

References

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 Prensky, M. 2001 *b*. Digital natives, digital immigrants. Part II: Do they really think differently? *On the Horizon*, 9, 6, 1–9.

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Helen Yallop, *Age and Identity in Eighteenth-century England*,
 Pickering & Chatto, London, 2013, 192 pp., hbk £64.23, ISBN
 13: 9781848934016.

The eighteenth century is notably a time of transition in England. Enlightened thought, grounded in scientific research methodology, began to challenge, or at least enhance, traditional world-views and ideas of man's place within them. From the second half of the century, the Industrial Revolution irreversibly altered the way individuals lived. And by the end of the century the concept of the modern self as a unique, interiorised, identity appears to have begun to take root (Wahrman 2004). This is the background against which *Age and Identity in Eighteenth-century England* is set.

Leaning heavily on medical advice literature, but incorporating historical, physiological, philosophical and other contemporary texts, the book adopts a socio-cultural approach to explain how citizens of eighteenth-century England understood age and the ageing process in the context of personal identity and the importance of this to individual world-view. For as Yallop points out, age and ageing, like gender, class and race, help us to define who we are. In her words, they are part of our personhood, reaching beyond mere body and medical issues, and becoming a lens through which to explore the 'nature of mankind and its relationship with society' at any given place and time (p. 3).

In six chapters following the Introduction, the author explores the foundations of how ageing was understood by academics and other writers and portrayed to the populace; the relationship between these understandings and recommended behaviours; and how identity and character were inextricably intertwined with the body throughout the lifecourse.

Chapter 1 examines the meanings of age and ageing in eighteenth-century England and the concepts people used to understand them, emphasising the importance of interpreting ageing in stages. Chapter 2 then considers social, spiritual, cosmological and physical influences on how the ageing body was perceived, as well as the recognised causes of ageing. Climacteric years, Christian dogma, humours, temperament and the non-naturals are discussed as a means of demonstrating the extent to which the body and ageing were affected by external forces and how variable the effects are between individuals.

In Chapter 3, the author probes new physiological paradigms, and particularly the mechanistic and sensible bodies, which, she argues, may

have presaged the idea of the body as a biological mechanism. Importantly, she points out how the body was viewed as a machine wearing out from its extrinsic interactions, suggesting ways in which people might have exercised agency over this process. Chapter 4 expands on the idea of agency in terms of sociableness. Cheerfulness, social interaction, politeness, positive thinking and keeping good company are explored for their benefits in managing the body as contrasted with the adverse effects of introverted, reflective and immoderate behaviours.

Men, and particularly old men, are the subjects of Chapter 5. Idealised forms of masculine behaviour are distinguished from acceptable behaviour for old men, as represented in the advice literature. Finally, Chapter 6 investigates the concepts of person, character and personhood through body-centric and longitudinal approaches. The author argues that these are not stable but change over time and that in this sense life can be analogised to a theatre performance. Ordinary people take on different characters over the lifecourse (due to changes in temperament) just as characters do in a play.

If, as the author suggests in the Introduction, the book's objective is to help us understand how people in eighteenth-century England viewed ageing and made sense of the ageing process, then she has achieved that. Of particular interest is the thread running through Chapters 2, 3 and 4, providing the reader with a solid underpinning to understand the multifarious forces (both old and new) at work; how they interacted; how they could be controlled; and how subjective the process was. Yallop makes no attempt to single out or create a specific formula, but rather emphasises the variegated, interwoven and impermanent nature of popular thought, and how slow things are to change. This is refreshing.

The analysis could possibly benefit from further clarity regarding the audience to whom the reviewed literature was directed. While Chapter 5 explains the focus is on men, it is not certain whether this applies only to that chapter or to the entire text. Additionally, since literacy was not widespread in the eighteenth century, some mention might have been made as to how extensively read the reviewed literature was. Finally, some discussion of other approaches undertaken in prior research could have provided a more rounded context.

This book should appeal to students and others interested in history and ageing, and would be a fine supplement to other texts approaching the same subject matter from different perspectives.

Reference

Wahrman, D. 2004. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-century England*. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut.

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