

This is the accepted version of a chapter publisher in *Disability, Health, and Happiness in the Shakespearean Body* (2015) ed. Sujata Iyengar, ISBN: 9781138804289

Afterword: Ten Times Happier

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The UK's National Wellbeing Programme was launched on 25 November 2010 by Prime Minister David Cameron. Since April 2011, a series of public consultations have set out to measure

our progress as a country, not just by how our economy is growing, but by how our lives are improving; not just by our standard of living, but by our quality of life.¹

Following a national debate about the desirability (and impossibility) of taking a nation's temperature by calibrating the happiness of its citizens, a "wellbeing measurement framework" was finally agreed. Known to sceptics as the Happiness Index, the framework attempts to tap into people's experiences of satisfaction, joy and pride through a series of questions about health, environment, employment, family life and community. The results comprise the country's official repository of feelings, and are invaluable – we are assured – as a tool for planning improvements in public health.² Strikingly, in the context of the present volume, Britons' happiness is today imagined to follow a straightforwardly upward trajectory, for the Index was established (according to its own forthright rubric) to record "how well [we] are growing and changing, in the right direction".³ Its aim is to measure not how well we are, in other words, but rather how well we are progressing incrementally towards an imagined ideal future state of health, prosperity and connectedness. To assess the

¹ A transcript of Cameron's speech, delivered on 25 November 2010, may be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-wellbeing>

² See the report entitled 'Measuring National Well-being: Life in the UK, 2014' compiled by the Office of National Statistics, available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/wellbeing/measuring-national-well-being/life-in-the-uk--2014/>

³ The 2011 report on 'Measuring what matters' was issued by the Office for National Statistics as part of the National Statistician's Reflections on the National Debate on Measuring National Well-being. The quotation appears on p. 2.

extent to which we are all moving in the “right direction,” we are invited to consult the colourful Wheel of Wellbeing whose segments each speak to one strand of our “real yearning to belong to something bigger than ourselves”.⁴ Although the framework was established in order to measure the emotional lives of individuals, its real aim is to bring citizens together in the service of Cameron’s Big Society where each subject’s identity is valued insofar as it is sorted and shared amongst others. Properly matched up, the segments of the wheel represent responsible civic life as a form of habitual epiphany.

The copious materials generated by the UK’s Office of National Statistics suggest that the Happiness Index can be maintained only through a very significant annual investment of time and money. It is clear, too, that its results are gloriously manipulable for state purposes. However naive or knowing the enterprise may be, however, the Index provides a useful way to address Sujata Iyengar’s challenge, posed in the Introduction to this volume, to put into conversation early modern and postmodern ideas about health and happiness. In the absence of an equivalent early modern Index: how may we understand the ways in which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men and women expected, hoped for, or strived towards happiness?

It is tempting to suggest that joy could only ever have been fleeting, like the experience of health which Katherine Schaap Williams, in her essay on the mysterious rituals of royal cures, finds emerging only as a “brief equipoise” or temporary cessation of discomfort. After all, early modern Englishmen and women suffered privations unimaginable today – or unimaginable, at least, to the originators of our Happiness Index. As Henry Cuffe makes clear in his book about corruption and finitude in both the cosmos and the natural world, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (1607), mortal life appeared hampered and partial – and joy was not regarded as a proper goal of earthly existence. Life was envisaged as a brief stint to be borne, so that when Cuffe points out that each of us has “a determinate date of endurance which hee cannot pass”, he suggests both that life’s term is limited and that its “toylesomenesse” cannot but be endured.⁵ Instead of our Wheel of Wellbeing, Cuffe’s readers may have been familiar instead with the Wheel of Fortune, spun by the blind and dispassionate goddess; or may perhaps have imagined life’s progress as a double set of stairs

⁴ This quotation is taken from Cameron’s speech; see footnote 1 above.

⁵ Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life Together with the Originall Causes, Progresse, and End Thereof* (1607), pp. 3 and 4.

to be ascended briefly towards mid-life but – invariably – descended thereafter.⁶ Cuffe’s subtitle promises consideration of life’s “Originall causes, [and] Progresse” but the movement imagined here is not towards the realisation of our heart’s desires, nor indeed towards any standardised measure of gladness agreed upon by the state, but rather towards the inevitable “End thereof”. As Ian Frederick Moulton notes above, all natural organisms were understood to contain both life and death – and the progress of the former led inexorably towards the latter. Life emerges not so much as an individual’s struggle towards happiness, but rather as a predicament shared by us all.

By way of conclusion to this volume on the various colours of early modern health and happiness, I offer here some brief remarks on Shakespeare’s most fully realised account of life’s brevity, and its connection to real or imagined joy: the *Sonnets* of 1609. Several essays in this volume have considered how impairment and suffering characterise (and corrode) the lives which are drawn in the *Sonnets*. Alanna Skuse’s essay on the metaphorical and medical vocabulary of “canker”, for example, explores the permeable boundaries which emerge here between selves and others, and demonstrates the contested nature of bodily “wholeness”. Other essays consider from different perspectives the fragility of health and happiness, sometimes focusing in particular on the vulnerabilities of men. Catherine E. Doubler’s discussion of *2 Henry IV* shows how able-bodied or “gambol masculinity” involves impairment rather than maturity, since Shakespeare’s athletic bodies are touched with deformity and decay. Darlena Ciraulo’s discussion of *Romeo and Juliet* sees Romeo’s youth revealing not only his physical preparedness for sexual generation but also the seeds of his own destruction. The young man addressed in the opening sequence of *Sonnets*, too, is enjoying his “golden time” – but the happiness which the speaker imagines (for the youth, and for himself) is inseparable from the sorrows of adulthood.⁷ Insofar as life emerges here as a form of progress, it involves a movement – like that sketched out by Cuffe – towards corruption and decay. But although the ‘procreation’ sonnets contain Shakespeare’s unforgettably rebarbative commentary on the ways in which satisfaction must contain its opposite, they also put forward some suggestion, as we will see, of boundless happiness.

⁶ See Anja Müller’s essay on pictorial representations of the ‘stairs’ of life, ‘Childhood in Early Modern Stairs of Life: Envisioning Age Distinctions’ in *Childhood in the English Renaissance*, ed. Müller (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2013), 43-56.

⁷ All quotations are taken from John Kerrigan’s edition of *The Sonnets and A Lover’s Complaint* (London: Penguin, 1986). The quoted phrase appears in Sonnet 3, line 12.

Sonnet 6 warns the young man that health and happiness are of limited duration. By way of consolation, however, the poet proposes that present happiness may multiply by as many times as the youth multiplies himself:

Then let not winter's ragged hand deface
In thee thy summer ere thou be distilled.
Make sweet some vial; treasure thou some place
With beauty's treasure ere it be self-killed.
That use is not forbidden usury
Which happies those that pay the willing loan –
That's for thyself to breed another thee,
Or ten times happier be it ten for one.
Ten times thyself were happier than thou art,
If ten of thine ten times refigured thee;
Then what could death do if thou shouldst depart,
Leaving thee living in posterity?
Be not self-willed, for thou art much too fair
To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir.

Elsewhere in the sequence, the young man is praised because he is unparalleled: “you like none, none you, for constant heart”. There are no others like him – for, as the speaker insists, “you alone are you”.⁸ In this sonnet, however, the speaker's happiness rests upon his plurality and his willingness to “breed another thee” – or (happier still) to bring in “ten for one”. The transition away from summer, and out of youth, involves the imperative to capture “beauty's treasure” before it is lost forever, and to counter winter's “ragged hand” by copying oneself tenfold. Maturity emerges as a version of personhood which is plural, or shared – and the more times beauty is multiplied and “refigured” for posterity, the greater the promised happiness.

⁸ Sonnet 53, line 14; Sonnet 84, line 2.

The young man's renewal is of course at the heart of the opening sequence of sonnets. The very first poem sketches out his "tender heir"; the second describes how a son would prove his "beauty by succession"; and the third imagines how a child would bring about his "fresh repair". In each case, the poet instructs the youth – sometimes stridently – to counter the impoverishments of age by replacing himself: "Make thee another self".⁹ These instructions look different, however, when placed alongside Cuffe's description of man's inherent replaceability:

his body being made of the first matter, whose inseparable companion is a desire of change, there must of necessitie follow dissolution; for God and nature (according to our presupposition) doing nothing in vaine, thus insatiable appetite of receiuing newe forms, shall not finally remaine wholly frustrate: if therefore we grant an induction of a new forme, we must withal grant an expulsion of that that before was inherent, for as much as two forms of diuers kindes as vnsufferable together in the same subiect, whereupon doth follow the corruption of the whole compound.¹⁰

It is in our bodies' nature to desire change – or, as Cuffe puts it, to indulge their "insatiable appetite" to replace one thing with another. But unlike Shakespeare, who repeatedly berates the young man "that thou no form of thee hath left behind", Cuffe is not here emphasising the importance of investing in an "unearned womb" before it is too late.¹¹ This passage appears instead as part of Cuffe's description of the ageing process – or what he calls our "naturall proceeding toward the enemy and end of nature, *Death*."¹² Living involves a constant process of dissolution and regeneration as the body keeps making and "receiuing newe forms". To keep ageing, we must keep expelling our younger bodies and replacing them with new ones. These new, old bodies cannot live alongside the younger ones they have succeeded, for such diversity would be "vnsufferable". The former, younger body must instead accede to the older as the whole compound inexorably corrupts.

Cuffe's discussion sheds light on the threatening tone of the opening sequence of sonnets which urge the young man towards fatherhood by taunting him with the cruel knowledge that he is reproducible – and hence expendable:

⁹ Sonnet 10, line 13.

¹⁰ Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life*, p. 75.

¹¹ Sonnet 9, line 6; Sonnet 3, line 5.

¹² Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life*, p. 6.

Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest
Now is the time that face should form another

The process of forming another involves cheating time by renewing, with a child, life's "lovely April" long after it has gone.¹³ The youth's imagined son is fresh, golden, and full of "sweets and beauties". But this re-forming does not simply involve replacing "hideous night" with "brave day", or substituting melancholy old age with youthful possibility.¹⁴ The happiness promised to fathers by their children looks partial and incomplete – for alongside that promise must come the knowledge that "youth's proud livery" is always fading to a "tattered weed".¹⁵ As Cuffe makes clear, "the time that face should form another" is all the time, since our younger adult selves are constantly being replaced by older ones. The process of joyful re-generation through children indeed looks indistinguishable in the *Sonnets* from this gradual "corruption of the whole compound", for the poet repeatedly confronts the young man with a story of maturity which involves the painful acceptance of his several replaceabilities – by his children, but also by his own ever-older selves, "each changing place with that which goes before". The later sonnets on the young man's mysterious "shame" and "fault" perhaps suggest something of his resistance to the poet's version of the truth.¹⁶

It has often been noted that the maturity which the poet sketches out for the young man in the 'procreation' sonnets looks indistinguishable from the urgent imperative to become a father. Less frequently remarked upon, however, is the fact that fatherhood – like ageing – is marked here as a kind of painful loss. Ariane M. Belizet argues persuasively in this volume that the joy of breastfeeding a new baby was inextricably linked in the early modern period to grief. Fatherhood, too, seems impossible to separate from death in the *Sonnets*. The poems are addressed to the young man not only by a friend and lover, but also by one who occasionally himself resembles a "decrepit father", made lame by fortune, who has already witnessed his own painful succession.¹⁷ By urging the young man to contemplate how he, too, must be succeeded, the sonneteer confronts him with all the futures he will lose. For although the youth may "now stand... on the top of happy hours", he must relinquish this blissful state –

¹³ Sonnet 3, lines 1-2 and 10.

¹⁴ Sonnet 12, lines 11 and 2.

¹⁵ Sonnet 2, lines 3 and 4.

¹⁶ Sonnet 60, line 3; Sonnet 95, line 1; Sonnet 96, line 1.

¹⁷ Sonnet 37, line 1.

and become instead something plural.¹⁸ Presently contracted only to his “own bright eyes”, the young man’s singleness shamefully confounds “the parts that thou shouldst bear”, namely the “mutual ordering” of a family (“sire, and child, and happy mother”). To evade this plurality is to risk disappearing altogether: “Thou single wilt prove none”.¹⁹ And yet, despite all this, fatherhood does not involve happiness, or even any sort of answer to “Time’s scythe”, for the poet’s insistence that fatherhood involves being continually new made sounds more like a threat than a promise.²⁰ The replacements of self necessitated by fatherhood would involve the young man not only ceding place to his son – but also acknowledging, with Cuffe, his perishability in common with all “bodily creatures... that had both beginning with *time*, and shal haue their end in *time*”.²¹

If neither adulthood nor fatherhood promise any real reparation, the *Sonnets* do however sketch a different version of happiness. This is realised not through reproducing (or replacing) oneself with children, nor by quietly accepting one’s inevitable changeability. Insofar as the *Sonnets* invest in happiness, they celebrate instead the promising person of the child who thrives after the youth’s imagined death, thus “leaving thee living”.²² The imagined son need not be succeeded, through the passing of time, by something resembling adulthood. For childhood is not understood privatively in the *Sonnets* as lacking the tokens of adult maturity such as reason, deliberation, or conscience. Rather than symbolising an early episode of human development, the child appears instead as a figure for plenty and spontaneity.²³ Geoffrey A. Johns’ essay in this volume explores the ways in which prodigious children exposed the limits of human knowledge and experience, disturbing the natural order of things and casting into doubt nature’s “determinate end.” In the *Sonnets*, children again interrupt life’s forward-tending progress – but do so this time not through fear, or aberrancy, but rather through a strength and intensity which looks something like happiness.

¹⁸ Sonnet 16, line 5.

¹⁹ Sonnet 1, line 5; Sonnet 8, lines 8, 10, 11 and 14.

²⁰ Sonnet 12, line 13.

²¹ Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life*, p. 8.

²² Sonnet 6, line 12.

²³ Here my discussion is indebted to Michael Witmore’s study of Renaissance childhood, especially his consideration of children’s often “seemingly automatic or spontaneous actions” in early modern literature. See *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), esp. pp. 20-57.

Scholarly discussion of children in early modern culture has tended to emphasise their place in larger societal structures, especially the family, thanks in part to the residual suspicion – still lingering from work published in the 1960s – that young children lacked identity because they were regarded as expendable copies of one another or their parents.²⁴ The much-discussed practice of “breeching” at around age seven has lent further weight to the suggestion that boys, in particular, lacked individual agency. In Shakespeare’s plays, young boys appear as both disturbingly precocious and pitifully defenceless: Macduff’s son, for example, who is slaughtered in Act 4 Scene 2 of *Macbeth*, and Leontes’ son Mamillius who pines away offstage in *The Winter’s Tale*. As Kate Chedgzoy has remarked, these boys reveal Shakespeare’s recurrent and “deeply ambivalent symbolism of childhood as evocative of vulnerability, innocence, and peril”.²⁵ But childhood stands for something quite different in the *Sonnets* where the young man’s future son is imagined as self-sufficient and limitless. The satisfaction he represents is not *eudaimonia*, the wellbeing which emerges from virtuous human flourishing, nor Epicurean happiness, centred around bodily pleasure.²⁶ The joy imagined here arises instead through being freed from the necessity to prepare oneself incrementally “against this coming end” – or, to put it another way, through being irreplaceable.²⁷

In this way, the resourceful child trumps the poet’s insistent vocabulary of thrift, wills, legacies and bequests which suggests that adult life repays – or even resembles – a process of prudent investment.²⁸ In a life lived according to one’s future “acceptable audit”, each age must look partial or incomplete because it is succeeded by the next. This view of adulthood as a continual process of auditing is altogether different from childhood, though, where “that beauty which you hold in lease/ Find[s] no determination”. Had he a son, all accounting

²⁴ As Kate Chedgzoy notes, writing about the legacy of the work of Philippe Ariès whose groundbreaking *Centuries of Childhood* was published in 1960, “the object of study was in fact not childhood so much as parenthood, for the question of childhood was reduced to one of adult perceptions of children, the family was privileged as the most important frame for interpreting children’s lives.” See Chedgzoy’s introduction to *Shakespeare and Childhood*, eds. Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15-31 (18).

²⁵ Chedgzoy, Introduction, p. 19.

²⁶ For a discussion of Shakespeare’s understanding of these terms, see Kevin Laam, ‘Shakespeare and Happiness’, *Literature Compass*, 7/6 (2010), 439-51 (444).

²⁷ Sonnet 13, line 3.

²⁸ See especially Sonnet 4.

would stop – for the youth could declare “This fair child of mine/ Shall sum my count”.²⁹ The youth’s imagined son will capture his “golden time” and keep it forever in “eternal summer”. In him, “truth and beauty shall together thrive”, for the child is the very embodiment of limitless “abundance”.³⁰ He is imagined as entirely himself, and entirely present, rather than being encumbered by self-division – or the obligation to cast “new forms” from old which looks central to the poet’s version of mature adulthood. Childhood may have been emerging at the turn of the seventeenth century “as a stage of life with its own peculiarities,” as Anja Müller has recently argued, but it is not represented as such in the *Sonnets*.³¹ Even though the imagined son is described, from the start, as the young man’s “tender heir”, he challenges the idea that life resembles a series of stages. Freed from “devouring time,” the child looks capable indeed of challenging Cuffe’s assertion that since our bodies’ “inseparable companion is a desire of change, there must of necessitie follow dissolution”.³² Or, as Shakespeare puts it in the poem where we began, Sonnet 6, “what could death do” in the presence of a child? The fact that this robustly unchangeable child exists only as part of the young man’s imagined future – or perhaps of the poet’s own remembered past – is at the heart of the ‘procreation’ sonnets’ poignancy and power.

The embarrassing rhetoric of the Happiness Index bears no comparison to the extraordinary beauty and complexity of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. But the poet’s shrewd, witty voice nevertheless seems in places to speak satirically against the Index’s strange stridency. If the authors of the Index suppose that life resembles a straightforwardly upward trajectory leading towards the realisation of our desires, the sonneteer, too, urges the young man to embrace life as a form of incremental progress, inviting him to ruminate over the man he will become “when thou from youth convertest”.³³ The Index’s criteria for happiness suggest that we are insufficient citizens if we think and act alone, rather than in the service of the structures that bind us – and the poet, too, insists that the young man must embrace life’s “mutual ordering”.³⁴ But the *Sonnets* also admit that this sketch of happiness as simply accumulative, and culturally consensual, is painfully mistaken. To embrace maturity and fatherhood, it turns

²⁹ Sonnet 13, lines 5-6; Sonnet 2, lines 10-11.

³⁰ Sonnet 3, line 12; Sonnet 18, line 9; Sonnet 14, line 11; Sonnet 1, line 7.

³¹ See Müller’s introduction to *Childhood in the English Renaissance*, 1.

³² Sonnet 19, line 1.

³³ Sonnet 11, line 4.

³⁴ Sonnet 8, line 10.

out, is to recognise one's perishability; and in pressing home to the youth that he "among the wastes of time must go", the poet points up the naiveté of the assumption that life progresses towards an ideal future.³⁵ Only the young man's imagined child experiences a state of blissful singularity, free from the pluralities demanded by adulthood – and removed from the ceaseless imperative to replace himself with someone else. Happiness resides elsewhere: in the energy of children not yet born.

³⁵ Sonnet 12, line 10.