

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THRESHOLDS

Volume III

OLD AGE

An Essay on the Anthropology of Finitude and Transmission

Chapter I — Entering Old Age

1. An Ordeal Rather Than a Stage

Old age is often spoken of as a biological stage, measured in years, observed in a body that tires more quickly and heals more slowly. This description is not false. It is merely insufficient, as the purely medical or administrative descriptions of birth were in the first volume of this collection. For old age is not merely a fact befalling the organism: it constitutes an anthropological ordeal that lays bare the deepest presuppositions of an entire civilisation, particularly those of a contemporary world that prizes above all else efficiency, productivity, autonomy, speed, and innovation.

For old age introduces, gradually and without asking anyone's leave, the exactly opposite experience: slowing down, fatigue, growing dependence, the loss of certain capacities, the proximity of death. It thus poses, to whoever lives through it or observes it, a question no other stage of life poses with the same clarity.

2. Reformulating the Question

To ask what old age is, or how to age well, invites medical, practical, or normative answers, useful but failing to reach the anthropological root of the phenomenon. To ask instead what becomes of the human being when their power diminishes, or what old age reveals of the truth of the human condition, opens a space in which dignity, dispossession, and transmission — the very matter of this volume — can finally be heard.

3. The Guiding Hypothesis

The question old age imposes, without detour or leniency, is this: does human dignity depend on what one can do, or on what one is? As long as strength, memory, social role, and usefulness remain intact, this question can remain theoretical, almost idle. Old age makes it practical, daily, sometimes painful — and it is precisely for this reason that it constitutes an anthropological revelation that no other experience provides with such clarity.

To grow old is to discover that one has always been worth more than what one could do.

4. The Third Movement

This volume does not begin from nothing. Being Born showed the human being on the side of reception: a being given to itself, given by another, given into a world, vulnerable, inscribed within a filiation it had not chosen. Parenthood showed this same being having become, in turn, the agency that transmits, guides, renounces, and separates. Old Age closes this movement upon itself, and closes it in a way neither of the first two volumes could anticipate: the vulnerability Being Born described as the beginning of all human existence is not merely, as is too often believed, a state definitively left behind by adulthood. It returns — not as a failure, but as the belated confirmation of what was true from the very first day.

Birth and old age unveil the same truth: the human being is never sufficient unto themselves.

5. Four Paradoxes

This hypothesis unfolds into four paradoxes, which the following chapters will each take up in turn. The first is that one can lose power without losing dignity: the diminishment of capacities does not, in itself, diminish any part of what constitutes a person's worth. The second is that one can become dependent without becoming less human: dependence is not the opposite of humanity, it is one of its modalities, the most visible at both ends of life. The third is that one can detach from the future while remaining responsible: the elderly person inhabits the time of projects less, but remains engaged in the destiny of those who succeed them. The fourth, finally, is that one can approach death while deepening life: the awareness of the end, far from emptying the present of meaning, can on the contrary give it its full gravity.

6. The Course of This Volume

The chapters that follow will each take up one thread of this inquiry. Chapter II will dwell, with Ricœur and Erikson, on what it means to finally see time become visible, and to reread one's own life as a story rather than as a series of projects. Chapter III will explore, with Guardini, the progressive dispossession of roles and functions, and what remains when what defined us disappears. Chapter IV will examine, with Beauvoir, the exact relation between vulnerability and dignity, and the difference between autonomy and independence. Chapter V will dwell, with Jonas and with the African oral tradition embodied by the figure of Amadou Hampâté Bâ, on old age as the age of wisdom and transmission. Chapter VI will follow, with Cicero, the nearness of death that old age brings closer without ever imposing it as an obsession. Chapter VII, finally, will confront this anthropology with the contemporary challenges of ageing: the lengthening of life, its medicalisation, the social invisibilisation of the elderly, the cult of youth.

One thing alone must be understood from now on, and the rest of the volume will do no more than unfold it: to grow old is to lose, one by one, the answers that had long stood in for our identity, and to discover, often with astonishment, that something remains that had never depended on them.

Chapter II — Time Become Visible

1. A Relation to Time That Reverses

In youth, time appears open. The future occupies the whole space: one projects oneself into it, forms plans within it, houses one's hopes there as though they had unlimited room to come true. The past, meanwhile, remains discreet, almost negligible — still too short to carry weight, too close to be viewed from a distance. Old age reverses this proportion without warning: the past lengthens, the future shortens, and time, which until then had served merely as a frame for action, suddenly becomes itself an object one looks at.

Youth mainly inhabits the future; old age relearns how to inhabit the whole of time.

2. Ricœur: Life as a Story One Can Finally Reread

Paul Ricœur showed that a person's identity is constituted as a narrative, an emplotment that gives form and coherence to events which, taken in isolation, would have none. As long as this narrative remains to be written, one perceives its overall architecture poorly: one lives the chapters without yet being able to assess their composition. Old age offers, for the first time, the possibility of an almost complete retrospective reading. The essential part of the narrative now lies behind one, which allows — without automatically imposing — a work of rereading that youth could not even envisage, for lack of sufficient material.

3. Erikson: Integrity in the Face of Despair

Erik Erikson identified, in the last of the eight ages he distinguishes within the psychosocial development of the person, a task proper to this period of life: achieving a sense of integrity, that is, the capacity to accept one's life as it was actually lived, with its choices, its failures, and the paths it did not take, rather than constantly measuring it against an ideal existence one might have lived instead. The failure of this task, for Erikson, leads not to indifference but to despair: the feeling that the time remaining will no longer suffice to correct what was missed, and that the story of one's own life can never be rewritten otherwise.

Integrity does not consist in having lived well, but in being able to welcome the life one has actually lived.

4. One Story, Two Operations

Ricœur and Erikson describe, each in their own way, the same phenomenon from two complementary angles. Ricœur gives its structure: life as a narrative, which only becomes legible as a totality as its material accumulates. Erikson gives its stake: this retrospective reading is not a neutral exercise; it engages the very possibility of reconciling oneself with what one has been, or, on the contrary, of finding oneself irremediably separated from it. Time become visible is therefore never a merely contemplative datum; it becomes the space in which a life finally seeks to consent to itself.

5. Toward Dispossession

This rereading of lived time does not, however, take place in the abstract. It accompanies, and is sometimes precipitated by, a more concrete and often more painful experience: the progressive loss of the roles, functions, and capacities that had long served, without our thinking about it, to answer the question of who we are. The next chapter will address this dispossession, and what may remain when what defined us ceases, one by one, to define us.

Chapter III — Progressive Dispossession

1. Deep Identity and Exercised Functions

For most of adult life, one answers the question of who one is, without thinking much about it, through an enumeration of functions: a profession, a family role, responsibilities, a recognised place within a group. Old age withdraws these answers one by one — retirement, the moving away of children grown into adults, the gradual loss of certain physical or cognitive capacities, sometimes the disappearance of loved ones who had known and confirmed who one was. What remains, once these answers are withdrawn, is not immediately obvious. It is this question that this chapter must directly confront.

2. Guardini: Each Age Has Its Own Form

The theologian and philosopher Romano Guardini devoted to the ages of life an analysis that allows us to avoid the most common error on this subject: measuring each age against a single one, generally that of full maturity, and judging all the others as imperfect approximations of it. For Guardini, each age possesses its own form, a complete and coherent inner configuration, which is neither a draft of the next age nor a weakened remainder of the previous one. Childhood is not an

unfinished adult; old age is not a diminished adult. Each of these ages is, in its own way, an accomplishment.

No age is the incomplete version of another; each possesses its own form.

3. What Old Age Is Not

This intuition allows us to name precisely the error a civilisation oriented almost exclusively toward efficiency and production makes when considering old age: it continues to measure it by the criteria of active maturity — speed, output, capacity for initiative — and can then only perceive it as decline. But to judge old age by the criteria of maturity is like judging childhood by the criteria of adulthood, seeing in it only a generalised incapacity where one should instead recognise a different form, not yet, or no longer quite, the one expected.

4. What Appears Only at This Age

If old age possesses its own form, one must be able to say what, within it, cannot be seen at any other moment of existence. Guardini sees in it, notably, a form of detachment that is not resignation but freedom: freed, at least partially, from the obligation to justify one's worth through action, the ageing being can attain a quality of attention, judgment, and presence to things that the urgency of active life made difficult. This is not a compensation granted for losses suffered; it is a possibility proper to this age, which no one could know while remaining younger.

5. What Remains

We can now answer, at least partially, the question posed at the opening of this chapter. What remains when functions withdraw is not an impoverished residue of what one was, but something that had never been identical to those functions: a proper form, which required precisely this dispossession in order to finally become visible. The loss of roles is therefore not the loss of self; it is, paradoxically, a condition of its clarification.

6. Toward Vulnerability

This proper form of old age, real as it is, does not, however, remove what is concretely difficult about dispossession: the growing dependence on others for acts one previously accomplished alone. The next chapter, with Simone de Beauvoir, must confront this dependence directly, and clarify what distinguishes it from a diminishment of humanity itself.

Chapter IV — Vulnerability and Dignity

1. A Dependence That Is Not an Accident

Old age brings back, in a new form, the dependence the first volume of this collection described at the other end of existence. But where the newborn's dependence is universally accepted, almost endearing, that of the elderly is too often experienced, by the one who undergoes it as by those around them, as a humiliation. We must understand why this same anthropological structure receives so different a welcome depending on the age at which it appears.

2. Beauvoir: What Society Makes of Old Age

Simone de Beauvoir devoted to this question a work of almost unbearable lucidity, in which she shows, drawing on considerable historical and ethnographic documentation, that the condition of the elderly has never been the same everywhere: some societies venerate them as repositories of common memory, others abandon them as soon as they cease to be productive. This considerable variation attests that the suffering often associated with old age does not stem solely from the declining body, but also, and perhaps above all, from the social treatment each culture reserves for this decline. A society that values persons only in proportion to their output cannot perceive old age as anything but decay, whatever vigour of mind it may otherwise retain.

3. The Trial of Modern Self-Sufficiency

This analysis allows us to call into question a presupposition contemporary societies rarely hold for what it is: a historically situated ideal rather than a universal evidence. Self-sufficiency — being able to feed oneself, move about, wash, decide without anyone's help — is there erected as the very condition of dignity, so that losing it, even partially, seems to strip the person of part of their humanity. Yet no society has ever been composed of entirely self-sufficient individuals: dependence accompanies human existence from beginning to end, and old age only makes visible, with a sometimes cruel clarity, what remained discreet the rest of the time.

4. Distinguishing Autonomy and Independence

To proceed more precisely, two notions ordinary language too often conflates must be distinguished. Independence designates the capacity to accomplish alone the acts of daily life — getting up, eating, moving about. Autonomy designates something else: the capacity to remain the author of one's own choices, one's values, one's judgment about what matters to oneself. These two capacities do not necessarily vary together. A person can lose a large part of their independence — needing help to dress or to move about — without losing the slightest part of their autonomy: they continue to know what they want, to judge, to choose, to express preferences that deserve to be heard and respected.

One can lose one's independence in the acts of daily life without losing one's autonomy as a subject.

5. What the Treatment of the Elderly Reveals

This distinction, once established, changes the nature of the moral requirement old age imposes on those around it. Helping someone in acts they can no longer accomplish alone should never mean deciding in their place what they want, still less treating them as though they had ceased to have judgment of their own. It is precisely this slippage — from legitimate help to the dispossession of judgment — that Beauvoir denounces as the true source of indignity, far more than physical dependence itself. The way a society, a family, or a caregiver treats this dependence reveals, more surely than any discourse, what they truly believe a person to be worth.

6. Toward Transmission

Recognising that autonomy can survive the loss of independence opens a question this chapter has not yet addressed: what can the person whose autonomy remains intact still offer, even as their capacity to act physically has diminished? The next chapter will address this question by exploring old age as the age of wisdom and transmission, with Hans Jonas and with a tradition contemporary Western societies have too often neglected.

Chapter V — Wisdom and Transmission

1. What Remains Transmissible

A purely deficit-based view of old age would miss the essential if it stopped at what age withdraws. For old age is not merely the time of withdrawal: it can become, and in many cases actually becomes, the time when what has accumulated over an entire existence — memory, experience, the capacity for perspective, knowledge of the long term — finally finds occasion to be transmitted to those who have not yet lived what it has lived.

2. Jonas: A Responsibility That Exceeds One's Own Future

Hans Jonas, already encountered in the first two volumes of this collection regarding parental responsibility, here provides a natural extension of his central intuition. Responsibility, for Jonas, is never limited to those who can claim it or respond to it in return; it extends to future generations, who do not yet exist and can demand nothing, but toward whom we already answer through our present acts. The elderly person occupies, in this respect, a singular position: their own personal future has considerably shortened, but this in no way releases them from responsibility toward a

future they may not see. This responsibility, stripped of all calculation regarding their own future interest, may even gain in clarity.

3. The Living Library

Here we must guard against an overly exclusively Western perspective. In many African societies, growing old is received as a gift from God and from the ancestors, and the elderly person, far from being set aside, remains the living memory of their community — repository not only of ancestral knowledge and skills, but also of the history of relations their lineage has woven with neighbouring clans. The Malian writer and thinker Amadou Hampâté Bâ summarised this conviction, in a speech delivered at UNESCO in 1960, in a formula that has since become famous: in Africa, when an old person dies, a library burns. This formula is not a mere sentimental tribute. It designates a precise anthropological function: in a society of oral tradition, the whole of collective memory rests on living heads, and the disappearance of one of them irretrievably carries away what no other medium could preserve in its place.

Where collective memory has no support other than the living, every elder is an entire library.

4. What Technical Modernity Displaces, Without Abolishing It

Contemporary societies, which entrust most of their memory to writing, then to digital media, no longer depend in the same way on the living memory of the elderly for the mere preservation of information. This is doubtless one of the reasons, among others, for the social invisibilisation from which the elderly suffer today in several Western societies, which the final chapter of this volume must examine in its own right. But this technical displacement touches only part of what the elderly transmit. For wisdom is never reducible to preserved information: it includes the judgment that knows what to do with that information, the capacity to situate a present crisis within a longer span of time, a quality of presence no database could store in place of the one who acquired it through living.

5. What Is Transmitted by One Who No Longer Has to Conquer Their Place

One last clarification deserves to be added. One who no longer needs to be recognised, to climb a status, or to defend a position, often transmits differently from one still engaged in that conquest: with less personal stake invested in what they say, and therefore, paradoxically, with a freedom of speech and a gratuitousness few other ages of life allow so fully. What the elderly person transmits is therefore not only content — memories, advice, a heritage — but a manner of transmitting, whose very gratuitousness constitutes part of its value.

6. Toward Death

This transmission, generous as it is, cannot indefinitely avoid the question to which old age inevitably leads: that of its own end. The next chapter, with Cicero, will address this nearness of death, not as a morbid obsession, but as a horizon thought can confront with a form of serenity.

Chapter VI — The Nearness of Death

1. A Horizon Rather Than an Obsession

Any serious reflection on old age necessarily encounters the question of death, and one must dwell on it without detour or morbid indulgence. Old age brings this question closer without needing to be reduced to it: it reminds us that human existence is limited, and this limit, far from mechanically stripping life of meaning, can on the contrary give it its full gravity. This is the fourth paradox announced in the first chapter of this volume — approaching death while deepening life — which this chapter must now examine in its own right.

2. Cicero and the Complaints Against Old Age

Cicero devoted an entire dialogue to this subject, which he places in the mouth of Cato the Elder, having reached an advanced age. There, Cato responds to four complaints usually levelled against old age: it removes one from active affairs, it weakens the body, it deprives one almost entirely of pleasures, and it brings death near. Cicero turns the first three complaints around without excessive difficulty — there exist activities, strengths, and pleasures proper to this age, which the preceding chapters of this volume have moreover largely confirmed in their own way. The fourth complaint demands a deeper response, because it touches on what no mere reversal of perspective can simply dissolve.

3. A Two-Branched Argument

Cicero's response to the fear of death follows a reasoning that has scarcely aged in two thousand years. Only two possibilities present themselves to thought: either death is the complete annihilation of consciousness, in which case it cannot constitute an evil for anyone, since no one will remain to suffer from it; or it opens onto another form of existence, in which case it should be welcomed rather than dreaded. In either case, the fear it inspires rests less on an argument than on an attachment — to life, to the body, to the things of this world — from which old age, having already practised many renunciations, finds itself paradoxically better equipped to detach than youth in full possession of its ambitions.

4. The Ripe Fruit

Cicero uses an image that illuminates better than any abstract argument what a death occurring at an advanced age may mean: that of the fruit falling from the tree once ripe. A green fruit, torn off before its time, falls by violence; a ripe fruit detaches itself, without rupture, because it has reached what it had grown for. The death of an elderly person who has fully lived their age does not betray their life; it is, in the most literal sense, its natural completion — which in no way exempts those left behind from grief, but changes the nature of what this death means for the one who passes through it.

A death that comes in its own time does not interrupt a life; it fulfils its form.

5. Societies That Hide, Societies That Celebrate

It is worth noting, without seeing in it a mere ethnographic curiosity, that human societies have never treated death uniformly. Some surround it with discretion, accompanying the dying and the dead in an almost silent restraint; others make it a solemn moment of collective gathering, celebrated with a pomp that may surprise an outside observer. This diversity confirms, as in Chapter V regarding transmission, that the meaning of death is never purely biological: it is always received through the forms a culture gives it, without these forms changing its ultimate reality.

6. What the Nearness of Death Gives to the Present

It remains to understand what this nearness, once thought without disproportionate dread, brings to the present rather than what it takes from it. The awareness that time is counted changes the quality of the attention one gives it: what could be repeated indefinitely is easily neglected, what will not be repeated demands to be looked at. Thus mortality, far from emptying life of meaning as is too often believed, can on the contrary give it that particular gravity only finitude makes possible.

7. Toward Contemporary Challenges

This philosophical serenity in the face of death, however solidly grounded, does not alone suffice to answer the very real transformations contemporary societies have inflicted upon old age. The final chapter of this volume must confront everything established so far with the unprecedented lengthening of old age, its growing medicalisation, the social invisibilisation of the elderly already announced in the previous chapter, and the cult of youth that characterises much of the contemporary world.

Chapter VII — The Contemporary Challenges of Ageing

1. A Structure Tested Rather Than Abolished

As with birth and parenthood in the preceding volumes of this collection, two symmetrical temptations must be resisted when facing the contemporary transformations of old age: lamenting a past in which the elderly were always honoured without reservation, and reducing these transformations to a simple linear progress toward better conditions of ageing. The six preceding chapters allow us to ask, of each contemporary phenomenon, the same question: does it modify the concrete forms of dignity, dispossession, transmission, and the relation to death, or does it alter their very structure?

2. The Lengthening of Life: An Old Age Become Plural

The considerable lengthening of life expectancy constitutes a historically unprecedented situation: old age, which once lasted only a few years for those who reached it, today extends over decades, and finds itself divided into very different periods — the gap is immense between the young retiree still fully active and the very elderly person who has become dependent for most daily acts. This internal diversification does not contradict what Chapter III established with Guardini; it only requires it to be more precise. Old age perhaps does not possess a single proper form, but several successive forms, each deserving to be thought in its own right rather than collapsed into a single, overly broad category.

3. Medicalisation: A Pathology or a Condition?

Ageing is increasingly apprehended as a medical problem to be managed, slowed, sometimes even fought as one fights a disease. This medicalisation has allowed real progress against sufferings that were not inevitable. But it also risks, when it becomes the only available framework of thought, reducing the entirety of the experience of old age to a series of clinical parameters to correct, and thus obliterating what Chapters III and V brought to light: a proper form of existence, bearer of a wisdom and a transmission no treatment alone could produce or replace. The question posed in Chapter I — does dignity depend on what one can do or on what one is — remains, here too, entirely pertinent: a purely medical view of old age implicitly answers with the first branch of this alternative, and it is precisely this that this volume has sought to call into question.

4. Social Invisibilisation: Resumption and Deepening

Chapter V began to explain the contemporary invisibilisation of the elderly through the technical displacement of collective memory, now entrusted to writing and to digital media rather than to persons. To this must be added a more directly spatial and institutional dimension: the physical separation of generations, by which a growing number of elderly people end their lives in

specialised institutions, set apart from the ordinary family and social fabric. This separation contrasts sharply with what Chapter V described regarding many African societies, where the elder remains integrated into the community until death. It in no way invalidates the dignity of the elderly person, which this entire volume has sought to establish independently of circumstances; but it seriously complicates its effective social recognition, since the most firmly established dignity in theory can remain without effect if no one is present nearby to recognise it day to day.

5. The Cult of Youth: Old Age as a Failure to Postpone

A significant part of contemporary culture treats old age as a failure that willpower, consumption, or technology ought to be able to postpone indefinitely, rather than as a normal and legitimate dimension of human existence. This is exactly the error Chapter III, with Guardini, named as the most common on this subject: judging one age by the criteria of another, and seeing in it only a lack where one should instead recognise a different form. The cult of youth is not a mere aesthetic or commercial phenomenon; it is the most visible contemporary expression of this anthropological error.

6. What Remains

What these transformations change are the demographic, medical, social, and cultural conditions under which old age is today experienced. What they do not change is the very structure this volume has patiently uncovered: a dignity that does not depend on the power to act, a dispossession of roles that does not extend to the dispossession of self, a dependence that does not abolish the autonomy of judgment, a wisdom that remains transmissible even when the social conditions of its transmission have weakened, and a death that, in its own time, fulfils a life rather than interrupting it. The forms change; what remains, remains.

Old age thus reveals, with particular clarity, that the human being is never entirely identical to the functions they exercise, the capacities they possess, or even the image they give of themselves. What remains when all this withdraws does not appear despite old age, but often thanks to it.

Conclusion

This volume set out from a question simple in appearance: what becomes of the human being when the strengths, roles, responsibilities, and capacities that had long seemed to define them progressively diminish?

The most spontaneous contemporary answer often describes this situation as a loss. And it would be absurd to deny that old age contains real losses: loss of power, sometimes of health, often of loved ones, sometimes of practical autonomy. But the inquiry conducted across these chapters leads to a different conclusion. Old age is not merely the time when something disappears; it is also the time when something appears.

It reveals first that human dignity never depends entirely on the power to act. If it did, the human being would be worth less as they age, and would end up being worth nothing at all once their capacities fade away. Yet nothing in the most elementary human experience allows such a conclusion to stand. The elderly person remains someone even when many things they could once do become impossible for them. Old age does not create this truth; it makes it visible.

It reveals further that dependence is not an anomaly come to interrupt a normally self-sufficient existence. The first volume of this collection showed that the human being begins life in radical vulnerability. Old age reminds us that this vulnerability never fully disappeared. It had simply ceased to be visible. Dependence is not the opposite of humanity; it is one of its permanent modalities, discreet at certain ages, manifest at others.

It reveals also that transmission does not depend solely on the capacity to act upon the world. An entire existence accumulates a memory, an experience, a manner of judging and discerning that often take on their full value only once personal ambitions have settled. The elderly person does not merely transmit what they know; they transmit what time has taught them to see.

Finally, it reveals that the nearness of death is not necessarily the enemy of meaning. A life that knows itself limited sometimes learns to look differently at what remains. What seemed ordinary regains its weight. What seemed taken for granted becomes precious again. Finitude does not strip time of its value; it gives it its gravity.

But perhaps one must go even further.

The preceding chapters have shown that old age progressively withdraws many answers to the question: who am I? Functions withdraw. Responsibilities diminish. Roles change. Certain capacities fade. And yet the person remains.

This abiding may well be the deepest anthropological discovery of old age.

As long as existence is carried by activity, we are tempted to identify with what we do. As long as it is carried by success, we identify with what we accomplish. As long as it is carried by

responsibilities, we identify with the place we occupy among others. Old age introduces a more radical question: what remains when all this withdraws?

What remains is not an impoverished residue of one's earlier existence. It is, on the contrary, what had never been reducible to its functions, its successes, or its capacities. Old age does not create this deeper core; it gradually uncovers it by withdrawing what had covered it over.

This is why this third volume retrospectively illuminates the two preceding ones.

Being Born showed a being who receives an existence they did not give themselves. Parenthood showed a being who transmits a freedom they do not possess. Old Age shows a being who progressively learns to detach from what they believed themselves to be, without thereby ceasing to be themselves.

To receive. To transmit. To abide.

These three movements do not merely describe three ages of life; they trace something of the human condition itself.

The human being receives what they did not choose. They give what they do not possess. And they finally discover that what they are is never entirely identical either to what they received or to what they gave.

Old age then appears in a new light. It is no longer merely the last age of existence before death. It becomes the moment when existence learns to stand in the truth of what it has always been: a life received, transmitted, and then slowly relinquished.

And this is perhaps why societies that still know how to make a place for their elders dimly recognise in them something that concerns everyone else. They know that the elderly person represents not only their past. The elder also shows them their future. More deeply still, the elder reminds them of what remains when everything else passes.

For forms change. Roles change. Strengths change.

But what remains, remains.

A poem accompanies this threshold in *Le Pédoncule des seuils*, the companion collection of poems that accompanies this series.

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