

Aged Young Adults: Age Readings of Contemporary American Novels and Films, by Anita Wohlmann. Bielefeld: Transcript. Aging Studies, 2014. Pp. 261. \$45.00 (paperback and electronic).

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Anita Wohlmann's *Aged Young Adults: Age Readings of Contemporary American Novels and Films* makes a welcome addition to both the burgeoning study of aging and old age, and the Aging Studies series imprint. This book offers an insightful study of ruptures to normative paradigms of the life course posed by the chronologically youthful who bear, or refuse, culturally specific signs and practices of aging. Through a range of cross-media case studies that include "silver rush" subcultures, popular American literature, and film, Wohlmann's analysis teases out the fluid attributions of "too old" or "too immature" in relation to chronologically based assumptions of life stage behaviors. In doing so, she undermines the easy assumptions that age is "a simple, descriptive feature with no further meaning or function" (27), while also dislocating "aging" from biologically determined alignments with chronology, which, following Hartung and Kunow, Wohlmann terms the "chronocentric view" (39). The book is interdisciplinary in its approach. For instance, a wonderful elaboration of metaphor is drawn from literary studies, with Wohlmann's "age reading" methodology indebted to luminaries of cultural gerontology and aging studies: Gullette, Woodward, Sontag, and Katz are among the key theorists deployed. Wohlmann describes her methodology as one that "tries to understand metaphors of age by focussing on fictional age narratives," while juxtaposing "these narratives with discourses, theories and concepts from sociology, psychology, or cultural studies" (73).

This methodology also governs the structure of the book, and its chapters are positioned in a dialogic relationship, each informing the other in a web of interlinked arguments and expositions. A highly effective introduction based on "silver rush" fashions clearly establishes the book's basic premise that a pervasive disjuncture between chronological age and discourses of life-stage appropriateness can be recognized in contemporary fictional narratives.

Subsequent chapters develop this idea, though the exposition of Wohlmann's highly original analysis is somewhat stalled by chapter 1, "Age and Aging in Theory and Practice," which offers an exhaustive literature review that betrays the book's PhD thesis origins. The book really comes into its own with chapter 2, "Conflicts of Timing," which, via Joel Zwick's *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), offers a well-nuanced reading of the regulatory practices that position an unmarried, thirty-something woman as "getting old" and "running out of time." The original thinking that underpins the remainder of the book notwithstanding, this thought-provoking section deserves to be placed on recommended reading lists on its own merit.

The theme of time continues through Wohlmann's analysis of Sam Mendes's *Amay We Go* (2009), in which the link forged between fetus and mother illuminates multiple measurements of time and the pressures to conform to assumed life-stage developments, for both parents and unborn child. Here, a link forged between the measurement of fetal heartbeat and narratives of life-stage development is inspired. Wohlmann's elaboration of ruptures to chronocentric, normative life stages usefully sets the scene for chapter 3, "Living Across the Life Course," and its juxtaposed formulations of so-called perpetual adolescence and delayed adulthood in a range of sociocultural theory and history and in the novels *Little Children*, by Tom Perrota, (2004) and *The Corrections*, by Jonathan Franzen (2001). In closing this chapter, Wohlmann identifies a significant link between depression and old age, which, in turn, performs a neat segue into chapter 4, "Mental Health and Age." This chapter opens with a thorough rehearsal of sociomedical theories that link old age with depression, and which cite age-related obsolescence as a causal factor and suggest activity and/or self-help as an ostensible palliative. Subsequent analysis of the novels *Indecision*, by Benjamin Kunkel (2006), and *Cosmopolis*, by Don DeLillo (2003), illuminates the extent to which "symptoms" of old age can be recognized on chronologically youthful bodies, thus severing any causal tendencies, while comparisons between human decline and consumerist obsolescence that chime with Gullette's argument ("Other End") are elaborated. In this way, the figure of the "Aged Young

Adult” is located in a post 9/11 entropy, trapped between a terrorized past and an impossible-to-imagine post-capitalist future. The book’s final chapter returns to film, Miranda July’s *The Future* (2011), which employs an apocalyptic imaginary similar to *Cosmpolis*, but here, aging is posed as a trope of hope and release from the entropy of anticipated obsolescence.

Wohlmann’s dialogic methodology produces a flow of ideas that is easy to follow. However, the clarity of the overall argument would be greatly enhanced if more frequent links were forged between the dense body of theory elaborated in chapter 1 and the analyses of chapters 2-5. At the same time, there are places where the stages of the argument need to be spelled out with greater force, though, given that Wohlmann is a European scholar working in her second language, those indistinct elements may well be the result of different scholarly traditions. And these minor caveats need to be set against the advantages that accrue from this highly suggestive style of writing. For instance, even though gender is not explicitly placed under the lens of scrutiny, the juxtaposition of characters and texts usefully illuminates some intersections with gender and formations of the “Aged Young Adult” that could form the basis of further research. Overall, Wohlmann offers a thoughtful and highly engaging exposition of “Aged Young Adults” in some contemporary fictional narratives in film and literature.

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