

situations, recognising them as such. I also think this book would be a beneficial read to those who are considering long-term care for their loved ones as the honesty and robustness in the writing is reflected through the pages. There would be an assurance for people that although this might be for some a difficult read, here is an honest account of what to expect at end of life for those you love.

I found this book to be extremely accessible, emotionally engaging but not overly sentimental. I found that unlike many books I wasn't guided, instructed or told what to think but left to reflect and arrive at my own conclusions. I felt it was a journey. I started in one place and ended up in another one. I felt reassured and confident by the robustness of the research methods and sensitive capturing of data. Although I am a specialist in palliative care, I still found there were things I had learned from reading it. I would fully recommend this book to anyone who either works in this field or who has an interest in knowing more about end-of-life issues.

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, REVEREND KATE MCCLELLAND
Leicester, UK

doi:10.1017/S0144686X14000749

Christopher Martin, *Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2012, 240 pp., pbk US \$27.95, ISBN 13: 978 1 55849 973 7.

The central premise of Christopher Martin's comprehensively researched book is that the public understanding of old age changed radically over the period of the last quarter-century of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1578–1603) with the emergence of the forerunner of our modern concept of individual subjectivity. One of the key drivers for this shift in attitudes was the example of Elizabeth's own longevity and the strategies she employed to continually re-invent her own image as she aged, which are discussed extensively in Martin's second chapter. What both Elizabeth and the dramatists and poets discussed by Martin drew upon in their constructions of ageing identity, was the mid-16th-century lexical development by which the definition of the word 'constitution' expanded from applying only to external bodies of laws and regulations, to signifying also the human body in regard to vitality and healthiness. *Constituting Old Age* charts how this productive ambiguity enabled a vigorous cultural contestation of any idea that late life should be a time for passive acquiescence in the face of impending mortality.

Given that the book is essentially a study of representations of ageing in Early Modern literature (the chapter on Elizabeth functions in effect to set out the historical context), it stands or falls on the strength of its readings, which are convincing. These are divided into three chapters respectively covering Elizabethan pastoral (such as Edmund Spenser's

The Shepherdes Calendar and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*), late Elizabethan poetry (such as Shakespeare's sonnets and the work of John Donne), and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Pastoral, an established traditional genre, typically depicted the elder as an embodiment of wisdom beyond the passionate engagements of the younger foregrounded characters. Martin argues that the Elizabethan writers enriched the tradition by showing older characters who reject this relegation to the role of dispassionate bystander with defiance bordering on rage. In particular, this defiance manifested itself in the refusal of older characters to abandon the pursuit of love. Martin illustrates the development of this trend through the careful accretion of close reading and continues the argument as he shifts his focus on to Shakespeare's sonnets, suggesting that 'preoccupation with the sonneteer's advanced age was integral to Shakespeare's conception from early on' (p. 114). This contention is convincingly supported with reference to several specific sonnets. For instance, he plausibly reads sonnet 138, which superficially appears to concern the older narrator's love for a younger woman, as an account of how an ageing couple defy time with 'nights given to a sexual consummation of which their years are supposed to have deprived them' (p. 115).

However, the pinnacle of Martin's case is found in his final chapter which considers not only *King Lear* but also other Shakespearean plays. A comparison between the characters of Falstaff and Lear is made to telling effect. Falstaff's larger-than-life exuberance in age functions ambiguously in the *Henry IV* plays and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* so that the latter, in particular, may be seen as a celebration of 'mature chastity at the expense of aged infatuation' (p. 145). In any case, as Martin observes, Falstaff always appears far more in love with himself than with the objects of his erotic interest. In contrast, Lear is ambiguous in a more profound way, inviting simultaneous amazement that he can show so much stamina in the face of his travails and unease at the lengths to which he denies reality to shelter himself psychologically. As Martin notes, most criticism of the play pays only lip service to Lear's old age without fully engaging with the fact that the central dynamic stems from 'the title character's struggle to marshal his own formidable constitution against the public and private roles that the ascending generation would constitute for him' (p. 140). By exploring this dynamic in full and relating his conclusions to the case of Queen Elizabeth once more, Martin completes what deserves to be seen as a strongly organised and evidenced study of the topic.

While *Constituting Old Age* will form a useful addition to the small but growing volume of work on the relationship between literature and old age, it is probably too specialised to have the same general applicability as work by authors such as Kathleen Woodward and Helen Small. Instead, the principle readership for the book is likely to come from researchers and upper-level students in the fields of English Studies and History who focus on the Early Modern period. However, at the very least, the passages concerning Shakespearean plays and sonnets deserve to attract a wider audience and it is to be hoped that the nuanced understanding of old age as shown by

Martin to feature in the texts becomes an accepted general method of approach to Shakespeare.

School of Arts, Brunel University, UK

NICK HUBBLE

doi:10.1017/S0144686X14000750

Janet L. Ramsey and Rosemary Blieszner, *Spiritual Resiliency and Aging: Hope Relationality and the Creative Self*, Baywood Publishing Company, Amityville, New York, 2013, 278 pp., pbk £59.95, ISBN 13: 978 0 89503 411 3.

I became interested in the issue of spiritual resiliency and ageing while undertaking research with older people who I met through an African Caribbean day centre and outreach service. When I spoke to, and interviewed, people about their experiences of using health and social care services, religious faith was identified as something that enhanced personal resilience at times when they were struggling and enabled people to maintain some degree of independence from services. This book by Ramsey and Blieszner is interesting as it presents findings from two research projects in which they explored the role that religious faith played in the lives of 16 older people. The book builds on previous research by Ramsey and Blieszner in which they interviewed eight spiritually resilient older women. The authors have now interviewed eight older men and re-examined the original interviews with the older women to illustrate how religious beliefs and spiritual communities have enabled the older people to cope with difficult times while maintaining hope for the future.

The research is a cross-cultural study (United States of America and Germany) that aims to present the participants' narrative accounts of how religious faith based on a shared Lutheran heritage had, or had not, made a difference throughout their lives. The narrative approach was used and this works well as it brings to life the lived experiences of the participants and shows how their faith connected, supported and challenged them throughout their lives. It also works particularly well since the participants accounts illustrate their experiences of the polarities and conflicts of life, such as hope at the end of life and living through world wars. The experiences of the older German participants are particularly poignant as stories of living through World War II, trauma and the Holocaust are presented. Two fuller narrative accounts are also presented as two chapters in the book: Anna, a German woman and Alex, an American man. These more holistic narrative accounts also powerfully illustrate how religious faith has interconnected and challenged the participants throughout their everyday lives.

The book is in three parts. Part 1 draws on the accounts of the women and men to explore how spirituality can be understood and conceptualised. This is an introduction to the rest of the book and gives a preview of the findings, which interestingly highlight how there is a gender difference in how women and men talk about their feelings, spiritual selves and life stories.