

Introduction

Ageing Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Spanish Literature

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Ageism and ageist representations of old age have been scarcely discussed in Spain despite the important increase in life expectancy in the country. ‘Edadismo’ or ‘etarismo’ are terms which have surfaced in the public discourse quite recently, although not many people know their meaning. Moreover, there is a very small number of articles on the matter even though the COVID-19 has resulted in a rise in the number of scholars and news media outlets interested in the topic of ageing. In fact, the reality is that Spanish discourses around ageing are essentially ageist, as Raquel Medina has argued,¹ thus the need to combat ageist language and representations of ageing and older people. Recently released language inclusive guides prepared by governmental offices and NGOs seem to not have had an important impact on ageist representations of older people in mass media, social networks and also literature. Discrimination by age is considered of secondary importance when discussing groups that are subject to discrimination, being sexism and racism the main foci of discrimination studies. In addition, ageing in Spain, as in most countries embracing neoliberal agendas, has left behind the so-called family values that placed the duty to care for older people on family members –mainly on daughters--. Therefore, representations of ageing in Spain do not vary that much from those found in other Western countries and, as we will examine in the pages that follow, the framework of cultural (and critical) gerontology is thus pertinent.

Ageing is the process of growing old. Life cycles are chronologically and linearly stage-based throughout the life course and are institutionalised through economic, socio-political and cultural structures. Nonetheless, the life cycles of infant, toddler, child,

¹ Raquel Medina, ‘Eliminar los estereotipos para reivindicar la vejez,’ *La revolución de los viejos*, elDiario.es, (December 2021, 44-45).

adolescent, young adult, adult, older adult, etc. are artificially constructed and regulated by cultural notions of productivity or decline.² Critical gerontology has contested those approaches to ageing supporting the biomedical model and the idea that older people are a burden on society. Cultural gerontology (and therefore literary gerontology) offers new perspectives on thinking about age and focuses on how age and ageing have been culturally constructed and portrayed. A critical analysis of fictional representations of ageing and the life course can help to understand the ageing process as well as its social and cultural constructedness.

Georges Minois (1989) claims that youth has always been preferred to old age across centuries, and old age has either been perceived as a source of wisdom and reputation or as decrepitude and discrimination.³ In ancient times, ‘old’ was not linked to ‘age’ *per se* but to loss of ability to do certain tasks deemed to be useful to society. It is precisely in Greek and Roman times when the current notion of old age as decrepitude and decline first appeared. While respected as sources of wisdom and experience, older men were also pitied, as beauty, youth, and strength were seen as the most valued features. In the opening pages of Plato’s *Republic*, for example, Socrates meets the old Cephalus and asks him what it is like to grow old, to which the latter replies that “they [older men] hanker for the pleasures of their youth, remembering how they used to make love...and thinking it a great deprivation that they can’t do so any more.”⁴ In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, old age was often regarded as a terrible stage of life. While older

² Amanda Grenier, Meredith Griffin & Colleen McGrath, ‘Aging and Disability: The Paradoxical Positions of the Chronological Life Course,’ *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 1: 2&3 (2016), 1-17. <https://www.rdsjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/588/1680>.

³ George Minois, *History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989)

⁴ Pat Thane, *A History of Old Age*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 14. In Greek art, one of Heracles’s jobs was also to fight against personified old age, “typically an emaciated figure with grotesquely swollen but flaccid genitals” (Thane, *A History*, 65), just as Plautus’s plays tended to focus on older men’s “sexual, though impotent, proclivities” (Thane, *A History*, 54).

women were often depicted as wicked witches, a lustful old man (*senex amans*) looking for sex with younger women was equally subjected to ridicule, as he was seen as “flouting the laws of nature and behaving like a madman” since he would be easily cuckolded.⁵ And, in the seventeenth-century *Commedia dell’Arte*, for example, Pantaloon becomes ‘an object of contempt, petulant, pretending to be young, falling in love with unattainable young women and being deceived on all sides.’⁶ In conclusion, in Western cultures ‘ageism’ seems to have existed since ancient times.

‘Ageism’ is a term first coined by Robert Butler in 1969 to refer to the systematic stereotyping and discrimination of people due to their age.⁷ Although Butler focused on the discrimination of older people, ageism reaches people in all life cycles. Thus, ageism is considered an attitude that the members of society develop from childhood and therefore it is not only internalised but can provoke intergenerational conflict.⁸ However, neoliberal Western discourses have portrayed later life as one of decline; a time in which frailty, poor health, dependency, loss of sexual vigour, passivity, lack of physical attractiveness, social isolation and unproductiveness are the main features.⁹ As a result, ageing and old age have been charged with negative connotations, causing discrimination against older people through the creation and dissemination of ‘the master narrative of decline.’¹⁰ According to Margaret M. Gullette (2004), we are “aged by culture” because old age is not simply the consequence of biological deterioration but also the result of

⁵ Thane, *A History*, 94-136.

⁶ Thane, *A History*, 138.

⁷ Robert N. Butler, ‘Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry,’ *The Gerontologist*, 9: 4.1 (1969), 243–246.

⁸ Becca Levy & Mark Schlesinger, ‘When Self-interest and Age Stereotypes Collide: Elders Opposing Increased Funds for Programs Benefiting Themselves,’ *Journal of Aging & Social Policy*, 17: 2 (2005), 25-39.

⁹ See Vern L. Bengtson, Elizabeth O. Burgess & T. M. Parrott, ‘Theory, Explanation, and a Third Generation of Theoretical Development in Social Gerontology,’ *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 52:2 (1997), 72–88.

M. W. Riley & J. W. Riley, ‘Age Integration: Conceptual and Historical Background,’ *The Gerontologist*, 40 (2000), 266–270.

¹⁰ Margaret M. Gullette, *Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997).

socio-cultural aspects.¹¹

In addition, the ageing population has become a matter of concern in economic and social terms and has been blamed for placing at risk welfare systems across the world. Consequently, and in clear contrast to the idea of ageing as decline, the concept of ‘successful ageing’ (also known as ‘healthy ageing,’ ‘active ageing’ and ‘positive ageing’) quickly gained importance in the last decades of the 20th century. The concept was coined by John Wallis Rowe and Robert Kahn¹² and had as its aim to encourage sustained healthy habits in older people in order to delay as much as possible (or completely) the time of dependence on the welfare system.¹³ Successful ageing, then, is synonymous with independence, vitality, and health. However, as Rowe and Kahn acknowledge,¹⁴ this notion of ‘successful ageing’ implies that individuals have to be free of disability or disease, possess high cognitive and physical abilities, and be able to socially interact with other members of society. ‘Successful ageing’ is thus inseparable from the particularities of Western neoliberal societies and the realm of consumerism. New products targeted for older people have recently hit the market: retirement communities, gyms, Viagra, plastic surgery, tourism, etc. all become important players within the context of ‘successful ageing.’ Some consider that ‘successful ageing’ is an ageist notion as it is a generalised attempt to mask the signs of ageing in the body.¹⁵ In

¹¹ Margaret M. Gullette, *Aged by Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

¹² See John Rowe & Robert Kahn, ‘Successful Aging,’ *The Gerontologist*, 37: 4 (1997), 433–440.

¹³ See Sarah Lamb, *Successful Aging as a Contemporary Obsession: Global Perspectives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004). See also Carl Honoré, *Bolder: Making the Most of Our Longer Lives* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2019). For some more thoughtful books that examine ageing and illness and recommend a realistic preparation for this life-stage, please see Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and what Matters in the End* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

¹⁴ Rowe & Khan, ‘Successful Aging’.

¹⁵ See Thomas Cole, ‘The ‘Enlightened’ View of Aging: Victorian Morality in a New Key,’ *The Hastings Center Report*, 13:3 (1983), 34-40.

Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick, *Images of Ageing: Cultural Representations of Later Life* (Routledge, London and New York, 1995).

Gullette *Declining to Decline*.

Kathleen Woodward, *Ageing and Its Discontents – Freud and Other Fictions* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991).

this way, as Margaret Cruikshank claims, the body has become the text in which age registers and presents itself.¹⁶ The ‘mask of age’¹⁷ positions the subject as the youthful identity that is behind the embodiment of age. As Kathleen Woodward discussed with regards to the gaze in 'Performing Age, Performing Gender' (2006),¹⁸ the concept of the 'youthful structure of the look' (which she had first proposed in 'Youthfulness as a Masquerade' [1988])¹⁹ places the spectator as younger, which in turn fills the gaze with negative fixed notions of old age as decline. Thus, the youthful structure of the look is 'the culturally induced tendency to degrade and reduce an older person to the prejudicial category of old age, [...] where youth is valued at virtually all costs over age and where age is largely deemed a matter for comedy or sentimental compassion.'²⁰

The ‘successful ageing’ and ‘ageing as decline’ narratives have been strongly criticised from a feminist perspective for linking decline discourses to female ageing, while positive ageing notions are mainly associated with masculinity by emphasising autonomy, productivity, and activity. With a view to resolving the binary created by ‘successful ageing’ and ‘ageing as decline,’ Linn Sandberg develops her ‘affirmative ageing’ notion,²¹ which not only recognises the material specificities of the ageing body but also dissociates them from the above mentioned (masculine) issues of autonomy, productivity, and activity. Sandberg proposes a return to the body and to the difference of ageing as a productive force, a positive difference, concluding that

Affirmative old age, in contrast to successful ageing, does not aspire to agelessness or attempt to reject and fight old age, but instead seeks a

¹⁶Margaret Cruikshank, ‘Ageing and Identity Politics,’ *Journal of Ageing Studies*, 22 (2008), 147–151.

¹⁷ Kevin McHugh, ‘Three Faces of Ageism: Society, Image and Place,’ *Ageing and Society* 23 (2003), 165-185, (p.169).

¹⁸ Kathleen Woodward, ‘Performing Age, Performing Gender,’ *NWSAJ*, 18:1 (2006),163–189.

¹⁹ Kathleen Woodward, ‘Youthfulness as a Masquerade,’ *Discourse* 11:1 (1988),119-42.

²⁰ Woodward, ‘Performing Age,’ 164.

²¹ Linn Sandberg, ‘Affirmative Old Age: The Ageing Body and Feminist Theories on Difference,’ *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 8:1 (2013)), 11-40.

conceptualisation and acceptance of old age in all its diversity, from active to sedentary, from sexually vibrant to sexually indifferent. Affirmative old age is as such ultimately a political force and empowering strategy.²²

Furthermore, at the centre of Sandberg's approach to affirmative ageing is queer studies' notion of gender and sexual orientation as a social construction. Queer studies have underlined the fluid qualities of gender and sexual orientation and, in doing so, have also challenged the fixed and stable dichotomies of 'young/old, sexual/asexual, attractive/unattractive, and homosexual/heterosexual.'²³ If (older) gay men have recurrently been stereotyped as hypersexual and as sexually voracious, they have also been represented as weak and effeminate, miserable and lonely, and as less manly than their heterosexual counterparts. Quite often, as Dustin Bradley Goltz reminds us, the two stereotypes intersect, as in classic films such as *Death in Venice*, *Gods and Monsters*, or *Love and Death on Long Island*, to name but a few, where ageism and homophobia combine to judge intergenerational relations as inappropriate and gay characters as "dirty old men" eager to recover their lost youth.²⁴ Given these negative images, it is no wonder, then, that both youthism and ableism have become part and parcel of contemporary gay culture, which may also be linked to the few positive cultural images available of aging or disabled gay male bodies.²⁵ (Goltz). The present issue will demonstrate, however, how fictions on older gay men may be useful to rethink such traditional (mis)conceptions, delving, as we shall see, into "queer" rather than linear or "straight" notions of time,²⁶ allowing for more varied and alternative images of ageing to coexist in old age.

²² Sandberg, 'Affirmative Old Age,' 35.

²³ See Mark Hughes, 'Queer Ageing,' *Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*, 2:2 (2006), 54-59, (p.57).

²⁴ Dustin Bradley Goltz, *Queer Temporalities in Gay Male Representation: Tragedy, Normativity, and Futurity* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-2.

²⁵ Goltz, *Queer*, 2-3.

²⁶ Judith (now Jack) Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

Ageing and Gender

Traditionally, the main gendered studies of ageing have centred on women.²⁷ Focusing specifically on the 'double discrimination' women face at the intersection of ageism and sexism, Julia Twigg has argued, for example, that the power of a woman resides in her sexual appeal and her attractiveness, which ageing clearly threatens to compromise. Thus, the female body become both 'invisible – in that it is no longer seen – and hypervisible – in that it is *all* that is seen.'²⁸ Thus, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* (1970) reminded us of the strong connections between age and sexual discrimination, suggesting that both women and older people are similarly disempowered as dependent objects, for the social status of both groups is always *granted*, not *won*, by men and adults respectively.²⁹ In a similar vein, Susan Sontag's influential essay 'The Double Standard of Aging' (1972) continued to denounce older women's double oppression in gender and age terms, reinforcing rather than qualifying the traditional gendered division of ageing. 'Growing older,' Sontag claims, 'is mainly an ordeal of the imagination—a moral disease, a social pathology—intrinsic to which is the fact that it afflicts women much more than men.'³⁰ Not only does Sontag describe ageing in exclusively negative terms but she also contends, then, that it is women, above all, who experience ageing with horror 'and even

²⁷ Susan Sontag, 'The Double Standard of Aging', *The Saturday Review* (1972), 29-38; Barbara Macdonald, 'Outside the Sisterhood: Ageism in Women's Studies,' *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 17:1-2 (1989), 6-11; Germaine Greer, *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Kathleen Woodward, *Ageing and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Betty Friedan, *The Fountain of Age* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age* (New York: Norton, 1996); Marilyn Pearsall, *The Other Within Us: Feminist Explorations Of Women And Aging* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Lynne Segal, *Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing* (London: Verso, 2013).

²⁸ Julia Twigg, 'The Body, Gender, and Age: Feminist Insights in Social Gerontology,' *Journal of Aging Studies*, 18:1 (2004), 59-73 (p.62).

²⁹ In *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir explains, 'I showed that [...] women [...] owe it [their standing] in fact to the men. This is equally true for the aged in relation to the adults. Their authority is based upon the dread or the respect they inspire: the moment the adults break free from it, the aged have no power left whatsoever'. Beauvoir, *Coming*, 85-86.

³⁰ Susan Sontag, 'The Double Standard of Aging', *The Saturday Review* (1972), 29-38, (p.29).

shame.³¹ Similarly binary in its gender-ed treatment of ageing is Betty Friedan's classic *The Fountain of Age* (1993),³² which, as in the case of Simone de Beauvoir, was published after her equally well-known feminist text titled *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).³³ If Friedan's earlier text had denounced the patriarchal oppression undergone by (young) women, particularly the mirage of the contented housewife and mother in 1950s America, her later text, written when she was herself in her sixties, focused on what she referred to as the 'age mystique,' which affected, for example, the invisibility of older women in the Hollywood industry, except as witches or hags, as opposed to the large number of male actors like Paul Newman or Burt Lancaster playing 'attractive, distinguished older men.'³⁴

More recently, other feminists have just followed suit. If Germaine Greer devoted a whole book to rethinking the specific physical, psychological, and social implications of menopause for ageing women,³⁵ the psychologist Lynne Segal has recently argued that ageing 'affects us all, and affects us all differently,' but she also insists that 'it is women who have often reported a very specific horror of ageing.'³⁶ In this sense, first Pearsall in 1997³⁷ and then Gardiner in 2002³⁸ highlighted the lack of symmetry between male and female ageing, as, according to both scholars, older women suffer stronger and deeper stigmatisation than older men.

No wonder, then, that Margaret M. Gullette sees ageism as deeply ingrained in (male-dominated) academic institutions and cultural studies,³⁹ or that Kathleen

³¹ Sontag, 'The Double,' 29.

³² Betty Friedan, *The Fountain of Age* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

³³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963)

³⁴ Friedan, *The Fountain*, 54.

³⁵ See Germaine Greer, *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991).

³⁶ Lynn Segal, *Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing* (London: Verso, 2013), 13.

³⁷ Marilyn Pearsall, *The Other Within Us: Feminist Explorations Of Women And Aging*. (New York: Routledge, 1997).

³⁸ Judith K. Gardiner, *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

³⁹ Gullette, *Declining*.

Woodward has gone even further, suggesting, just as Barbara Macdonald already did in the mid-eighties,⁴⁰ that 'ageism is entrenched within feminism itself.'⁴¹ Given the pervasive connections between ageism and sexism, it should come as no surprise, either, that most studies on aging in fiction have focused on older women, too. This is the case, for example, of Zoe Brennan's *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction*⁴² and *Aging and Gender in Literature*, edited by Anne M. Wyatt-Brown and Janice Rossen,⁴³ to name but a few.

While the interrelationship between sexism and ageism thus seems unquestionable, it must be remembered that ageism affects both older women and men. Just as Simone de Beauvoir had recognised the disempowering effect of ageing on the two sexes, Betty Friedan posited the powerful effect of ageing on diminishing masculinity, as the older men she interviewed often felt 'feminised' because of their growing weakness and dependency. Moreover, one should not neglect some women's relief at the waning of their sexuality and the concomitant lessening of the pressure to conform to normative beauty standards, which Diana Athill, for example, celebrates in her memoir *Somewhere Towards the End*.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Betty Friedan has defended women's 'softer' transition into old age, which she put down, however, to their *lifelong* inferior status. To put it simply, older women may not lose as much power as older men simply because women never had it to start with. 'There is, of course, a 'double standard' of aging,' she concluded, 'a remnant of the feminine mystique that defined women solely

⁴⁰ Barbara Macdonald, 'Outside the Sisterhood: Ageism in Women's Studies,' *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 17:1-2 (1989), 6-11.

⁴¹ Kathleen Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 11.

⁴² Zoe Brennan, *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2005).

⁴³ Anne M. Wyatt-Brown and Janice Rossen, *Aging and Gender in Literature* (Charlottesville & London: Virginia UP, 1993).

⁴⁴ Diana Athill, *Somewhere Towards the End: A Memoir* (New York: Norton & Company, 2009).

in terms of their biological role as mothers and as nubile sex objects.⁴⁵

While male ageing may not be as culturally denigrated as female ageing, it is, of course, equally deserving of scholarly attention, which, however, seems to have seldom received. Indeed, ageing males, when/if studied at all within feminist scholarship, have seldom been approached as a specific and equally complex gendered group, having been recurrently depicted as a homogeneous, 'genderless' group against which older women were implicitly compared.⁴⁶ As is known, Bob (now Raewyn) Connell developed the notion of hegemonic masculinity to highlight the importance of patriarchal power, which the 1970s sex role framework left largely untheorised.⁴⁷ In so doing, she posited the existence of a dominant model of masculinity that depended on the subordination and oppression of "Other-ed" groups—especially, women and gay men. Despite its continued influence on a variety of fields, ranging from sexuality and gay studies to psychology and sociology, it may be and has been criticised for different reasons and from different perspectives. Christian Groes-Green, for example, has underlined the dynamics and malleability of hegemonic masculinity, thus recognizing internal contradictions but also nuances with respect to the concept.⁴⁸ In an article co-authored with James W. Messerschmidt, Connell herself recognised that hegemonic masculinity cannot be seen as a one-dimensional understanding of hierarchy and trait conceptions of gender, but forms part of social struggles in which subordinated masculinities influence and often co-exist with dominant forms.⁴⁹ These studies have thus shown how there is a good case to be made for the existence of "subordinated" masculinities that challenge the dominant

⁴⁵ Friedan, *The Fountain*, 264.

⁴⁶ Edward H. Thompson, 'Images of Old Men's Masculinity: Still a Man?' *Sex Roles* 55: 9 (2006), 633-648.

⁴⁷ Raewyn, Connell, *Gender and Power* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

⁴⁸ Christian Groes-Green, "Philogynous Masculinities: Contextualizing Alternative Manhood in Mozambique," *Men and Masculinities* 15.2 (2012), 91-111.

⁴⁹ Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19: 6 (2005), 829-859.

norm. As Connell and Messerschmidt have insisted, there is always a struggle for hegemony, hegemonic masculinity often co-exists with nonhegemonic practices, and this co-existence might lead to “more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man.”⁵⁰ While Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity posited the hegemony of men over women, it also underlined the oppressive power of some (heterosexual) men over other subordinated men, mostly gay. In recent years, the concept of subordinated masculinities has been extended to describe Other-ed masculinities as embodied by non-white or working-class males, amongst others. Surprisingly, however, little attention has been paid to the role played by aging in the hegemony or subordination of men. While the notion of male privilege remains (at least implicitly) connected to ableism and youthism, little work has been done on exploring aging men and masculinities as subordinated.⁵¹ Yet, as Benjamin Saxton and Tom Cole rightly remind us, the implicit or explicit association of (hegemonic) masculinity with younger or middle-aged men has inevitably contributed to the cultural ‘invisibility’ of older men and, even more, ‘the inverse correlation’ between masculinity and ageing.⁵² ‘While in relation to early and middle adulthood we find clear models of dignified masculinity,’ Gabriela Spector-Mersel agrees, ‘these become vague, even non-existent, when referring to later life ... Western masculinity scripts are not designed for older men, and thus are concluded somewhere before ‘old age.’⁵³ It seems particularly urgent, then, to begin to undertake a thorough and well-informed analysis of

⁵⁰ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic,” 833

⁵¹ Some remarkable exceptions are Benjamin Saxton & Thomas R. Cole, “No Country for Old Men: A Search for Masculinity in Later Life,” *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, 7:2 (2012), 97-116; Gabriela Spector-Mersel, ‘Never-Aging Stories: Western Masculinity Hegemonic Masculinity Scripts,’ *Journal of Gender Studies*, 15:1 (2006), 67-82; Toni Calasanti & Neal King, “Firming the Floppy Penis: Age, Class, and Gender Relations in the Lives of Old Men,” *Men and Masculinities*, 8:1 (2005), 3–23.

⁵² Saxton & Cole, “No Country,” 97-116.

⁵³ Spector-Mersel, ‘Never-Aging,’ 73. Similarly, representations and discourses on older men’s sexuality tend to be mainly located at the intersection between youth and heterosexuality. With the exception of the so-called ‘silver foxes’ (ageing male celebrities and Hollywood stars), cultural representations of sexuality in older men are fundamentally ascribed to the stereotype of the ‘dirty old man’ (Calasanti & King, “Firming,” 3-23).

the specific role played by aging in the construction and de-construction of men and masculinities. Ageing masculinity is a complex, understudied, and often misunderstood phenomenon, which, as we hope to demonstrate, requires the nuanced and multifaceted perspectives presented in this special issue.

Admittedly, the intersection of age and masculinity has been acknowledged by some social scientists of gender. Edward H. Thompson, for example, has repeatedly insisted that there is a 'pluralistic ignorance of nearly 20 percent of the adult men.'⁵⁴ Even though psychologists such as Daniel J. Levinson⁵⁵ and sociologists like David Jackson⁵⁶ have drawn upon interviews to analyse the challenges men face at various stages of their lives, the study of masculinity in relation to age thus remains largely unexplored, both the changing constructions of masculinity over the life course (from boyhood to manhood) and, especially, in old age.

The same applies to the Humanities. Certainly, there have been numerous studies concerned with female-authored portrayals of older women—for example, Zoe Brennan's *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction*⁵⁷ and *Aging and Gender in Literature*, edited by Anne M. Wyatt-Brown and Janice Rossen,⁵⁸ to name but a few. Yet there has not been, surprisingly enough, a comparative in-depth study for ageing male characters in fiction.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Thompson, 'Images,' 633.

⁵⁵ Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Random House, [1978] 1986).

⁵⁶ David Jackson, *Exploring Aging Masculinities: The Body, Sexuality and Social Lives*. (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

⁵⁷ Zoe Brennan, *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction* (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, 2005).

⁵⁸ Anne M. Wyatt-Brown and Janice Rossen, *Aging and Gender in Literature* (Charlottesville & London: Virginia UP, 1993).

⁵⁹ A recent and remarkable exception is the study by Alex Hobbs, which focuses on the representation of ageing masculinity in the contemporary American novel. Also, Gullette as well as Woodward & Schwartz, amongst other feminist age scholars, had devoted some attention to men's ageing, although their focus has been primarily on women.

See Josep M. Armengol, 'Past, Present (and Future) of Studies of Literary Masculinities: A Case Study in Intersectionality,' *Men & Masculinities* 22:1 (2019), 64-74.

Josep M. Armengol, Marta Bosch Vilarrubias, Àngels Carabí & Teresa Requena, *Masculinities and literary studies: Intersections and new directions*, (London & New York: Francis & Taylor, 2017).

See Alex Hobbs, *Aging Masculinity in the American Novel* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

Kathleen Woodward, & Murray M. Schwartz, *Memory and Desire. Aging—Literature—Psychoanalysis*

'The scholarly material available for describing men's experiences of ageing,' as feminist scholar Lynne Segal reminds us, 'remains more limited, far sparser for men than for women.'⁶⁰

Thus, this special issue sets out to fill this gap, challenging in particular some contentions made by recent feminist studies of female-authored fiction, which seem to highlight the ageism women face while underexploring similar effects upon men.⁶¹ Challenging these assumptions, we will show how ageing experiences are neither a lesser concern for men nor can they simply be pitted against those of their female counterparts. To do so, the different contributions to this volume explore and revisit traditional perspectives on "successful" ageing while also probing alternative images of "affirmative" ageing, as defined by scholars like Linn Sandberg above. At the same time, the issue draws on a wide range of innovative and interdisciplinary methodological approaches, including original articles addressing some of the key questions around masculinity and ageing in Spain, as depicted in contemporary Spanish literature. In doing so, we aim to examine literary representations to understand more fully the interrelationship of masculinities with a variety of social issues specifically associated with men's ageing: older men's health; social inclusion and exclusion; sexualities and affective relationships; as well as ageist stereotypes. The articles included herein also look at how men's experiences of, and attitudes to, ageing vary across different social, cultural, and national(ist) contexts, which is reflected, as we shall see, in different contemporary Spanish literary texts from Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque country. At

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁶⁰ Segal, *Out of Time*, 83.

⁶¹ See, for instance, the seemingly accepted gendered classification, put forward by influential scholars like Barbara Waxman, that women are much more likely to author *Reifungsromane*—'a novel of ripening,' presenting 'newly self-knowledgeable, self-confident, and independent' women—than men, who usually produce portraits of older men that are simply characterised by depression, self-hatred, and decline, as exemplified by popular novels such as Philip Roth's *Dying Animal* and *Sabbath's Theatre*, to name but a few. Barbara Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Ageing in Contemporary Literature* (London: Praeger, 1990), 2, 17.

the same time, the issue seeks to explore the gendered specificities of men's ageing from an intersectional perspective to highlight that ageing masculinities also depend on questions of class, ethnicity, sexuality, amongst other factors. The resulting notions of masculinity that emerge from these intersections will be shown to shape their cultural representations.

Representations of ageing men in Western cultures tend to reflect hegemonic discourses based on stereotypes that either associate ageing with decline or emphasise 'successful' ageing (healthy and active older men). As a result, and through a detailed analysis of ageing men's life stories, distorted images of ageing men surface. Although studies focusing on these cultural representations of ageing men have started to be published in the last decade,⁶² it is also true that more attention needs to be paid to cultural representations of masculinity and age from the fruitful intersection of gender and ageing studies.

Ageing Masculinities in Contemporary Spanish Fiction

Ageing studies are starting to take off within Hispanic Studies, although most of the research done so far has dealt with representations of ageing in film, TV, media and publicity. While some of the analyses carried out focus on the lack of visibility of older people as main characters in film,⁶³ others concentrate on the presentation of the female

⁶² See Sally Chivers, *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011).

Amir Shalev-Cohen, *Visions of Aging* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2012).

José M. Armengol, *Masculinities in Black and White Manliness and Whiteness in (African) American Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Hobbs, *Aging Masculinity*.

Josephine Dolan, *Contemporary Cinema and 'Old Age': Gender and the Silvering of Stardom*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Raquel Medina, *Cinematographic Representations of Alzheimer's Disease* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁶³ See Matthew J. Marr, *The Politics of Age and Disability in Contemporary Spanish Film: Plus Ultra Pluralism* (London: Routledge, 2013). Sacramento Pinazo & Trinidad Núñez Domínguez, 'Mujeres

ageing body and its sexuality⁶⁴; the possibility of a feminist film theory approach to ageing⁶⁵; female intergenerational relationships and ecocriticism⁶⁶; the formal and thematic effects of dementia on film narratives⁶⁷; film representations of violence against older people⁶⁸; and questions such as regional representations of ageing, the ageing of the film, ageing male and female filmmakers and actors, etc.⁶⁹

In relation to literature, few Hispanists have approached the issue of ageing in contemporary Spanish literature. For example, Núria Casado-Gual has studied the importance of ageing in Joan Margarit's poetry,⁷⁰ and Raquel Medina the formal and thematic impact of dementia on poetic expression in the poetess Juana Castro.⁷¹ In line with g the scarcity of gerontological approaches to poetry, and despite the abundant

mayores en el cine. Una evaluación de los proyectos filmicos,' *Revista de evaluación de programas y políticas públicas*, 7 (2016), 96-115.

Virginia Guarinos Galán, *La isla etaria: tercera edad y medios de comunicación* (Sevilla: Rea Duck, 2021).

Virginia Guarinos Galán, 'Envejecimiento (de tópicos) activo(s) en el cine español de las décadas del "bienestar". La tercera edad en el cine español durante los gobiernos socialistas de finales del siglo XX.' *Área Abierta*, 19:1 (2018), 59-73.

Txetxu Aguado & María Pilar Rodríguez, *Representaciones artísticas y sociales del envejecimiento* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2019).

⁶⁴ See Barbara Zecchi, 'Women Filming the Male Body: Subversions, Inversions and Identifications,' *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 3:3 (2006), 187-204.

Barbara Zecchi, 'Sex After Fifty: The 'Invisible' Female Ageing Body in Spanish Women-authored Cinema.' *Spanish Erotic Cinema*, Santiago Fouz Hernández (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 202-218.

Raquel Medina, 'Envejecimiento, lesbianismo y heteronormatividad en la película *80 egunean* (2010),' *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 94:10 (2017), 1101-1116.

⁶⁵ See Raquel Medina & Barbara Zecchi, 'Technologies of Age: The Intersection of Feminist Film Theory and Aging Studies,' *Investigaciones Feministas: Metodologías Feministas: Nuevas Perspectivas*, 11: 2 (2020), 251-261.

⁶⁶ Raquel Medina, 'Madres, hijas y naturaleza: solidaridad y conflicto generacional en *La enfermedad del domingo* (Salazar, 2018) y *Con el viento* (Colell, 2018),' *Activistas, creadoras y transgresoras. Disidencias y representaciones*. Mónica Moreno Seco (Madrid: Editorial Dykinson, 2020), 239-260.

⁶⁷ Raquel Medina, 'El poder de los sentidos en *El señor Liberto y los pequeños placeres* (Ana Serret, 2017): representaciones de la subjetividad e identidad en las personas con alzhéimer,' *Bulletin of Contemporary Hispanic Studies* 2:1 (2020), 51-68.

⁶⁸ Isabel Meléndez Meléndez & Francisco Zurián, *Edad y violencia en la gran pantalla: diálogos entre estudios etarios, de género y filmicos* (Mallorca: Universitat de les Illes Balears, 2019).

⁶⁹ Barbara Zecchi, Raquel Medina, Cristina Moreiras & María Pilar Rodríguez, *Envejecimientos y cines ibéricos* (Valencia: Tirant lo Blanc, 2021).

⁷⁰ Núria Casado-Gual, 'Lessons from an Older Poet: The Meanings of Ageing in Joan Margarit's Late-life Poetry,' *Catalan Review* 33 (2019), 39-54.

⁷¹ Raquel Medina, 'Donde impere el olvido: Poesía y Alzheimer en *Los cuerpos oscuros* de Juana Castro,' *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 36:3 (2012), 541-556.

number of novels and plays from the Middle Ages to the present whose main characters are older people (*La Celestina*, Cervantes' *El Quijote*, Moratín's *El viejo y la niña* or Galdós' *El abuelo*, to name just a few), very little scholarly attention has been paid to the representations of ageing in contemporary Spanish fiction⁷² and theatre.⁷³

Focusing on representations of ageing masculinities in Spanish fiction from the Transition to the present, this special issue thus includes articles that bring together two neglected areas of study within Spanish studies, ageing studies and masculinity studies, specifically in contemporary Spanish literature. Masculinity in contemporary Spanish culture, as has been noted, has mainly been examined in film,⁷⁴ but literary depictions of ageing men in contemporary Spanish literature have significantly been overlooked.⁷⁵ Thus, we believe this study is timely.

As part of this issue, we have included some examples of what may be called 'canonical' representations of men's ageing, such as Rafael Chirbes' *Crematorio*, Eduardo Mendicutti's *Los novios búlgaros* or Lorenzo Silva's *El mal de Corcira*, who seem to

⁷² See Heather Jerónimo, 'Family Bonds that Ensnare and Empower: Dementia as Identity Formation in Elvira Lindo's *Una palabra tuya*,' *Hispania* 101:1 (2018), 114-124.

Raquel Medina, 'Who Speaks Up for Inés Fonseca? Representing Violence against Vulnerable Subjects and the Ethics of Care in Fictional Narrative about Alzheimer's Disease: *Ahora tocad música de baile* (2004) by Andrés Barba,' *Ageing & Society* 37: 7 (2017), 1394-1415.

Martina Zimmermann, 'Deliver us from evil: carer burden in Alzheimer's disease,' *Medical Humanities*, 36:2 (2010), 101-107.

⁷³ See Raquel Medina, 'Ser mujer y envejecer en el teatro: El monólogo como espacio dramático autoficcional,' Javier Huerta, Julio Vélez, Mónica Molanes & Julia Gaytán *Circuitos teatrales del siglo XXI* (Madrid: Antígona, 2018), 195-212.

⁷⁴ See Chris Perriam, *Stars and Masculinities in Spanish Cinema: From Banderas to Bardem*, (Oxford: Oxford, UP., 2003).

Santiago Fouz-Hernández & Alfredo Martínez-Expósito, *Live flesh: the male body in contemporary Spanish cinema*. (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

Lorraine Ryan & Ana Corbalán, *The Dynamics of Masculinity in Contemporary Spanish Culture*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2017).

Mary Harston, *CASTING Masculinity in Spanish Film: Negotiating Identity in a Consumer Age*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

⁷⁵ Just a few articles and/or books devoted to the topic of masculinity have been published so far. Among them see Joseba Gabilondo, 'Terrorism as Memory: The Historical Novel and Masculine Masochism in Contemporary Basque Literature,' *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 2:1 (1998), 113-146. Lorraine Ryan, 'The Economic Degeneration of Masculinity in Rafael Chirbes' *En la orilla*,' *Romance Quarterly*, 62:2(2015), 83-96.

Ryan & Corbalán, *The Dynamics*.

have recurrently represented men's ageing as, literally, the opposite of virility, with diminished sexual prowess inevitably leading to the loss of manhood and feminisation. While seemingly reaffirming binary gendered notions of ageing, such examples will then be qualified and even contradicted by differing images of ageing males in the fiction of other contemporary Spanish writers, male and female, gay and straight, including Arturo Pérez-Reverte, Marta Sanz, or Luis Antonio de Villena, who re-present men's ageing as inflected by the particularities of class, ethnicity, sexuality, and national(ist) identities, amongst other factors. In so doing, the study as a whole will conclude not just the variety but also the ambiguities and contradictions that define men's gendered experiences of ageing in contemporary Spanish letters, exploring traditional but also alternative models of ageing masculinities.

Focusing on *El disputado voto del Señor Cayo*, a 1978 novel written by Miguel Delibes, the opening article by Isabel Durán deals with the historical transition, both literal and metaphorical, from the 'old' Francoist regime to the new or 'young' democracy in Spain. Indeed, the novel is constructed around a road trip in which a candidate for a political party in the first 1977 democratic Spanish elections, as well as two younger militants, travel to a remote Castilian village in order to convince its only inhabitant, Mr. Cayo, to vote for their party. In this essay, Durán proposes a (re-)reading of the relationship between Mr. Cayo, a naturally wise old man, and the younger visitors as being, figuratively, one between mentor and student. Ironically, though, the leading mentorship role is far from clear. For, as Durán skilfully notes, the young politicians look down on the 'old-fashioned' Mr. Cayo, whom the younger visitors try to 'redeem,' only to find that they are the ones to be redeemed.

In the next article, Raquel Medina explores ageing and masculinity in Lorenzo Silva's novel *El mal de Corcira* (2020). As part of the hard-boiled fiction that flourished

in Spain as of the Transition period, Silva's detective novel deals with a crime that prompts the 54-year-old Bevilacqua to narrate his past actions as a twenty-five-year-old guardia civil fighting against ETA in the Basque Country thirty years earlier, in the late 1980s. The middle-aged detective recollects and tells the (legal and not so legal) actions of a twenty-five-year-old self within the context of the highly masculinised and violent environment of both the Guardia Civil and ETA. Through his storytelling thirty years after the events, Bevilacqua's life writing/memoirs offers the reader an account of a personal and a collective past. However, the readers are offered normative notions of ageing masculinities: ageing as decline (emasculating, lack of physical fitness, etc.) and successful ageing (linked to fitness and healthy ageing). Furthermore, sexual identity in *El mal* is linked to the sexist ageism that privileges hegemonic masculinity. Despite the contrast between the 'then' and 'now' of the characters, the stereotypes they are based on end up reproducing the same hegemonic masculinity of patriarchal society that places ageing homosexuality as exclusively located within an in-between space, whereas ageing femininities are subjected to the heteronormative and patriarchal aspect of motherhood.

Arturo Pérez-Reverte's short novel *Los perros duros no bailan* (2018) is the first of the prolific Spanish writer's attempts at animal fable and allegory. Marked by the recognizable postmodern patterns of intertextuality that are characteristic of the author's narrative style, the text explores the nature of masculinity and ageing in a hostile world of violence and conflict. In this sense, the next article by Claudia Alonso analyses what the protean motif of the dog aesthetically provides Pérez-Reverte's signature male *héroes cansados* with, examining how the species triggers processes of allusions and significations in which gender, age, history, and Spanish identity intersect.

Using a number of literary texts from the 1990s to the present, the next article by Josep M. Armengol offers an overview of ageing men's sexualities in contemporary

Spanish fiction. As it has already been mentioned, traditionally (men's) sexualities have been dissociated from old age, which has often been stereotyped as a stage of (sexual) 'decline.' Indeed, sexuality in later life has even been seen as unpalatable, often conforming, in the case of men, to the stereotype of the 'dirty old man.' Questioning these (mis)representations, however, this paper focuses on contemporary Spanish novels which pose a challenge to such dichotomous images, redefining ageing men's sexualities as much more complex and multifaceted than has been traditionally acknowledged. Thus, if Rafael Chirbes and Marta Sanz focus on the relationship between ageing men and younger women, other texts by writers like Álvaro Pombo and Luis Antonio Villena, Armengol insists, complicate ageing gay men's sexualities from interesting class, race, and sexuality perspectives.

Going more deeply into sexual relationships of older men (with younger women), Esther Zaplana's article provides a detailed analysis of Marta Sanz's award-nominated novel *Susana y Los Viejos* (2006). An interesting woman's perspective on male ageing, Sanz's novel takes the intertextuality of the Biblical story ('Susanna and The Elders') as leitmotif to engage with the gender double standard of ageing in contemporary Spanish society. From a feminist stance, Sanz's postmodern take on the story, Zaplana argues, lends itself to uncovering entrenched biases of gender, in particular, the gendered assumptions embedded in relationships of a sexual nature between an older individual and a younger one. This paper will draw a closer look at the operations of the gaze in representations of ageing, gender and older men in Sanz's novel *vis-à-vis* its underlying agenda of gender empowerment and disempowerment. Since *Susana y Los Viejos* presents a multi-layered story besieged by images of moral and physical decay linked to transgression, Zaplana will concludes, the analysis will focus on a gender critique of old

ageing men that dovetails the Spanish aesthetic traditions of dark imagery with the psychological feminist critique.

While Zaplana focuses on a woman's perspective on ageing men, the next articles further complicate literary images of Spanish men's ageing from both national(ist) and/or sexual perspectives. Thus, María Pilar Rodríguez and María Jesús Pando's article explores how the intersection between fatherhood, age and alternative models of masculinity, as well as the social and individual traumatic impact of violence, are central issues in the narratives of recent Basque women writers. While Portela's *Mejor la ausencia* (2017) portrays the traditional hegemonic image of fatherhood, Etxenike's *Absoluta presencia* (2018) and *Aves del paraíso* (2019) create a new understanding of the role and identity of the fathers, marked by the impact of ETA's deleterious violence. Such fathers' subjectivity, they argue, is elaborated in patterns of affective landscapes that reject traditional Basque hegemonic masculinity and interrogate marking constituents of fatherhood.

The issue of (gay) *carescapes* is equally central to Danny Barreto's article on contemporary Galician fiction on older gay men. When the question of ageing in Galicia, as elsewhere in the Spanish state, is reduced to a 'problem' for political geographers and policy makers to contend with, we fail to consider the value of intergenerational relationships, the transmission of cultural memory, and complex alternative *carescapes* in which ageing men play important roles. Thus, Barreto's study seeks to begin mapping those terrains, exploring how ageing and homosexuality are represented in contemporary Galician literature. For example, Carlos Callón's collections *Atravesar o fantasma* (2014) and *Inscripcións* (2019), written when the poet was 30 and 40 respectively, offer longitudinal studies of his own masculinity, sexuality and familial relationships. Similarly, Antón Lopo's novel *Extraordinario* (2018) is a reflection on masculinity from

a middle-aged man who needs to take care of his ailing mother from whom he has been estranged. Their reencounter prompts the narrator to reflect on masculinity, ageing, and sexuality in relation to his dying mother. Central to Barreto's article, then, is study is the role that older men play in helping younger queer relatives to navigate their sexual and transgender identities, as in *Cabalos e lobos* (2015) by Fran P. Lorenzo and *22 segundos* (2017) by Eva Mejuto.

In the concluding article, which incorporates drama into the discussion, Miquel Bota proposes a new reading of the play *Testament* (1995), by Catalan playwright Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, and its film adaptation *Amic/Amat* (1999), by Catalan director Ventura Pons, in order to challenge decline narratives on ageing men. Through the experience of ageing, the nearness of death, and inheritance as a malevolent artifact that ensures patrilineal society, Bota argues that the three male protagonists of the pieces—The Professor, the Young Man and the Friend—subvert or affirm Western master narratives on age and masculinity. The juxtaposition of categories of age, gender, class and sexual orientation play a fundamental part, as we shall see, in the Professor's approach to his final act and its role as a model to affirm or subvert malign culture narratives on age and lineage.

To conclude, this issue highlights the importance of both ageing and masculinity studies in contemporary Spain, filling the current academic gap around ageing men and masculinities in Spanish literature. The articles included herein elaborate on whether the literary texts under study present a concept of ageing men and masculinities that reinforces the stereotypes and the discrimination surrounding ageing men, or, on the contrary, put forward new conceptualisations. In fact, the diverse analyses that the articles offer unveil both the persistence of hegemonic masculinity (with its binaries) as well as new fluid perspectives that transcend dichotomies and heteronormativity. It is important

to note that the intersection of ageing and masculinity brings to the fore key notions about men's mid-life crisis and old age, both linked in popular culture to discourses around men's 'unsuccessful' control of their health and ageing process. It also calls into question the cultural and social identification of manhood with virile masculinity which has long pervaded the traditional machismo of Spanish culture. However, these intersections also display how narratives around ageing men and masculinities in contemporary Spain are changing. This change, as the pages that follow will show, ranges from reversal of gender roles, clear and strong intergenerational relationships based on solidarity, affirmative ageing of older men, and sexuality in old age. Though far from being "a case study" or a "recipe," literature, as Toni Morrison suggested, usually has "something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are."⁷⁶ Thus, we can only hope that the present special issue will contribute to questioning traditional models of ageing and gender but also, and above all, to providing inspiration for change.

⁷⁶ Mari Evans, *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*, (New York: Anchor, 1984), 341.