundly hopeful age-effect that *Jerusalem* had upon me: even though Byron enacts a particularly masculine performance of age and aging, I felt emboldened by his resistance. By asserting the significance of forces beyond the mundane power play of petty fiefdoms and the machinations of bureaucratic discipline, *Jerusalem* connected me to a sense of my place in and across time, strengthened me in my own battles against what Butler calls “constitutive exclusions,” and brought me hope in the heroic (*Bodies* 141).

ABSENT ELDERS IN THE LAST OF THE DUCHESS

It is notable that in *Jumpy* the performance of aging is ultimately one of female insignificance whereas middle age in *Jerusalem* is performed as an embattled but heroic masculine significance. A disparity exists between representations of men and women as they age, and midlife is the time when this comes into sharper focus. However, on reaching the frailty of deep old age, as Woodward points out, “age as a category becomes equal to—rather than more important than—gender” (“Performing Age” 177). In the fourth age, which Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs call “the abject other, objectified old age,” any resistance—for women or men—to the “social imaginary of a fourth age as ageing without agency and

without redemption” (138; 139) seems entirely impossible. This is clearly demonstrated by the absence of all the named frail older characters in *The Last of The Duchess* (2011). Based on the book of the same name by Caroline Blackwood, the play details Blackwood’s failed attempts to meet with and interview the eighty-six-year-old Duchess of Windsor for a *Sunday Times Colour Supplement* article. This play is unusual in that it has a predominantly female cast and four of the six named female characters are over sixty. The title character, however, never actually appears as her aged self, and the staging of deep old age, though central to the drama, is consequently problematic.

The final scene of this play culminates in a heated argument between the Duchess of Windsor’s vigorous eighty-one-year-old lawyer Maître Suzanne Blum (Sheila Hancock) and the writer Lady Caroline Blackwood (Anna Chancellor). Blackwood threatens to write a sensational exposé of the regime that Blum has orchestrated, in the elderly Duchess’s household, concerning her medical care and financial affairs. The formidable lawyer threatens to sue and, in response, the forty-nine-year-old Blackwood asserts that she will wait and publish after Blum’s death. As Blackwood exits, Blum shouts defiantly after her: “I will live longer than you! Much longer! Wait and see!” (77). She then goes to a desk where she has secreted a canister of poison, which she aims to use in the event of declining mental faculties, smashes the canister underfoot, and Wright’s stage directions tell us that she “[s]taggers to a chair and slumps onto it, panting and exhausted but with a sense of triumph: she has looked her death in the face and defeated it” (77). This act stages a common fantasy: the triumph over death by a defiant elderly subject, especially sweet in the face of the confident young. On the face of it, by staging a significant, triumphant elder, the age-effect of this drama seems to be agentic, offering a performance of age that is resistant to normative constructions of “the elderly.” However, moments later, as the curtain falls, the audience read that although Blum lived for another fourteen years, dying aged ninety-five, she was bedridden, blind, and deaf for her final two years and she failed to outrun her opponent. Blackwood did survive Blum (if

only by two years), and she published her book. The play is based on that book. What is revealing, however, is that Blum's inevitable failure to cheat both death and, crucially, frailty in her final years, is pushed to the margins of the drama, presented only as an epilogue caption. This relegation is illustrative of the marginalization of physical frailty in the play as a whole. I aim here to analyze the mechanisms and implications of the suppression of the frail older subject in *The Duchess* and to examine ways in which the narrative maintains the taboo of decline, dying, and death.

Blackwood comes to suspect that the Duchess's lawyer, the formidable octogenarian Blum, is not only keeping the Duchess prisoner, depriving her of her vodka and denying her visitors access, but is also secretly selling off the Duchess's possessions and slowly stripping the assets from her Paris home. The Duchess is ailing both in body and mind. Blackwood's alcoholic-dream-meeting with her at the opening of the play, however, presents a phantom of the youthful, iconic Duchess, who has the self-professed "muscle tone of a greyhound and the waistline of an elf" (10), standing in an elegant gesture, as Cecil Beaton might have photographed her, with one arm raised against the mantelpiece, turning into the room. On waking, Blackwood is told that the present incarnation of the Duchess is markedly different; as a result, both Blackwood and the theatre audience are denied access to the Duchess, and her state of "objectified old age" is established. Blum's assistant Michael Bloch, who has also never met the Duchess, describes what he knows of how she is accommodated: "There was a long dark corridor and the Duchess's suite was at the far end. Like a chrysalis at the end of a tunnel. Except a chrysalis is the start of life and this was the end of life. It was like the shrine of some long dead saint with a few old bones piled up in a velvet casket" (29). In a reversal of giving birth (references to "a chrysalis" and a "long dark corridor" evoking images of gestation and the birth canal), here frail old age is ghoulishly imagined as a living death. The Duchess is enshrined, like a "long dead saint," and the contrasting youthful apparition presented at the opening of the play establishes her iconic self as the safe and stable identity of the Duchess; only this—not

her enfeebled—self is allowed a performative presence here, establishing youth as agentic. The still-living, present (but always absent) body of the Duchess is concealed—and negated—by the reliquary of her medical room, so many old bones. The play exposes the meaning, potency, and most importantly the ownership of the Duchess's iconic image, juxtaposing it with the problematic of her ailing self. The frail, older subject exists only in the audience's imagination, objectified by Bloch's hyperbole. This privileging of the iconic over the aged disappears the enfeebled octogenarian Duchess and at the same time raises questions as to how far a photographic image can represent a living subject, given the physical changes that aging brings. As Featherstone and Wernick point out, "[i]t is the openness to the sense of loss of the substance of one's own body and face with all it might have been able to represent: the sense of discrepancy between one's self-image and the image we take others to see, and their subsequent dialectical interplay, which envelops photographs with poignancy" (4). Such a dialectical interplay between iconic photograph and enfeebled subject is established in *The Duchess*, which questions the ways in which such a compelling image as that of the Duchess of Windsor in her prime functions in the cultural economy. Does the power of this historic-iconic image dissolve if the present, enfeebled reality is exposed? Crucially, who owns this image-capital and who can wield its power?

Almost as old as the Duchess, Blum—"a remarkable woman for her age, [who] walks as fast as most people run"—acts as a double for the present Duchess, both legally, having taken power of attorney, and symbolically (11). At the end of Scene One, Blum stands by the fireplace, repeating the gesture of the phantom Duchess seen at the opening of the play, eventually taking the Duchess's place even as the person profiled by Blackwood and photographed by Lord Snowdon. The play, as much as it documents the jealousy with which Blum guards the printed display of images of the Duchess (13), also stages Blum's attempt to appropriate and reinhabit the image of the iconic Duchess, claiming its potency for herself in the process.

Woodward, writing on age and psychoanalysis, proposes that at the end of life there is an equivalent stage to Lacan's mirror stage of infancy,

in which, in a reversal of the Lacanian infant understanding and accepting the image in the mirror as a representation of his or her own body and so being ushered “into the domain of the imaginary” (*Discontents* 67), the older person rejects their mirror image as not a true representation of self. This rejection brings on a psychic crisis or dislocation of the imaginary. Woodward explains, “[t]he mirror stage of old age may precipitate the loss of the imaginary. Where then would we be located? Outside the mirror? Caught between the double and the absent?” (69). Woodward is referring here to André Green’s 1978 essay “The Double and the Absent” in order to theorize the dilemma of both understanding and simultaneously repressing the knowledge of one’s own old age, an understanding which presents to the elder “the feared image of death” (*Discontents* 66). The “double” in Woodward’s analysis is the reflection of the aged subject and the “absent” represents her/his denial of this reflection. The aged subject is consequently located somewhere outside the mirror, presumably existing only as an acceptable, iconic-historic memory of the self, now existing beyond representation. While some, such as Butler, might contest the possibility of the subject existing before or beyond the symbolic order (*Gender Trouble* 202), Woodward’s notion of rejection followed by dislocation is useful in elucidating something of the mechanisms of disappearance of the frail older subject in *The Duchess*.

Reviewing the production for *The Stage*, Natasha Tripney asserts, “This is a play with an absence at its centre.” She is right, the title is a misnomer; the audience never witness “the last of the Duchess.” She is always what Penny Farfan calls “ob/scene,” that is, remaining “out of sight off stage,” referred to but always (quoting D H Lawrence) “that which might not be represented on stage” (65; 69). Butler alerts us to the “constraints” which “not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies” (*Bodies* x), and this drama certainly operates to generate such opposing domains: not only the Duchess but also other declining, elderly characters such as Sir Oswald Mosley and Blum’s dying husband are referred to but, deemed “unthinkable,” fail to appear on stage.

While populating the stage world with vigorous older characters, the play is haunted by the almost-but-not-yet-dead who, as they confront the reality of death, are prematurely exiled to a place beyond representation, beyond the symbolic order of this drama, at least.

Woodward claims that, “narcissistic hostility allows the elderly to be rejected as a class more easily” (*Discontents* 70). Just as subjects deny their aged reflection, similarly the rejected image of old age extends to the social body; society (here represented on and by the public stage) rejects a reflection of itself in old age that is disintegrating, failing, or dependent. *The Duchess* stages a neat—if temporary—resolution to this socio-psychic crisis. The decrepit, aged female, the Duchess of Windsor, is disappeared and replaced by the vigorous octogenarian Blum, the acceptable face of aging, powerful and productive in a way that is socially desirable in old age, not quite yet associated with the “image of death.” Similarly, the sub-plot, concerning Lady Mosley’s rivalry with Blum, introduces us to another coupling of present-vigorous and absent-enfeebled old age. Lady Mosley, described in the stage directions as “*a beautiful white-haired woman of seventy*” (36), depicts her absent husband Sir Oswald Mosley as “falling to bits” (37), characterizing him as a monstrous “leathery old Komodo lizard” (47). This doubling maintains the social equilibrium by staging old age in its acceptable, vigorous form, while suppressing the “unlivable” disintegration of the fourth age.

The absent aged Duchess—at least as she appears to the searching eye of the telephoto lens—is described with disgusted fascination by Blackwood and Bloch who, in Scene Three, read a double-page, paparazzi-illustrated, exclusive on the Duchess in *Hola!* magazine:

MICHAEL. She looks like ...

CAROLINE. What?

MICHAEL... . a marmoset. A very tiny one. Sort of paralysed, with its wiggly little hind legs dangling in the air.

CAROLINE. Look at her hands. Curled up like claws.

MICHAEL. And her face in the close-up.

CAROLINE. How would you describe it?

MICHAEL. Vacant.

CAROLINE. And?

MICHAEL. Desperate.

...

CAROLINE. Does she remind you of anyone?

MICHAEL. Nobody human. (66–67)

This dehumanizing description mediates the already mediated image of the Duchess and characterizes her, paradoxically, as at once vacant, desperate, *and* inhuman, successfully “othering” her as a frail aged subject. This dialogue sustains the negative view of old age that is disseminated in the contemporary press by replaying a popular, ageist discourse. On the face of it, in disappearing the elderly Duchess, Wright simply replicates Blackwood’s failed interview narrative. However, in making the dramatic choice both to stage the iconic duchess and to present a sensationalized description of the paparazzi pictures, he fails to critique and—by omission—contributes to the normalization of “ob/scene” frail elder experience. Frail old age here—as in western culture generally—seems all the more disturbing because it is hidden, and the sensationalized descriptions of the frail elder in *The Duchess* go no way to dispel this disquiet. As Butler points out: “the excluded and illegible domain ... haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility the very limit to intelligibility, its own constitutive outside” (*Bodies* x). The age-effect of the play, in doubling Blum with the Duchess, and Lady Mosley with Sir Oswald, solves this haunting by replacing the central frail and dependent older body with a productive and active version.

The absence of the title character raises the question: Is it not conceivable that theatre, a medium where it is possible to represent anything within the bounds of imagination, could—rather than staging the enfeebled Duchess as an absence, and to balance the dream-like presentation of her youthful, iconic incarnation—reveal her frailty as a value, a presence-in-disintegration, and consequently trouble the illegibility of deep old age? Such a performance might, as Gilleard and Higgs propose, “serve to remind us of our common humanity and the universal vulnerability of our bodies and our relationships. A remoralization of the life course that acknowledges human imperfection and the limits of autonomy

provides redress to the all-too-ready objectification of frail and aged people as ‘object’ objects” (141). As it is, the play sets up a dichotomy between a monstrously enfeebled and a preternaturally vital old age, which in effect constructs deep old age as illegible, “unlivable,” and “ob/scene.”

CONCLUSION

Remembering Lipscomb’s advocacy of theatre as a research site, in this selective snapshot of mainstream British drama, a perceived increase in roles for elders and those aging through the middle years might constitute evidence of a widening of the “range of cultural messages that [older people] are allowed to depict.” Quantitative research would be required to substantiate the impression of an increase in these roles, and such a shift—even if borne out by research—could be the result of a temporary response to the intense public debate about the aging population in the early twenty-first century. More roles for older people do not necessarily guarantee a subversion of the accepted script of aging but may, to a degree, inadvertently amplify the normative construction of old age. This happens in *The Duchess*, which, while offering strong parts for active older women, cooperates with the ageist discourse of the popular press. *Lovesong*, while offering a supple, multi-temporal performance of age, and a challenge to the taboo of elder sex, inadvertently reinforces a narrative of decline, predicated on a youth/age binary and a narrowing of meaning as age advances. Moreover, *Lovesong* enacts an “unproblematic” elder suicide that generates a problematic age-effect. *Jumpy*, by staging a female midlife impasse, draws attention to women’s struggle against culturally constructed redundancy at the intersection of age and gender, but offers nothing beyond an enactment of the insignificance of aged femininity.

Staging aging as an event in *One Day* goes some way to presenting a multifaceted performance of the aging body in “temporal depth,” in which a gradual accumulation of selves can be represented by one body, and which reveals the certainty that all bodies change over time, however youthful they are in the present moment. Seeing “time ... produced by the body,” as Basting puts it, may not rely solely on casting an older actor’s body, which has all possible lived-times inscribed upon or held

within it (*Stages* 145). Having said this, when the body-politics of aging at a *specific* age is clearly the subject of the play, as in *Jumpy*, the undeclared, commercially expedient passing of a younger body for an older one undermines dramatic integrity in the service of the dominant ‘age ideology’ (Gullette, *Aged by Culture* 7), producing an age-effect that reinforces cultural hostility towards aging women.

Jerusalem offers a hopeful performance of midlife, albeit one of heroic masculinity. Byron’s “poetic body,” his psychic and physical vitality, and his connection to a heritage of belonging, which founds this poetic significance, is predicated on a *very* male belonging to a line of “boys” and on the possession of rarity in the form of his blood. These features, whilst they might be problematic in terms of gender and racial politics, do not erase the fact that by presenting an achievement of “significant form,” Rylance’s performance and Butterworth’s character offer a playing of age with potential for a troubling and transformative age-effect. It remains a necessary project for sophisticated, age-aware theatre makers to create equally potent stagings of aging femininity, and for all involved in creating performance to challenge the objectification and absence of deep old age. It remains to be seen, given that age is the subject of increased focus, if new work might emerge in mainstream British theatre, or elsewhere, that can produce new age-effects whilst dramatizing a range of complex, significant, and even frail older women.

NOTES

¹ See, for example, Basting (*Stages of Age* 7–8), and (“Performance Studies” 258–71), Chambers (167–68), Lipscomb (117–41), Russo (21), and Twigg (60–61). However, Biggs doubts the usefulness of the performative as a way of conceptualizing the management of aging identity (49–50).

² The special issue was comprised of selected papers delivered at the ENAS conference.

³ “Mainstream” is taken to mean theatre offered by subsidized or commercial theatre buildings and is defined in opposition to what might be called “experimental,” “avant garde,” or “fringe” theatre. See chapters on “Mainstream Theatre” and “Alternative Theatres” in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre* Vol. 3.

⁴ This information was gathered through extensive internet research, taking *The Actors’ Yearbook* (2009) as my guide, or by reading publicity or reviews. Resources allowed me to attend only a limited number of productions.

⁵ Unlike *Five @ Fifty*, the majority of the plays mentioned in this survey deal with

older rather than middle age. However, midlife does feature as a stage through which characters pass (*Love, Love, Love*) or beyond which some do not progress (*Calendar Girls* and *1 Beach Road*). Midlife is the focus of detailed analysis in this article's later section on *Jerusalem* and *Jumpy*.

⁶ A Google search showed the following: April De Angelis b. 1960; Mike Bartlett b. 1980; Jez Butterworth b. 1969; Nell Dunn b. 1936; Jane Juska b. 1933; Abi Morgan b. 1968; Laura Wade b. 1977; Nicholas Wright b. 1940. Birth dates for Stephen Beresford, Mike Kenny, Nick Payne, Ben Power, and Tim Price were not available online but photographs at doollee.com suggest these playwrights were born later than 1960.

⁷ The Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) is a research institute and publisher of the *Intergenerational Justice Review*. The "Themes" section of its website states, "[g]enerational justice' is well on its way to becoming the driving issue for the next centuries." The growing focus on aging is demonstrated by a simple Google search for "the ageing population debate," which on 4/7/12 yielded 20,000,000 results; the more scholarly Web of Knowledge offered 1,468,464 results in response to a search for "ageing population."

⁸ Margaret and William are the younger couple, Maggie and Billy are the older couple.

⁹ See line 122, "Do I dare to eat a peach?" (qtd. in Graham 20).

¹⁰ In Basting's work, Ohno's first name is spelled "Kasuo." It can also be spelled "Yasuo."

¹¹ For an interview with Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett about working with older actors on *Lovesong*, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF-22alcjAU>. An informative trailer for the production can also be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRuqJpnYGF1>.

¹² See Kathleen Woodward's chapter on "Youthfulness as a Masquerade" in *Aging and its Discontents*, and also Judith Butler on parody in the chapter "Subversive Bodily Acts" in *Gender Trouble*.

¹³ Butler's theories help explain the crisis of female midlife at this historical point, where politicized women such as Hilary are asked to exchange a script that plays out significance (however much predicated on sexual capital) for one that negates accomplishment and significance.

¹⁴ Born on 23/2/67, Greig was forty-four in October 2011 (IMDb).

¹⁵ The line is spoken by Linda Fawcett, Kennett and Avon Senior Community Liaison Officer, to a camera recording the serving of an eviction notice on Byron, which will come into force at 6pm that evening. Byron, up until now, has evaded the council's attempts to evict him for having an "illegal encampment since September 1982, a period of twenty-seven years" (95).

¹⁶ According to the character Ginger, Byron had been a daredevil stunt rider and had once actually died doing a bike jump over 20 lorries: "He just gone teethfirst into a lorry doing a hundred mile an hour ... on top of which he's just spent ten minutes in the hereafter and he gets up and hobbles in that tent and pays for his pint" (32).

¹⁷ In the program for the 2011 Apollo Theatre production of *Jerusalem*, Butterworth states: "In 1994 I moved to Wiltshire and met a man who was banned from every pub in the village. I once picked him up and he was light as a feather. A month later I walked into him in the street by mistake and it was like walking into a tree" (14).

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- Jerusalem*. By Jez Butterworth. Dir. Ian Rickson. Apollo Theatre, London. 28 Oct. 2011, and 29 Dec. 2011.
- The Last of the Duchess*. By Nicholas Wright. Dir. Richard Eyre. Hampstead Theatre, London. 29 Oct. 2011.
- Lovesong*. By Abi Morgan. Dir. and chor. Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett. West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds. 12 Nov. 2011.
- Colder Than Here*. By Laura Wade. Dir. Abigail Anderson. The Theatre by the Lake, Keswick. 22 Sept. 2012.
- A Tender Thing*. By Ben Power. Dir. Helena Kaut-Howson. Royal Shakespeare, Swan Theatre, Stratford. 10 Oct. 2012.
- The Last of the Hausmans*. By Stephen Beresford. Dir. Howard Davies. NT Live at Kirkstall Vue, Leeds. 11 Oct. 2012.

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