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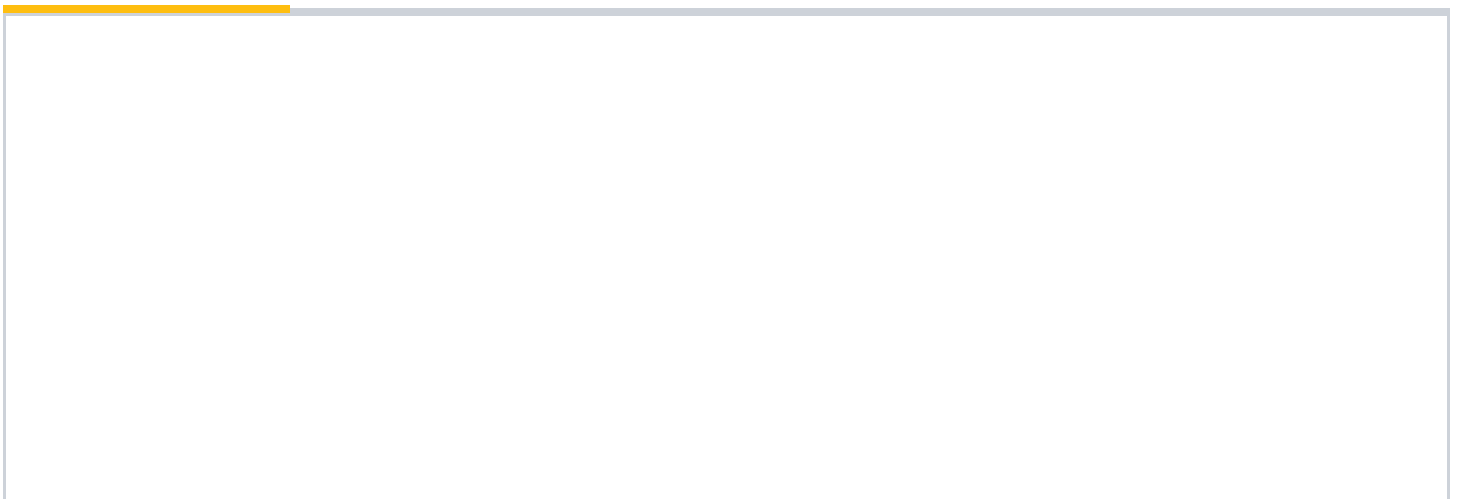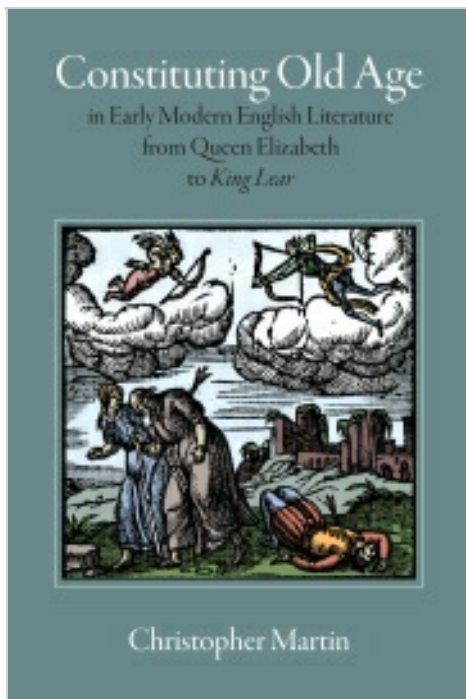
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Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature, from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear

In this Book

Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature, from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear

Christopher Martin

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SUMMARY

How did Shakespeare and his contemporaries, whose works mark the last quarter century of Elizabeth I's reign as one of the richest moments in all of English literature, regard and represent old age? Was late life seen primarily as a time of withdrawal and preparation for death, as scholars and historians have traditionally maintained? In this book, Christopher Martin examines how, contrary to received impressions, writers and thinkers of the era—working in the shadow of the kinetic, long-lived queen herself—contested such prejudicial and dismissive social attitudes. In late Tudor England, Martin argues, competing definitions of and regard for old age established a deeply conflicted frontier between external, socially "constituted" beliefs and a developing sense of an individual's "constitution" or physical makeup, a usage that entered the language in the mid-1500s. This space was further complicated by

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