Introduction

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Introduction

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At the 2016 Billboard Music Awards, on receipt of an award for Woman of the Year, Madonna delivered an emotional speech detailing the misogyny and sexism she has experienced throughout her career. She stated that "the most controversial thing that I've done is to stick around," given that in the entertainment world, "to age is a sin. You will be criticized, you will be vilified, and you will definitely not be played on the radio"[1] (Blake, 2016). Three days previously, on the British television show *Good Morning Britain*, Piers Morgan pretended to vomit upon seeing a clip of Madonna twerking on James Corden's popular "Carpool Karaoke" segment for *The Late Late Show*. He claimed "I loved Madonna when she acted her age […] you can't be 58 and prancing about." Six weeks later, in his column for the *Mail Online*, Piers Morgan blasted Madonna's version of angry feminism, referring to Madonna as "once the fresh, exciting Material Girl, now the bitter, cynical, ageing Vinegar Girl who can always be relied upon to sour anything she touches" (Morgan 2017). Morgan here constructs the ageing woman[2] according to a strict binary logic that aligns female sexuality and power exclusively with youth: she is no longer "fresh." Madonna's refusal to retreat into silence in middle-age and her repeated assertion of an overt sexuality is demonised, especially in the context of a demonstration for

[1] This reference to radio play is almost certainly related to the BBC Radio 1 controversy in the UK. In 2014, the then head of music at BBC Radio1 and 1Xtra, George Ergatoudis, stated that "The vast majority of people who like Madonna, who like her music now, are over 30 and frankly, we've moved on from Madonna." A year later Madonna's newly-released single "Living for Love" was omitted from the station's playlist, leading to accusations of ageism from the singer. See Deardon 2015.

[2] We recognise that "ageing" is a contextual, perspective based term, which is also often negatively associated with decline and stereotype. When we use this term, rather than substitute it with "older" or "later life," it is in the context of our guiding premise: that the body is embedded in discourse, and confronting and naming categories in the cultural world provides for resisting such forces, to "unveil," as it were, the ageing subject. By using the term "ageing" rather than "older" we also draw attention to the fact that ageing is a life-long process and that signs of ageing affect individual women at different stages in the life-course. Accordingly, while this volume's focus ranges from middle-age to the fourth age, some chapters also specifically explore how prevalent cultural notions of ageing, such as the "horror of growing old" (de Beauvoir 1997, 587) or the cult of youth, can impact on younger women's self-perception (see, for instance, chapters 7, 11 and 12).

women's equality. Loudly proclaiming himself an ardent feminist, Morgan in his article adeptly uses Madonna's repudiation of cultural norms relating to ageing to attack feminism itself. It seems feminism is acceptable only at the expense of the exclusion of ageing women.

The Madonna-Morgan spat is symptomatic of a wider cultural obsession with, and marginalisation of the ageing woman. In contemporary celebrity culture, examples abound of women's experience of ageism (see Jermyn and Holmes 2015). In her 2011 memoir *Shockaholic*, Carrie Fisher discussed her casting as Princess Leia in *Star Wars*, and wrote "What I didn't realise, back when I was this twenty-five-year-old pinup for geeks in that me myself and iconic metal bikini, was that I had signed an invisible contract to stay looking the exact same way for the next thirty to forty years. Well, clearly I've broken that contract" (Fisher 2011). Four years later Fisher would take to Twitter to defend herself against accusations of ageing badly in the 2015 *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. She tweeted: "Please stop debating about whetherOR not [I] aged well.unfortunately it hurts all3 of my feelings.My BODY hasnt aged as well as I have" (Fisher 2015 *sic*). Here Fisher articulates a significant difference between her experience of ageing and its visible manifestation in her body. The physical embodiment of ageing does not, in Fisher's experience, match her corresponding lived experience of ageing and in this way resembles what Jeannette King refers to as "the ideal embodied subject" who "construct[s] an identity for herself that is determined neither by the ageing body nor by the discourses that construct it as 'ageing'" (2013, 173). This complexity is at the root of dominant cultural conceptions of the ageing female body, which tend to conflate biology and experience, identifying the "I"(self) and the ageing body as one and the same, leading to what Margaret Morganroth Gullette refers to as a loss of "selfhood" (1999, 36). Fisher insists on the separation of the subject "I" from the body, thus asserting a robust selfhood in a later tweet: "I identify more w/who I feel myself 2be than what I look like. Either way, Am I obliged 2entertain U w/ my appearance?" (Fisher 2005 *sic*).

This obligation to entertain audiences with appearance relates to the broader context of women having less success in their careers as they age. Certainly in the entertainment industry, women's youth is a prized commodity that loses value with age and when the physical signs of youth are no longer visible, the older woman is rendered invisible[3]. In an interview with *The Telegraph* in 2015, Jane Fonda spoke about her experience of invisibility, observing that "We are the fastest-growing demographic in the world, and yet we have no face in the mass media. It is OK for men to get older, because men become more desirable by being powerful. With women, it's all about how we look." The visibility of women in the mass entertainment industry is dependent on making the visible signs of ageing invisible – in Fonda's case, this resulted in plastic surgery. She explained, "I need to work, so I had some plastic surgery […] I think it probably bought me a decade of work" (Mulkerrins 2015). Fonda's experience demonstrates that, as Jeannette King notes, "the value of the female body and its talents is dependent on its youthfulness" (2013, 176). Fonda's acknowledgement that an anti-ageing procedure literally increased her earnings is suggestive of the way in which contemporary culture, driven by consumption, transforms women's bodies into products with economic value. Youthful (female) bodies make money.

The ageism experienced by Madonna, Carrie Fisher and Jane Fonda is not atypical in the contemporary entertainment industry, but the issues it raises with regards to the cultural construction of the ageing woman are common across multiple cultural texts and contexts. The sexualised ageing woman as source of disgust, the commodified female body, the (dis)connection between the ageing body and the ageing subject, the cultural obsession with the visual manifestations of ageing: all these concerns can be discerned in representations of ageing women in popular culture, celebrity culture, literature, film and television, art, performance art, and fashion. And yet, the ageing woman's experience is one that has, up until relatively

[3] See Kathleen Woodward, "Introduction," *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, 1999 for a discussion of the invisibility of the ageing woman.

recently, received little critical attention in feminist studies. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) was arguably the first feminist text to overtly address the "horror of growing old" and the "sorry tragedy of the aged woman" (1997, 587, 603). De Beauvoir would, three decades later, publish *La Viellesse* (translated and published in 1972 as *The Coming of Age*), a full-length consideration of the ageing process, but this latter text is curiously devoid of any in-depth consideration of gender in relation to the ageing process.[4] In 1972 Susan Sontag published "The Double Standard of Aging" in *The Saturday Review*, in which she lamented the fact that "there is a double standard of aging that denounces women with special severity. Society is much more permissive about aging in men" (31). This double standard is still prevalent in contemporary culture – consider for example a recent Huffington Post article which describes "30 Celebs who are Aging Gracefully," 23 of whom are women. Elle magazine does not bother to include men in its 2015 article "18 celebrities Who Don't Age and the Anti-Ageing Secrets they Swear by" (Dawson Hoff).

Following Sontag, ageing was a topic largely absent from feminist discourse until the publication of Germaine Greer's *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* in 1991. Greer's critique of the medical establishment's treatment of the menopause was groundbreaking at the time. Unlike her predecessors, Greer does celebrate the onset of old age in women as an avenue of freedom: as a woman's looks recede, she is no longer culturally-constructed as a sexual object, and, now "unwanted," the ageing woman can "be free" (4). This stance partly explains Greer's reaction to reading the *Telegraph* article featuring Jane Fonda's criticism of the entertainment industry's bias against ageing women. A day after the Fonda interview was published, Greer spoke disparagingly at the Hay Festival about Fonda's decision to have plastic surgery for the sake of her career: "I read Jane Fonda today saying men want younger women

[4] This goes in part to explain why *The Coming of Age* was largely ignored by feminists. For a detailed analysis of the text see King, 67-72.

so we have to try to look young. Jane! Why not say older women want gorgeous boys? Men want younger women? So let them want. There's no shortage out there. You don't have to pretend to be one!" Greer's attack on Fonda's effort to look young was framed by her acknowledgement that "the terror of growing old is worse than it ever was" (Singh 2015). This, in Greer's view, is due in part to anti-ageing products, which don't work, and "are marketed by exploiting […] women's anxiety" (Singh 2015). The "terror of ageing" then is a cultural construction synonymous with the commodification of women's bodies. The rise and success of the anti-ageing cream industry since Greer's 1991 book on ageing testifies to the growing need for a sustained critical consideration of prevailing attitudes to the ageing woman's experience in multiple texts and contexts.

Accordingly, with the rise of cultural gerontology as a discipline, more critical attention has been devoted to the cultural construction of the ageing woman. Kathleen Woodward's pioneering essay collection, *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (1999) focuses on making visible "the virtually invisible subject of older women" (x) and arguably spearheaded a new direction in ageing studies, represented by literary critics such as Sally Chivers, Zoe Brennan, Jeanette King and Heike Hartung, and media and visual culture experts such as Ros Jennings, Julia Twigg, Deborah Jermyn and Imelda Whelehan, all of whom link gender to ageing in specific genres or aspects such as popular culture.[5] Margaret Cruikshank's *Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture and Ageing* (2003) concentrates on American women's experience of ageing, arguing that "ageing is a creation of this time and place, more cultural than biological, determined by social institutions, or, more optimistically, a set of life experiences we can consciously shape, once we see how others are attempting to shape them for us" (2003, 2). The very fact that ageing is largely socially constructed means, in Cruikshank's positive view, that

[5] Examples for publications on ageing and literature include Chivers (2003), Brennan (2005), King (2013) and Hartung (2016); examples for publications on ageing and celebrity/popular culture include Jennings and Gardner (2012), Whelehan and Gwynne (2014) and Jermyn and Holmes (2015); an example for a study on ageing and fashion is Twigg (2013).

it can be resisted. In her view, "learning to be old requires that we both observe how aging is socially constructed and find ways to resist being molded to its dictates" (2003, 2), and her study details some of the ways in which this might be achieved. However, as recently as 2006, Calasanti, Slevin and King have produced research that demonstrates how ageing studies is still largely marginalised in feminist discourse. They lament the fact that "[t]he number of women's studies scholars engaged in work on later life is still so small that those with any interest in aging can count them" (2006, 13). This essay collection, then, marks a vital contribution to a field still in its relative infancy. In contrast to most recent publications on this topic, which tend to look at ageing in one genre, such as literature, or one aspect, such as popular culture, this book seeks to put diverse genres and media into conversation, acknowledging that conceptions of the ageing woman are constructed across different visual and verbal media.

As our initial examples taken from celebrity culture illustrate, visuality plays a dominant role in discourses on women and ageing. However, while it is true that we live in "a culture saturated by images" (Woodward 1999, xix) and that "age itself is a visual phenomenon" (Twigg and Martin 2015, 5), we argue that such images are created – and can be resisted or reshaped – both visually and verbally. Not only do images and texts often go hand in hand, but literary texts can activate powerful processes of visualization in the reader. As Margarita Dikovitskaya puts it in *Visual Culture* (2005): "The psychological notions of vision – interior vision, imagining, dreaming, remembering – are actualized by both visual and literary means. Thus, the study of visual culture allows all these aspects to come into view: One begins to look at and actually examine the process of visualizing literary texts" (56). While much of the work done in the fields of ageing studies and cultural gerontology has focused on visual culture, it is important to note that what Gullette refers to as "inner storytelling" and "nonvisual memories" (2004, 10) can result in new cultural narratives of ageing that enrich, complicate, counteract and complement the visual image. This is arguably most effectively realised in literary genres, such as life-writing or the *Reifungsroman*, which focus on the ageing subject's inner life, often

at odds with outward visual appearance. Several contributions in this collection testify to the inextricable interconnections between the visual and the verbal, such as Julia Dabbs's chapter, which focuses on the ways in which contemporary, male-authored biographies and art histories treat (or ignore) early modern women artists and their productivity in old age. Another case in point is performance art. Thus, as Bridie Moore points out in her chapter in this collection, Peggy Shaw's age performances in "gentleman drag" present her audience with the outward image of a gentleman in his thirties while the story she tells is that of "a sixty-plus year old, second-generation Irish, working-class, grand-butch-mother." Other chapters illuminate similar themes, such as prescribed social roles for older women, through the lens of either literature or visual culture, thus complementing and enriching each other.

As the image of the ageing woman is reflected and refracted across cultural texts and media, our collection brings together experts in literature and visual culture to foster a much-needed dialogue across disciplines. In doing so, it analyses the power these constructions exert over public and private conceptions of age, and explores the ways in which the figure of the ageing woman is reimagined or reinscribed across media, genres and cultures. In acknowledging the diversity of experiences and perspectives, we aim to follow Woodward's invitation, voiced in the preface to *Figuring Age*, "to write about women, bodies, and generations not just in terms of mainstream, middle-class culture, one that is predominantly white, but in a myriad of other cultural and subcultural contexts as well" (Woodward 1999, xxiii). Thus, section four on "Class, 'Race' and Agency" includes chapters which explore ageing in African American (Fürst), South African (Pretorius) and emigrant Irish (O'Neill) contexts. More generally, the contributors to this volume engage in transnational, multi-disciplinary research methods, including fields of life-writing, memory studies, postcolonial and feminist approaches. The collection is deliberately structured to facilitate the imbrication of visual culture and literature so as to arrive at a multi-facetted and overtly inter-disciplinary analysis of cultural representations of ageing. Our hope is that this intersectional and cross-

disciplinary structure will foster a fruitful dialogue across interdisciplinary and generic boundaries.

Narratives of Ageing

The first thematic section brings together four chapters on narratives of ageing. Narrative has emerged as central to cultural gerontology. Discussing literature and ageing, Sarah Falcus, in her contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*, notes that "With its insistence on the temporal, narrative is of obvious interest to those exploring age, often based on the idea that we live storied lives" (2015, 57). The analysis of narrative draws on a range of critical approaches. The contributors in this section interweave psychoanalytic, historical, biographic and generic approaches as they explore how older women in biography, biopic, fiction, and performance art confront social expectations. Their readings are further illuminated by theories of narrative and ageing. To expand on such theories, Woodward, for example, has commented on the process of reminiscence in narratives of old age, which involve backward and forward movement, and are both private and social (1997, 3). Heike Hartung has further established age as a literary category with particularly gendered inflections. As she notes: "[N]arratives of ageing are always gendered, differentiating the potential scope for development as well as the possible social and individual roles for men and women" (2016, 2). Such theories shed light on the cultural texts under exploration in this section, as narratives affect a conversation between older and younger generations of women and meander in a manner that nods to psychic time as well as the progression of chronological time. Though they encompass different genres and media, each essay in this section has a biographical leaning. In this context, it is significant that narratives of ageing have been read both in terms of decline and of progress. The decline of the old is so widely and pervasively assumed that it is embedded in narratives of old age (Gullette 1997). Barbara Frey Waxman, however, coined the term *Reifungsroman* to describe progress narratives in which, positively, "We cannot underestimate the political power

[…] to effect change in younger people's attitude toward the elderly, in individuals' attitudes toward their own aging, and in notions of appropriate social roles for elders" (1990, 187). The essays in this section illustrate these oppositional attitudes towards the progression of age, as they read stories of decline as well as regeneration. As these contributions testify, periods of later life, however negatively or affirmatively they are depicted, can both reflect as well as interrogate cultural values. Doing so, they open out generative spaces which may be informed by new concepts of ageing.

The first chapter, by Julia K. Dabbs, focuses on the (in)visibility of older women artists in the early modern period. While recent male-authored studies on artists and old age tend to omit or marginalize women artists past the age of 50, Dabbs draws on early modern sources to explore both verbal and visual representations of women artists productive in their later years. Studying these artists' life narratives in light of prominent old age tropes associated with male artists as well as negative cultural tropes associated with older women, her analysis highlights alternative, more positive representations of the older woman artist in terms of wisdom, creativity and agency.

Following this, Eva Adelseck turns to more recent examples of successful women by examining two biographical films, *Iris* (2001) and *The Iron Lady* (2011), about novelist Iris Murdoch and former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, respectively. The two biopics are linked by their focus on Alzheimer's disease, from which both women suffered in their later years. Adelseck explores the representation of the formerly successful and autonomous protagonists' loss of memory, identity and independence in the light of psychoanalytical concepts such as othering and the uncanny. In doing so, she argues that ageing women suffering from dementia are doubly othered and that this othering is, in part, perpetuated in the films that narrate their mental decline.

The next chapter focuses on literary narrative. Michaela Schrage-Früh reads Clare Boylan's novel *Beloved Stranger*, a fictionalised account of the relationship between Boylan's

parents, as an example of the recently emerged genre of the *Reifungsroman,* or novel of ripening. In her analysis, Schrage-Früh foregrounds the narrative features of this genre, one of whose central aims is to resist the cultural myth of ageing as a narrative of decline, by exploring the seventy-five-year-old protagonist's fictional life review and her difficult journey towards self-discovery, progress and liberation.

In the final chapter in this section, Bridie Moore shifts the focus to performance art and Peggy Shaw's autobiographical age performances in particular. Moore argues that the absence of a linear narrative or a coherent fictional world enables the performance artist, in this case an older, lesbian woman in "gentleman drag," to subvert "the normative age scripts of femininity." As Moore points out, by also performing and engaging with the infirmity of her post-stroke body, Shaw challenges the conventional decline narrative, instead presenting an "old woman" who counters the figure popularly staged as dependant, obsolete or obscene.

Social Roles

Section two explores the ways in which social roles and expectations for ageing women are reflected or reimagined in, or indeed shaped by, different media and genres. As cultural gerontology has established, old age is not solely biological but is also culturally situated, its meaning influenced by wider social structures. The important project of foregrounding age in socio-cultural analysis is exemplified in the research of Julia Twigg, who argues that age, like gender, is "one of the most profound elements that structure the social realm. Age and aging are deeply social" (2004, 70). Furthermore, old age is not only a collective but also an individual experience. An individual's position is informed by physical, psychological as well as cultural and social conditions, and it is always in flux. However, the identities of older people are often airbrushed in and by a culture of youth which asserts the pressure to "pass" as younger. The "invisible" older woman, as Jeanette King writes in her seminal work *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman,* is compelled to disguise herself as younger to

become visible (2013). Connectedly, Gullette has famously argued that we are "aged by culture," whereby dominant concepts of age in culture are mapped onto the body, which is then monitored for signs that it is in decline (2004). This phenomenon pervades in contemporary postfeminist culture in which, under the guise that equality has been achieved and within a consumerist society, the figure of the young woman represents an ideal of attainment. Exploring different facets of the histories of this culture, the essays in this section together illuminate the influence that symbols and stereotypes of womanhood, such as the "spinsters" and "mothers" created by Jane Austen, still hold today. Recognising the historically and culturally constructed nature of these images and speaking to their present-day endurance, the essays in this section interrogate the consequences of two-dimensional representations of older women, illustrating how this informs and impoverishes social status in old age. Doing so, these essays reinforce the importance of diversity and creativity in cultural representation.

The first chapter in this section, by Amber Jones, takes a fresh look at Jane Austen's representation of ageing mothers. Taking into account the lasting popularity of Austen's novels, Jones argues that, while Austen's young and unconventional heroines still appeal to readers today, their ageing female counterparts are harder to identify with, as they tend to be presented as a source of ridicule and conflict. However, as Jones shows, Austen's largely negative representations of ageing mothers must be read in their historical and cultural context, more specifically in line with the limitations inherent in social and cultural norms which, for ageing mothers, often evolved into literal, physical boundaries.

If Austen's fictions have lastingly impacted readers' negative conceptions of older women, the same can be said of fairy tales, which often depict older female characters as evil stepmothers or witches. Accordingly, in her chapter on ABC's television programme *Once Upon a Time*, Katherine Whitehurst examines the depiction of the three female leads, Snow White, Snow White's daughter and the Evil Queen, all of whom have been cast within the same age bracket, thus seemingly diverting from generational conflicts and age stereotypes. As

Whitehurst shows, however, the programme reiterates the Queen's and Snow White's connection with ageing and youth through their ideological associations with different generations of mothers and feminists, thus ultimately perpetuating narratives that idealise youth and reaffirming the narrative of the evil older woman.

Following this, Cathy McGlynn's chapter shifts the focus from motherhood to spinsterhood. More specifically, McGlynn looks at the representation of ageing women in relation to the construction of spinsterhood in Sylvia Townsend Warner's short fiction, spanning the author's long writing career from the interwar period in the 1930s to her later work in the 1960s. Taking Warner's most famous ageing spinster Lolly Willowes as her starting-point, McGlynn analyses the construction of spinsterhood in a selection of Warner's critically-neglected short stories, demonstrating the author's increasingly subversive critique of a youth culture that marginalises the old and unmarried.

The fourth chapter included in this section has a combined focus on the depiction of the ageing mother and widow. In her analysis of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones: Mad about the Boy*, Lucinda Rasmussen shows how the third novel about Bridget Jones differs from its predecessors in that the chick-lit heroine is now a fifty-one-year-old widow and single mother rather than a singleton in her mid-thirties. Examining the negative reactions by readers and critics, who shame the older protagonist for her perceived immaturity, Rasmussen discusses the novel in the context of postfeminism, arguing that *Mad about the Boy* allows us to better understand how a now mature postfeminism depends vitally on its continuing suppression of its female subjects as they age.

<u>The Body and Embodiment</u>

The contributions in section three partake in a burgeoning field of work on the body and embodiment in ageing, exploring how the body is aged in and by culture. It is notable that much of previous feminist work has focused on younger bodies. This avoidance comes not only from

within feminism but also from within gerontology, as biomedical accounts have been privileged over the social. Essentially, this reflects reluctance in wider culture to address issues of old age (Twigg, 2004, 60). However, with the cultural turn in gerontology, renewed considerations of the body have emerged in the humanities and cultural studies, illustrating, as Twigg demonstrates, that "[t]he aging body is thus not natural, is not prediscursive, but fashioned within and by culture" (2004, 60). The cultural in gerontology signifies a movement away from bodies as purely physiological towards thinking of ageing in relation to power, as with gender and sexuality. Furthermore, as Emmanuelle Tulle illustrates in her contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Gerontology*, "gender as well as class (and ethnicity) are inscribed in and on bodies" (2015, 130). The essays in this section starkly illustrate how bodies in culture are created by discourses and regulated by social practices. Individually, they deal with representations of the body and embodiment in film, fiction, television, fashion campaigns, and performance art. These essays draw our attention to the mechanisms that operate to construct and control the body, as well as individual subversion of these expectations and stereotypes. Contributors explore discourses that regulate the body according to social standards and expectations of beauty and sexuality in a culture of anti-ageing. The essays draw attention to significant differences in how society perceives the ageing bodies of women and of men, and how this can have an effect on lived experience. As age differentiates older and younger, it also differentiates women and men, particularly when it comes to the appearance of old age. Therefore, old age is a time of commonality and of difference. However, depictions of strategies of resistance to ageist and gendered social expectation may be read across these essays. Together, these contributions illustrate that the position of the aged body in culture is gendered, subjective and open to many variables.

The section starts out with Susan Liddy's chapter on representations of older women and sexuality in film. As Liddy argues, in recent years cinematic films have engaged more overtly with later-life sexuality, thus challenging the cultural myth that sexual passion belongs

exclusively to the young. However, analysing the representation of female mature sexuality in three recent films, *Hope Springs*, *Le Week-end* and *45 Years*, Liddy shows that these films still perpetuate some problematic cultural conventions, such as the absence of the ageing female body, which, as Liddy concludes, points to a patriarchal and youth dominated culture as well as a gendered film industry.

Following this chapter on film, Theresa Wray explores perceptions of the ageing process in Irish fiction. Focusing on a range of diverse texts by Mary Lavin, Bridget O'Connor, Mary Costello and Claire Kilroy, Wray analyses the ways in which their fictional characters struggle with bodily signs of ageing that carry negative cultural connotations and therefore impact negatively on their self-conception. In her analysis, Wray connects these diverse characters' perceptions of ageing to dominant cultural, media and health discourses and emphasises the importance of women's voices to counter prescribed meanings of what it means to get older.

The next chapter, by Ros Jennings and Hannah Grist, complements Liddy's and Wray's work on film and literature by exploring representations of the older female body in Lena Dunham's comedy television drama *Girls*. The authors show that the programme's representation of female older age for the most part perpetuates dominant stereotypes such as the dying grandmother, the powerless disabled older woman or the postmenopausal cougar. Analysing the reasons for the programme's failure to transcend these categories, Jennings and Grist argue that current intergenerational politics of cultural ageism and chronological models of ageing prevent an imaginary where older women can be represented as powerfully complex and diverse. They also suggest that by reimagining ageing and motherhood through a "desire for the postmaternal," the ageing woman might be empowered and a younger generation of women might be provided with alternative cultural narratives.

In the next chapter, Deborah Jermyn and Anne Jerslev examine recent fashion campaigns featuring older women. Analysing the 2015 Céline campaign featuring Joan Didion, and the 2017 Pirelli calendar, they note that at first glance these campaigns increase the

visibility of the older woman in popular culture and contribute to forging a positive image of the older woman's body. However, similar to older women's representation in recent film, the older female model ideal in fashion is overwhelmingly white and slim, just like in fashion photography in general. Exploring the implications of the 'cool' image as exemplified by older women in fashion photography, the authors nevertheless conclude that a cool appearance could provide an aesthetic space for older women in which to dissolve and reimagine norms about appearance as an older woman.

The last chapter included in this section, by EL Putnam, focuses on performance art in which the artists use their own bodies in the process of artistic creation. Putnam analyses three different performance acts of experimental artists: Rocio Boliver (Mexico), who holds up a grotesque mirror to the beauty industry and its commodification of youth and beauty; Pauline Cummins and Frances Mezzetti (Ireland), who take on male dress and mannerisms in public contexts to expose how older men and women are treated differently in public space; and Marilyn Arsem (United States), who draws attention to the female, ageing body as the corporeal inscription of time. As Putnam concludes, despite their differences, all of these artists treat experiences of ageing as performative. They do so through the creation of live works that emerge from embodied experiences and that reveal new forms of knowledge situated in the ageing female body.

Class, 'Race' and Agency

The essays in the final section of this volume explore the gendered, racial, and class based nature of old age. Age has come to the fore as a category of analysis that may be situated alongside feminist, postcolonial or queer approaches to understanding cultural texts. Due to different experiences and trajectories of growing older, age differentiates while it collectivises. It can be read as "the last difference, the unspoken but inevitable site of a difference not only *between* subjects but also a difference *within* subjects are they are exiled from their younger

selves" (Bazin and White, 2006, ii). In ageing, a conversation emerges both internally, between our past and present selves, and externally, as age functions to create distances and barriers between and amongst social groups. Age also crosses paths with categories of gender, 'race,' class and ethnicity. Intersecting with all, it is a common denominator in that "Each of us has confronted, or will eventually have to confront, the physical, psychological, social, and other changes that happen with time; all of us who live will eventually belong to the "Othered" category that is old age" (Marshall, 2006, vii). Focusing on Irish, South African and American contexts, the essays in this section illustrate that because women have so often been objectified or treated as symbols, and as older women are "invisible," they have to struggle for political and personal agency. Together, these contributions emphasise the material conditions and social factors such as sexism, racism and poverty that influence the experience as well as construction of old age. Following on from our explorations of narratives of ageing, the socially constructed nature of ageing, and the regulation of the ageing body in culture, this section further complicates and moves us away from age-related experience as simply biological. Applying theories in cultural gerontology in new ways alongside postcolonial, feminist and psychoanalytic criticism, the essays in this section can contribute to shaping future responses and possibilities for analysing ageing and old age.

The first contribution is Antoinette Pretorius' chapter on J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, a novel set in the last days of the South African Apartheid regime. Pretorius shows how Coetzee's text subverts the conventional notion of dependency associated with the concepts of childhood, femininity and older age by foregrounding the ageing white female protagonist's body as a marker of transcendence rather than as one of inevitable decline and deterioration. In the context of South Africa's transition to democracy, the elderly female body could thus be seen as representative of the irony underlying the complex and often paradoxical tensions governing societal change. As Pretorius further shows, through his representation of the elderly protagonist's body in pain and her awakening social consciousness and agency, Coetzee

subverts conventional representations of women in relation to land, and to some extent liberates the figure of the ageing woman from socially prescribed meanings.

Moving the focus away from South Africa to North America, the next chapter, by Saskia Fürst, explores how Clarence Major's novel *Such Was the Season* uses African American humour and speech acts to negotiate a mature identity in its protagonist Annie-Eliza. As Fürst points out, until very recently mainstream print and television culture either ignored African American older women or represented them in stereotypical ways. In contrast, Major's creation of his character Annie-Eliza, inspired by the voices of Major's mother and other female relatives, gives voice, agency and legitimacy to the perspective of an older black woman from a working/middle-class background in the US. Fürst further shows that Major's use of humour works to criticize mainstream views of mature black womanhood as well as the concept of successful ageing.

The next chapter, by Margaret O'Neill, explores the literary representation of a formerly celebrated Irish actress, who lives a life of loneliness and poverty in 1950s London. O'Neill reads Joseph O'Connor's novel *Ghost Light*, a fictional biography of Molly Allgood, with reference to Freud's concept of the Uncanny. O'Neill shows how, by means of narrative technique, the novel reveals the complexity of the aged protagonist's inner life as she retells and relives her memories of the younger Molly's romance with playwright J.M. Synge, while simultaneously struggling to survive in an environment hostile to the old and the poor. As O'Neill concludes, the novel thus demonstrates the potential for art to reveal the moral failings of a wider community, eventually seen in Molly's bleak death.

This section concludes with Kate Antosik-Parsons' chapter on the visibility of women's ageing and agency in American artist Suzanne Lacy's performance art, particularly her two major participatory works *The Crystal Quilt* (1987) and *Silver Action* (2013). As Antosik Parsons notes, Lacy defines her work as "new genre public art," work created in the public realm that is activist in nature, incorporating traditional and non-traditional media to render

visible the impact that the political, economic and social conditions have on women's lives. She further analyses the ways in which Lacy's participatory works directly challenge viewers to confront their own fears and misconceptions about ageing and reveal the need to approach ageing from multiple points of analyses, accounting for gender, sexuality, 'race,' class and abilities.

Finally, in her Afterword to this collection, Germaine Greer, twenty-six years after the publication of *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (1991), denounces the indignities that older women still endure in a youth-obsessed culture that habitually side-lines and humiliates them while perpetuating negative images of old age. In contrast to this, in the second half of her Afterword, she notes the growing number of women writers and artists who are not only productive in their later years but who provide valuable – both fictional and autobiographical – accounts of their own ageing that deserve to be heard and that we ignore at our peril. Many of these women have been relegated to the margins of cultural discourse and Greer's insistence on the need for a recognition of their achievement persuasively signposts possible future avenues for research on women and ageing.

Together, the contributions in this collection reveal new insights into contemporary representations of ageing women, while simultaneously recognising the historically constructed nature of these images. They bring together visual and literary, media and popular culture to explore reflections, refractions and reimaginings of the ageing woman and to consider how these representations shape contemporary society. In the understanding that the ageing body is embedded in, informed by and informs the cultural world, these essays explore and interrogate this relationship. They consider the potential of narrative, as well as its shortcomings, the limits of society, as well as modes of resistance, the ageing body as shaped by discourse, and intersections of 'race,' class, gender and ageing. In concluding with the section on "Class, 'Race' and Agency," we encourage readers to retrospectively consider the many and varied ways in which age intersects with stratified power relations throughout this volume. While the

structure serves to highlight specific themes that have emerged as central to critical ageing studies in recent years, in many cases the chapters comprised in a specific section also lend themselves to consideration in light of other sections. For example, Margaret O'Neill's chapter in the 'Class, 'Race' and Agency' section may productively be read as an exploration of the process of reminiscence in narratives of ageing. Likewise, Michaela Schrage-Früh's chapter in the 'Narratives of Ageing' section might equally be read to illuminate how social roles such as widowhood and motherhood might be reimagined. The chapters by Bridie Moore and Antoinette Pretorius, in the 'Narratives of Ageing' and 'Class, 'Race' and Agency' sections respectively, both foreground the potential for a focus on bodies and embodiment to destabilize social, cultural and political representations of ageing. As a whole, the contributions in this volume serve to complicate and challenge dominant ideologies of ageing. They testify that, as Marshall notes: "The deconstruction of dichotomies in genders and sexualities, feminist approaches to postmodern selfhood, analyses of the connections between power and economy, and the plethora of works on body-based identity categories: each of these ideas could be brought to bear on the performance and construction of aging" (Marshall, viii). Furthermore, as authors and artists explore these issues, they harness feminist theory that has so often overlooked the figure of the ageing woman, to contribute to and extend an emerging, innovative, vibrant discourse. In doing so, they open out new cultural and critical spaces that enable the creation of alternative futures.

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