

# Putting Age into Place: John Mighton's *Half Life* and Joan Barfoot's *Exit Lines*<sup>1</sup>

*Ulla Kriebner*

## INTRODUCTION: THE SPATIALITY OF AGING IN CARE HOME NOVELS

Questions of aging and demographic change as well as issues of caregiving and nursing-care dependency have recently become central concerns in the United States and Canada as well as in Europe. As the first baby boomers in North America are currently reaching retirement age and the “silver tsunami”<sup>2</sup> is allegedly threatening our economies, considerations regarding how to grow old and where to live in old age also increasingly concern people on an individual level. These considerations are reflected and processed in literature, where fictional representations of institutionalized eldercare are currently booming, resulting in the development of what could be called a new genre, the “care home narrative.”<sup>3</sup> This newly established category comprises fictional works that are set in care homes and/or deal with the complex array of problems and feelings associated with moving oneself or relatives into a caregiving institution. While the care home played a very small role in novels written in the 1960s and 1970s, with a few exceptions such as Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (1964) or May Sarton's *As We Are Now* (1973), the following decades have seen an increase in fiction set in such institutions. Also, the representation of elderly characters has changed significantly in recent decades. Due to demographic and social transformations, Anne Wyatt-Brown argues, there has been increasing interest in what it means to grow old and be old, leading to a development from “flat” towards “fully round” old fictional characters (57). Now, at the onset of the twenty-first century, the nursing home seems to be firmly established as a setting, and its residents have developed into central figures.

Although the field of age studies has been flourishing in the last

decade, and despite the fact that a vast body of research exists that discusses the spatiality of aging and care (McHugh; Arber and Ginn; Diamond; Gubrium; Peace et al.; Johnson et al.; Rowles and Bernard), the intersection of space, place, and age is an underrepresented category in literary gerontology.<sup>4</sup> This essay, which is part of a larger research project on the spatiality of aging in care home narratives, aims at filling this research gap. It is situated in the context of the *spatial turn*, which initiated the development of a critical understanding of space and place as a result of social relations and practices (Lefebvre) and is based on the assumption that aging, as cultural geographer Glenda Laws maintains, “is not only embodied; it is also emplaced in time and space” (“Embodiment” 253). The spatiality of identity that Laws mentions here and its intersections with time and experience provide a productive point of departure for an analysis of nursing home narratives. “Spaces are constituted by and constitutive of social relations,” Glenda Laws argues with reference to Edward Soja’s socio-spatial dialectic (Soja 1-9), emphasizing that we must acknowledge that space and place also alter social practices as social relations are *mediated* by space (“Spatiality” 92). “Places, like retirement communities or nursing homes, are obviously created by social practices. For example, once nursing homes were created, attitudes about the appropriate locus of care for certain categories of older people changed,” Laws asserts (“Spatiality” 92). This paper shows how a society’s imagination of a space for the oldest old informs the way old age itself is imagined. In the words of sociologists Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, “The nursing home has become a paramount site for the care and custody of old people, but it also affects how we think and talk about the ageing body” (519). As Gubrium and Holstein put it, the home serves as a discursive anchor for the aging body: “We age bodily, in other words, as much because our bodies are discursively anchored by a particular institution, as because our bodies grow old” (537). The home, they argue, shapes its residents’ identities by providing a framework of signification and description (533). What has been observed by Gubrium and Holstein solely for the space of the care home has been

noted in a broader context by Margaret Morganroth Gullette, who has most famously argued that we are not only aged by biology, but also by culture. The discursive anchoring of the space of the care home is also part of this cultural aging.

This analysis of two contemporary Canadian care home narratives, John Mighton's play *Half Life* (2005) and Joan Barfoot's novel *Exit Lines* (2008), addresses the fictional construction of such settings. Both texts, *Half Life* (henceforth cited as *HL*) and *Exit Lines* (*EL*), draw readers into the world of the care home, permitting them to identify with the protagonists in their struggles against institutionalization and in their attempts to redefine themselves in a way that makes sense in their new environment. What both texts have in common, despite different depictions of the home, is that they focus on residents' individual resistance, subversion, and agency, thus opposing the ageist stereotypes of decline and deconstructing prevailing norms and negative images of old age as merely physical decrepitude and disease. As fiction creates reality, and at the same time can challenge dominant discourses, an analysis of care home narratives from the abovementioned perspectives might change the way aging and old age are perceived and, as a consequence, might lead to a reconsideration of how care homes are designed.

#### **THE CARE HOME NARRATIVE CHALLENGING THE NURSING HOME SPEC- TER**

The negative connotations that accompany nursing home care derive to a large extent from the institution's history.<sup>5</sup> In his Foucauldian analysis *Disciplining Old Age*, Stephen Katz traces its development back to nineteenth-century English almshouses and poorhouses and argues that "almshouses and related institutions of geriatric care have been considered as a technology of differentiation, however gruesome or humane their conditions may have been" (59). The images based on historic depictions of nursing homes as dreadful places where the old are stored away and that disindividualize men and women linger on in our minds. Some contemporary novels and plays still tap into stereotypical notions associated with nursing homes, while others decidedly challenge

the “nursing home specter” Betty Friedan writes about in *The Fountain of Age*. Friedan equates nursing homes with “death sentences, the final interment from which there is no exit but death” (510). The nursing home specter still lingers on and is perpetuated, but also challenged, in care home narratives.

When care homes are represented in novels or films, such depictions usually emphasize that such a home is more than simply a building or residence. Rather, it is “a micro-complex of architectural, administrative, financial, clinical, familial, symbolic, and emotional interactions and power relations” (Katz, *Cultural* 204). It is, in many ways, a world in itself where a seemingly homogeneous group of people is housed that shares two characteristics: being old and being in need of a certain amount of help in everyday life. This micro-complex of the care home, as Katz calls it, has been theorized by Michel Foucault in his essay “Of Other Spaces,” where he positions the retirement home at the borderline between what he defines as “heterotopia of deviation” and “heterotopia of crisis,”<sup>6</sup> “since, after all, old age is a crisis, but is also a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 24-25; 25). This assumption foregrounds the image of old age as “other.”

Although it is rather difficult to theorize the care home due to the vast differences in terms of geographical, cultural, socio-political, and economic contexts (Chivers, *From Old Woman* 60), the last decades have witnessed, as Stephen Katz observes, the production of institutional ethnographies and socio-gerontological studies that deal with the conditions of living and working in institutional, residential, and community-care spaces (*Cultural* 204). This view is seconded by Gavin Andrews who maintains that “[r]esearch interest in residential homes has occurred across a number of academic sub-disciplines including medical/health geography, medical sociology, environmental psychology, social policy and health economics, as well as across health professional research disciplines including nursing, occupational therapy and social work research” (61). The field of literary gerontology, however, is missing both from Andrews’s

comment and from the growth in research interest in residential homes.

Fiction has already been tapped as a resource to understand aging and old age better by researchers from disciplines ranging from sociology to anthropology, and from geography to literary gerontology. The methods and approaches of literary criticism, however, have not sufficiently been incorporated into an analysis of spatial aspects of institutional care as represented in care home novels or films. Therefore, fictional representations of the space of such institutions and the way in which they influence the identity of patients or residents need to be analyzed.

Whereas *Half Life* is set in an old-fashioned prison- or hospital-like nursing home for war veterans in the “fourth age,” with the threat of the locked area of the dementia ward on the second floor, *Exit Lines* introduces the reader to the Idyll Inn, a retirement lodge for affluent, active “third agers” that offers services such as birthday cakes, shuttle services into town, and sundecks overlooking the river—a place mimicking the luxurious amenities of a hotel. This juxtaposition of two entirely different caregiving institutions reflects how choices in late modernity—including choices about how and where to live in old age—are no longer as predetermined by traditions and customs as they were in traditional, premodern societies. While asserting that post-traditional aging can offer opportunities for older individuals with respect to identity, community, and mobility, Katz and McHugh also point to the “dilemmas of post-traditional aging” (271), referring to the promotion of “positive aging” cultures “that stretch middle age into a troubling celebration of growing older as an ageless, timeless enterprise” (271). A critical assessment of such a promoted agelessness can be traced in *Exit Lines* (“The Idyll Inn”) and other fictional representations of care homes.<sup>7</sup> *Half Life* and *Exit Lines* critique positive aging cultures by depicting different spatial settings that obscure individual agency.

#### **HALF LIFE: RESISTING THE NARRATIVE OF DECAY**

The setting in John Mighton’s play *Half Life*,<sup>8</sup> which in 2006 won the prestigious Canadian Governor General’s Award, resembles an old-fashioned prison-like facility, and its residents are treated as inmates

rather than as patients, clients, or residents. In fact, the play can be read as a portrayal of what Erving Goffman terms a “total institution.”<sup>9</sup> It tells the story of Clara and Patrick, two octogenarians who develop a romantic relationship in a nameless Canadian home for veterans and their families. Whether they had actually been lovers earlier in their lives or whether they only imagine having had a wartime love affair becomes increasingly unimportant through the course of the play. What counts is that they now enjoy each other’s presence. Although their relationship seems to give meaning to their lives and makes them very happy, their love is seen as intolerable by both the institution’s management and their respective children. Patrick’s forty-something-year-old daughter, Anna, an artist, finds it only a little less difficult than Clara’s son, Donald, a psychology professor and expert in artificial intelligence, to cope with this. Donald is immensely concerned about his mother’s and Patrick’s “misbehavior,” and prefers to ignore that his mother is actually happy. Donald’s relentlessly scientific worldview (he works on a project on artificial memory in machines) makes him unable to understand how his mother’s apparent loss of memory enables her to live happily in the moment. He is determined to prevent the old couple from getting married. In the meantime, Patrick’s daughter Anna seems to have understood what the romance means to the old lovers. “He is taking his medication regularly for the first time in his life. He hasn’t tried to escape or go drinking since he came here. He’s even started to talk to me. He’s told me stories about his childhood and the war that have made me see him differently,” Anna argues in favor of her father’s marriage plans (*HL* 63). She tries half-heartedly to convince Donald, who has power of attorney over his mother, to support the couple’s engagement, but Donald has no intention of changing his mind. When Patrick learns about Donald’s decision, he rebels by breaking out of the home and drinking, but is soon apprehended. Donald, who comes to visit his mother, finds him tied to a chair with restraining straps and with a large bruise on his face. He refuses to untie Patrick, underlining his decision not to let him marry his mother, who has dementia: “I wouldn’t be living up to my responsibilities as a

son. She is not fully herself,” he argues (*HL* 65). As a result, Patrick further provokes Donald’s anger by telling him he has made love to Clara. Anna, having learned about her father’s recent escape and drinking, now also turns against him and agrees that he be moved permanently to the closed ward, keeping him from seeing Clara. The play here critiques the disindividualization of care home residents by foregrounding the power struggle between the institution (which also includes Donald and Anna), on the one hand, and its elderly residents on the other. As in many care home narratives, the struggle is resolved by means of spatial separation.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes about the effect of the panopticon to “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (210). As residents of the nameless Canadian nursing home, Clara and Patrick have become “docile bodies” (Foucault, *Discipline* 135) that are subject to a panopticon-like “institutional gaze” (174) and are supposed to behave according to the rules and codes of the institution that patronizes and infantilizes them. The play showcases numerous examples of ageist practices such as elderspeak, elder abuse, and the continuous invasion of residents’ privacy in their own rooms. It is on the level of space that the institution exerts its power. Being moved to the upper-floor closed ward is a constant threat, and even in the residents’ rooms, there is no guarantee of privacy. This lack of privacy is one of the primary and most-often-criticized characteristics of caregiving facilities. As opposed to “home,” the quintessential private space, institutions are semi-public spaces with medical staff and caretakers having to be able to enter their clients’ rooms. In the play, however, Clara is stripped of her privacy and agency not by the medical staff and not only because of her early-stage dementia, but also by Reverend Hill, a character who literally embodies institutional power. Although he is not a caretaker, he seems to have access to the home and all its rooms at any time, exposing Clara to an asymmetrical and omniscient institutional gaze.

The following situation exemplifies the ways in which Clara’s autonomy, privacy, and personal freedom are constantly undermined not only

by doctors or nurses, but also by visitors who intrude on her private space without her being able to decide whether she wants to have them: “Knock-knock. I hope everyone is decent,” Reverend Hill says as he enters Clara’s room, just as she finishes bathing and puts on her dressing gown (*HL* 50). “I’m just putting Clara to bed,” Nurse Tammy explains, demonstratively looking at her watch to indicate that he is not welcome. Tammy is generally not very friendly regarding Reverend Hill; she does not approve of his morals, and she defends the old couple’s affair against him as best she can. Although she is generally very understanding, she still represents the institution and has to abide by its rules. Straightening Clara’s sheets and sighing, Tammy scolds Clara in front of the Reverend: “My goodness, Clara, your bed is a mess. Have you been having an affair?” (*HL* 51). “I don’t believe in sex before marriage,” Clara retorts. “Then you’ll have to get married,” Tammy says. “Aren’t I too old to get married?” Clara asks, upon which Reverend Hill argues, “I am not sure Clara is ready for marriage quite yet. She would have to ask permission from her son. He has power of attorney” (*HL* 52). Tammy, enervated by Reverend Hill’s comments, cuts this conversation short by stating, “It’s past Clara’s bedtime” (*HL* 52). Clara, who does not have much to say in this conversation, is infantilized by both Tammy and the Reverend in this scene, but when Patrick suddenly shows up in Clara’s room, it is again Tammy who argues that they could and should be left alone. “They’re adults,” she argues (*HL* 53). After Reverend Hill points to the strict house rules, he agrees to let them have a little time together, provided he and Tammy stay in the room. Tammy then takes a tape and cassette deck out of her bag and encourages the couple to dance, which they enjoy. She seems to be the only person who understands Clara’s and Patrick’s love and seeks to grant them the freedom to enjoy it.

Quite surprisingly, however, Tammy is soon replaced by a new nurse. A conversation between Donald and Anna reveals that Tammy’s sudden disappearance results from the accusation that she has broken more rules than just those of keeping Clara and Patrick apart: Donald suspects her of stealing money from his mother. Whether or not this accusation

is accurate cannot be verified, but Tammy seems to spend Clara's money on clothes that she buys for the old woman without being asked to do so (*HL* 50) and without producing any bills and change for her (*HL* 50). The play here again critiques institutional abuse and patients' helpless exposure to institutional power, exercised even by the character who seems most sympathetic to Clara's right to develop a relationship.

In the play's final scene, the new nurse, Diana, comes to put Clara to bed, and Clara is slightly confused as she has never seen Diana before. Diana explains that she usually works upstairs and tells Clara, who says that she wants to go there, that it is actually a very sad place that people would rather leave. Alluding to Patrick, whom Diana does not yet know, she says, "There's one old gentleman who stands by the door all day asking if he can go out... He's a drinker. No one will let him out..." (*HL* 75). Patrick, however, does know how to leave, as he was a mathematician and master of pattern recognition in World War II, working as a code breaker for Special Services—useful skills that enable him to return to his love. In fact, soon after Diana leaves, he enters Clara's room. Diana, returning, is surprised to see him:

DIANA: Hello, Patrick. What are you doing here? You're on the wrong floor.

*Pause*

How did you get down here?

PATRICK: I broke the code.

DIANA: You're very naughty. Now we'll have to change it. (*HL* 79)

Diana asks another nurse to take Patrick upstairs again. Her evaluation of the situation is based on the space he inhabits, and she misinterprets Patrick's escape from the upper floor as mental confusion rather than capacity: "I'm sorry, Clara, I don't know how he got down here. He seemed very disoriented" (*HL* 79). Clara tells Nurse Diana that she did not have to show Patrick out ("I didn't mind. We're married," *HL* 80). Diana plays along, asking whether he is a good husband, which Clara confirms (*HL* 80). An instant later, however, when the nurse leaves, Clara again shifts to her past: "I knew a Patrick once during the war..." (*HL* 81). The play ends with Clara repeating incoherent childhood memories to herself. The ending leaves open whether Patrick will again be able

to break out to see Clara, but what becomes clear is that his resistance against institutional rules finally separates him from his beloved Clara (Scotten 10-11). The two old characters' happiness is not important to the "system" represented by Donald, Reverend Hill, and the institution as a whole, which cannot tolerate "that Patrick will not let himself passively slide into quiescent old age: he refuses to be another elderly person abandoned by the rest of society" (Scotten 10). His fight against institutional power is comparable to tilting at windmills.

The care facility with its rigid rules, as presented in this play, can be seen as a prototype of Goffman's "total institution" (xiii). Entering such institutions results in "role dispossession," Goffman argues, as the "self is systematically, often unintentionally, mortified" (14). Life inside the limits of institutional space is, as the title of the play indicates, only a "half life"; the nursing home is a world separate from the outside where different rules and regulations apply that contribute to interpellating individuals into their roles as patients, stripping them of personal freedom and choice. This is illustrated by the following episode involving Agnes, another disobedient patient:

AGNES: Where is Mrs. O'Neill? Why isn't she here?

TAMMY: She died last night.

CLARA: Oh, that's terrible.

AGNES: How did she die?

TAMMY: She died very peacefully and quietly in her sleep.

AGNES: At least she doesn't have to do crafts anymore.

(*HL* 44)

In this brief scene, Agnes expresses her discomfort with the institutional schedule to which she is subjected. Wishing for more personal control, she debates with the nurse whether or not she is allowed to go to her room instead of doing crafts. Her frustration with the confinement in the home becomes evident as she recounts how, as a child, she enjoyed her freedom: "I was one of the children who would disappear and find a hill somewhere just outside of town. I'd spend the day writing stories in my head" (*HL* 45). Here she uses spatiality to critique the confinement and dependence she now experiences in old age.

The care home's separation from the outside world and its realities are expressed not only on a spatial but also on a temporal level. The first scene already addresses the differences regarding frames of reference and aspects of space, time, and experience between the inside and the outside of the home:

ANNA picks up a paper and starts reading.

ANNA: Oh my God!

DONALD: What is it?

ANNA: Three hundred people died yesterday. In Nepal.

DONALD: You should check the date on the paper. It's two years old.

ANNA: Oh.

(*HL* 4)

The irony of this scene indicates that real events do not have much, if any, impact in the microcosm of the home. This may especially be the case for some residents, for instance those who have dementia. In relation to aspects of memory, "half life" acquires another meaning: that of disintegration and decay. Donald, in particular, being an expert in artificial intelligence, finds his mother's increasing memory loss extremely hard to accept. Daniel Brooks, who directed the play at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre, says in the production notes,

John Mighton's *Half Life* is a play about memory—or more precisely—forgetting. The central idea is that we are defined as much by what we forget as we are by what we remember. And given that identity is contingent on what we remember, how does the loss of memory affect identity? Under investigation is the following: What is it that constitutes self, and what might be this thing we call the soul? (Jones 1)

The question of memory and forgetting is central to the play. Social practices defining the nursing home in *Half Life* contribute to the characters' renegotiations of their identities in an ongoing dialogue of past, present, and future. What the system cannot tolerate is that Patrick's and Clara's life course narratives are constituted not by what they are actually able to remember, but by what they are able to imagine. Especially for a scientist like Donald, who believes in the existence of an absolute truth and has little tolerance for ambiguity, a reconstruction of his mother's life course narrative is unacceptably threatening. The couple's wish to

create a new joint narrative of belonging together and of happiness is not compatible with Donald's, Anna's, and the institution's agenda and is consequently rejected.

#### ***EXIT LINES: CHALLENGING THE NURSING HOME SPECTER***

Similar to *Half Life*, Joan Barfoot's novel also focuses on the difficulty of renegotiating one's identity in the context of long-term residential care. The novel introduces readers to Silvia Lodge, one of the novel's four protagonists, who has to get past the difficult transition phase from the privacy of her home to the semi-public space of the Idyll Inn retirement lodge. In her struggle against an overly well-meaning nurse on the one hand and an overbearing administrator on the other, she resists becoming a "patient" and prefers to be seen as a paying customer. "Here, people are *residents*, at least to their faces," Silvia contends, not without a hint of bitterness (*EL* 29). She sees the Idyll Inn as a hybrid space—a hotel, light-flooded and customer-oriented on the one hand, and a "genteel, open-doored prison" on the other (*EL* 16). "I am Sylvia Lodge," she announces at what, in a hotel, would be the front desk; in a prison, the guard post. "I have arrived" (*EL* 10). The novel starts with Silvia Lodge moving to the Idyll Inn to avoid becoming a burden for her daughter, Nancy. She has moved to the lodge on her own initiative and—in a passive-aggressive mode—did not even inform her daughter about her decision. Most importantly, however, she is aware that this is not yet the ultimate destination she will move to: "Depressing, really, and this isn't even a nursing home, the next step downwards en route to incapacity's basement" (*EL* 20), she says to herself.

The novel tells the story of three women, Silvia, Greta, and Ruth, and one man, George, who meet—or meet again (George and Greta had actually had an affair in their younger days)—when they move into the Idyll Inn. Soon, the four characters become friends and undermine the rigid rules imposed by the management by "forming an alliance, downing early-evening glasses of chardonnay to the consternation of the administrator" (Wheelwright), while they are more or less enjoying their "community of fate." The story reaches a climax when Ruth, the "baby

of the place” at only seventy-four years of age, announces her intention in a theatrical gesture to leave “the stage of life” by committing suicide exactly on her seventh-fifth birthday (*EL* 55). To prepare for her exit, she carefully crafts the speech (hence the title) with which she intends to ask her three friends for euthanasia, as she cannot carry out her plans without them. “Dry cleaner bags, duct tape, little scissors—primitive tools, but as Ruth says, ‘Simple is best’” (*EL* 263). After being rather shocked at Ruth’s request, her three friends decide to help her. Having a common goal, their friendship deepens, and there is a certain sense of purpose now that allows them to overcome their mental disabilities and physical difficulties. When the set moment for Ruth’s assisted suicide arrives, they gather in her room, trying to convince her once more to re-evaluate her decision. Ruth is determined to go through with her plan, but just before they actually set out to wrap plastic around Ruth’s head, Greta suddenly collapses with a severe heart problem. Silvia instantly runs for her medicine, while Ruth gets up from her bed to let Greta lie down. Together, they competently manage to save Greta, thus demonstrating, as Patricia Life also argues, their ongoing ability to react to new situations and to alter their consequent opinions and actions. Ruth, recognizing the new significance friendship has given to her life, determines to put aside her earlier suicide wish. Instead of assisted death, the situation, in a comical turn of events, develops into one of assisted life. The plot is resolved with a somewhat clichéd ending when Ruth realizes that the support of her new friends makes life meaningful (*Life*).

While Patrick’s or Agnes’s resistance is immediately undercut in *Half Life*, the characters in *Exit Lines* are presented as more subversive and stronger. On the one hand, their better health conditions (none of them has dementia, although George, a stroke victim, is confined to a wheelchair and has difficulties talking) allow for more agency. On the other hand, the Idyll Inn, where they all dwell, is portrayed not as a nursing home but as a retirement lodge and might as such be seen as a “pseudo-total institution” (Heinzelmann 245). However, many aspects illustrated by Goffman are also present in the narration. Joan Barfoot had

already thematized the care home back in 1985 with her novel *Duet for Three*, which portrays Aggie, an old woman afraid of being moved into a nursing home by her daughter. In her most recent novel, *Exit Lines*, however, Barfoot modifies the depiction of the care home to some degree and makes it more luxurious and hotel-like. In this respect, *Exit Lines* can be placed in the tradition of stories such as *The Best Exotic Mari-gold Hotel* (2011) or *Quartet* (2012),<sup>10</sup> which also portray residents in their “third age” who are able to afford an affluent lifestyle and decide to leave their long-time dwellings to provide for the time when they eventually will need assistance. The differentiation between a traditional nursing home and a hotel is emphasized at the beginning of the novel when Sylvia, through whom the passage is focalized, describes her new home, fully aware that despite its hotel-like ambiance, the residence is in fact a caregiving institution and thus a move away from independence: “Unlike nursing homes, with their particular standards for the amount of actual medical care required in the course of a day, not to mention a considerably less elegant ambiance, this is a *retirement lodge*, the Idyll Inn—hard to imagine who dreamed that name up. ‘Sounds like one of those twee cottage names,’ Sylvia told her friend Mabel when she was deciding to move here. ‘Dun Roamin. Bide-a-Wee. You know? The Idyll Inn, my rear end. The Belly-Up is more like it’” (*EL* 20). Joan Barfoot sets her novel in a luxurious place boasting a sun deck, large private suites, a shuttle service into town, and birthday cakes for people “with healthy incomes but varying hopes, despairs, abilities and infirmities” (*EL* 231). Despite the luxurious ambiance, however, the Idyll Inn remains a caregiving institution that interpellates individuals into the role of resident-patient.

Like *Half Life* and many other care home novels, *Exit Lines* shows how the transition experience to institutional care changes a person’s sense of self. In *Exit Lines*, this process can be clearly traced with all four protagonist residents, as focalization oscillates among the four characters (and Annabel Walker, the manager, in some instances), who all develop different coping strategies. As Sylvia Lodge functions as the prime focalizer in large parts of the book, I will concentrate on her perspective. The

novel opens with her account of the transition: “She must learn not to think *home* of the place she has left, even if she lived there for half a century and has been here for maybe ten minutes. So much will need swift redefining; for instance, what’s referred to here as the *living room*, with its sturdy bluey-grey spillproof carpeting and pale yellow blank walls . . . it will be her *sitting room*. That being, she expects, her main activity in it” (*EL* 13). What used to be “living”—which connotes activity—is now reduced to mere “sitting,” which can in itself be very emotionally and mentally active, but here, through its opposition to “living,” connotes dying, or at least idleness. The residence’s ambiguous name “Idyll Inn,” which can also be heard as “Idle Inn,” foregrounds this stereotype of inactivity in old age and emphasizes a decline narrative. Equally, Sylvia’s interpretation of the spill-proof floor cover underlines the narrative of physical decline. Although the room does not have a linoleum floor as common in a hospital or nursing home room, the easy-to-clean carpeting has been put there for reasons of institutional efficiency and hygiene.

Having made the decision to move into the retirement lodge—a sign of agency in late life—Sylvia tries to justify this move by imagining a positive future for herself, forcing herself to see the home in an optimistic light: “Her suite is the seventh door on the left down this wide hallway. Her sanctuary; her vacant sanctuary at the moment, pending the arrival of her possessions. The remains of her life. Don’t think of them that way” (*EL* 12). Always disciplined, Sylvia forbids herself to let herself go and tries to shut out even the smallest doubt that moving into a home eventually means that she will have to deal with thoughts about the finiteness of her being. Clinging to her independence, she is determined to enjoy life in her new home, imagining herself on her private sundeck that she will furnish with “her own private lawn furniture . . . . She sees herself out there in loose trousers and shirt, a book and binoculars, the world of the sitting room left well behind” (*EL* 13). Sylvia imagines a space of her own, outside of the home and at the same time part of it—a transitory space that allows her to benefit from both places, uniting aspects of institutional caregiving and independence. She feels the

need to reinforce her freedom and stresses that she will be able to move around freely between institutional and private space as she intends to replace the “clinically white vertical blinds” with “a second door to the outdoors and her own private deck” (*EL* 13). Sylvia will decide herself to what extent she is symbolically and literally inside or outside the institution, and the door, more substantial than mere blinds, will reinforce this borderline. Although she feels that her freedom to move about is jeopardized, she still tries to convince herself that keeping up a good spirit is what she needs to do. Determined to think positively, she tries to reformulate her concerns and fears into affirmative ideas, giving them “[t]he most positive possible spin” (*EL* 16).

In her fight to remain independent despite institutionalization, Sylvia wins an argument with the institution’s manager, Annabel Walker, who had tried to talk her into moving to the second floor, “where the most lucid and able are supposed to gather in merry segregation” (*EL* 14). As in *Half Life*, the residents’ or patients’ abilities determine which floor they live on. In the Idyll Inn, the upper floors are allocated to those who only need a little help while the main floor rooms are kept for residents who, as Annabel expresses it, “can’t move so independently” (14). Sylvia sees them as “other” and defines herself as not being part of them, which she underlines by insisting on moving into a suite on this particular floor: “Having a deck suits me best. Have you considered that your plan is entirely backwards? Of course that’s up to you. And your other residents. But as for me, this is my choice” (*EL* 14), Sylvia tells Annabel. She will not simply be allocated a space, reduced to her body that is placed in the institution. She has a self-understanding as a paying customer and thus insists on her freedom to choose. The themes of freedom and choice are linked to keeping personal control, which the narrative highlights when Sylvia cannot help noticing the small differences that seem to foreshadow her future as a more dependent person: “The toilet and shower feature bars to hold on to and lift off from as need be. It’s the little things, isn’t it? While other little things can turn at the flip of an ankle into quite large things” (*EL* 12). As this passage shows, Sylvia’s

move to the Idyll Inn redefines her first and foremost in terms of physical abilities. It is primarily her aging body that will be taken care of, and she learns that the decision about which floor she may reside on are usually left to nurses and medical practitioners, who cite physical criteria as a basis for such decisions. Sylvia's adjustment process in the facility and the consequent redefinition of her identity are difficult. Although she is aware of the process and manages to subvert many of the institution's strategies, the transition is experienced as threatening to her identity as an independent and self-determined person.

The Idyll Inn as a place also structures Silvia's relationships and exerts its power on new inhabitants, as the opening paragraph of the novel reveals: "At three o'clock in the morning, that defenceless hour when anything feels possible and nothing human or inhuman out of the question, the Idyll Inn's only sounds are the low hum and thrum a complicated building makes to keep itself going. Like any living body, even a sleeping or unconscious one, a building has to sustain its versions of blood and breath, so there's a perpetual buzz to it, white noise to the night. With only those faint sounds of companionship, three o'clock in the morning is an uneasy hour for the wakeful" (*EL* 1). The simile ("like any living body") and personification emphasize the important role the building plays in the narrative. With its human characteristics, it symbolically embodies institutional power and links spatiality to the social as it determines its residents' relations.

Another perspective on the Idyll Inn that relates the building to the body is presented in the next chapter: "This Idyll Inn, if viewed from the unlikely vantage point of the air, more or less resembles a sperm: a rounded head with a long two-storey tail," with all the "friendly, communal, well-intentioned features located in the part of the building which would, from the air, form the plump head of the sperm" (*EL* 4; 5). Whether the shape of the building underlines the fact that it houses active life or even represents a new start in life, or whether the metaphor alludes to an eternal circle of life and death, it seems absurd and certainly bears some irony, which is reinforced by further description of what the

sperm's head contains: it houses the staff office with "harried people, women, on a steep learning curve" and the "ill-named library, a dark paneled room with no books" (EL 6)—descriptions highlighting that the Idyll Inn's advertisement as a luxurious "home" is nothing but an empty promise. There is no point in complaining to anybody because "[c]omplaints risk retribution," as Greta observes with an air of disillusionment and fear—her phrase is characteristic of the relationships between residents and staff at the Idyll Inn (EL 76). Relationships among residents themselves are to be formed in the unwelcoming common areas, such as the dining room with "a certain draftiness around some of the windows" (EL 7), the crafts room, and the coffee lounge, where all sorts of gatherings can remain within the control of the staff.

Sara Jamieson notes, in this context, "The novel's emphasis on the intentions and expectations underlying institutional design draws attention to how the built environment functions, particularly in its more public areas, as the expression of specific ideas about how the elderly should best manage the leisure time that the facility has made available to them. The pastoral focus on leisure in *Exit Lines* frames the novel's engagement with gerontological debates concerning the optimal level in old age of activity and engagement with the world" (373). With reference to Katz (*Cultural* 121), Jamieson points out that "'the association of activity with well-being in old age' is one of the dominant ideologies of contemporary gerontology" (373). She argues that the importance of activity and interaction is more compatible with the ideal of positive aging than with what came to be known in the 1960s as "disengagement theory" (373), an approach that regards the desire to withdraw from any activities and the attenuation of former relationships as natural aspects of aging (374). *Exit Lines*, she argues, "participates in a rehabilitation of concepts associated with disengagement, suggesting that the choice to cease participation in certain activities, and to focus on certain relationships while letting others lapse, has at least as much to recommend it as maintaining high levels of activity and social contact in old age" (374). Sylvia as well as the other characters literally exemplify disengagement theory. She is

suspicious of activities that are forged by planned encounters: “Relationships are bound to develop, but obviously it will be necessary to hold out against forced jollity. Presumptuousness. The sort of thing that leads to sing-alongs, and clumsy exercises from a seated position to the tunes of old ballads” (EL 11). These disciplinary acts, as Sylvia understands them, reflect Michel Foucault’s notion of the institutional gaze (*Discipline* 174), but Sylvia and her friends radically undermine all kinds of disciplining (“Honest to God, we’re just old, we’re not morons,” EL 51) and refuse to participate in “all the promised *fun*” (EL 31). For this reason, Annabel Walker, the embodiment of institutional discipline, is suspicious of the group meetings in Sylvia’s room—and she is right, as they are actually held to prepare for Ruth’s assisted suicide.

It is precisely here that *Exit Lines* subverts the Foucauldian panoptical gaze as well as discourses of normalization. While the consciousness of being surveyed has been induced in the residents of the Idyll Inn, they still reject and even reverse, as Patricia Life has pointed out, institutional discipline and any attempted administrative gaze. “They boldly move about the residence in the middle of the night in the dark, and they know more about the administrator’s private secrets than the administrator herself does,” Life argues, alluding to the fact that Annabel Walker’s father used to be Sylvia Lodge’s secret lover, and Sylvia is well informed about Annabel’s turbulent family history. When the residents finally set out together to euthanize Ruth, the rejection of the institutional gaze is at its peak. They manage to carve out a niche of independence and self-determinacy, and although the mutual euthanasia pact of the residents presents a questionable twist in the plotline, the text here suggests that the residents seize the ultimate agency, agency over their very existence (Life), challenging the institution’s surveillance practices as well as the assumption that they have become “institutional bodies.”

#### CONCLUSION

Both texts, especially *Half Life*, insinuate that living in long-term care institutions is “a dreary medicalized fate more likely to cause harm than good” (Chivers, “Reimagining Care” 68), but although the characters’

agency is more limited in *Half Life* than it is in *Exit Lines*, and despite the fact that the protagonists' fights for self-determination are not always successful, both *Half Life* and *Exit Lines* can be read as powerful and self-confident assertions of strength, endurance, and energy in old age. The characters in both texts "defy the outmoded social expectations of passive senescence by taking charge of their lives... By leading 'young' lives in middle and old age, these fictional heroines [and heroes] undermine the conventional binary opposition between young and old," as Barbara Frey Waxman has argued with reference to what she calls "Reifungsromane" in the context of feminist literary gerontology (*From the Hearth* 183). Patrick and Clara in *Half Life* as well as Sylvia and her friends in *Exit Lines* reject negative cultural stereotypes of what it means to be old in a caregiving facility. John Mighton and Joan Barfoot use the space of the care home as a setting metaphorically to critique traditional assumptions that are discursively anchored in such spaces.

The value of these texts is to be found, therefore, not only in their literary quality but also, and more importantly, in the ways in which they contribute to deconstructing metaphors and discursive formations that produce the care home as a place where the focus is directed first and foremost on the aging body. Instead, such texts widen the focus to the whole person and consequently invite diverse readings that include questions of identity and the life course as well as of inter- and intra-generational relationships, questions that naturally also include bodily aspects but are not limited to them. Similar to feminist scholarship that addresses the gendered construction of space and the spatial construction of gender (McDowell and Sharp; Massey), I argue that the intersection of age and space for which the care home novel can be used as a paradigm needs to be addressed by literary gerontologists in order to facilitate a change in attitudes toward old age. Both the creation and the analysis of such sites in care home narratives can contribute toward that end. As literary gerontologist Sally Chivers argues in a similar context, "These depictions of institutional care, more than commenting on the possibilities of such facilities to provide improved care, demonstrate the

complicated process of forming attitudes toward the frail old and help to counter the impetus to think of age as either positive or negative. They provide examples of how narrative fiction can offer a perspective on the individuality of elderly residents that differs from clinical interaction” (*From Old Woman* xlvi). While it is clearly neither the task nor the focus of sociological, gerontological, or medical texts to facilitate identification on the reader’s part, literary texts offer potential on two levels: identification and resistance. The “visceral prose” (Waxman, *From the Hearth* 18) and aesthetics of literary texts can enable readers to identify with a literary character and thus narratively experience aging. Literary gerontologists can take the matter one step further: as literary critic and age studies pioneer Roberta Maierhofer contends, “the field of literary gerontology can only be established with a better understanding of what literature is and how it works rather than with literary critics having to use traditional gerontological methods” (256). Literary texts, Waxman maintains, “can affect whole societies and do important work for social betterment, even when they are presenting sexist or ageist notions in their characters and plots, precisely because resisting literary critics will interrogate and undermine these sexist or ageist notions in the texts and raise general readers’ awareness of how these damaging notions operate both in texts and in society” (“Literary” 88). A critical analysis of literary texts in an interdisciplinary scholarly field such as gerontology also contributes to raising awareness of how caregiving needs to be reimagined. Both *Half Life* and *Exit Lines* can be read as urgent demands to address the intersection of space and age and to include considerations of space in scholarly discussions of aging. These two twenty-first century texts contribute, via different genres, to envisioning new narratives for how to live in old age by offering strong and life-affirming expressions of individuality despite the bleakness of institutional care.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on a paper presented at the 2013 conference “Space and Place: Exploring Critical Issues,” which appears online at [www.inter-disciplinary.net](http://www.inter-disciplinary.net).

<sup>2</sup>Ageist metaphors such as “the silver tsunami” or “the gray flood” testify to “the barely conscious figurative language that serves to construct perceptions of an aging popula-

tion” (Charise 2) and are frequently found in media reports on aging. For informative analyzes, see Charise, Cruikshank, and especially Katz (*Cultural Aging*), who discusses how already in the 19th and early 20th century, “the elderly population was constituted as a subject of knowledge and politics through a discourse of alarmist demography”(69; 127).

<sup>3</sup> For the German speaking area, Miriam Seidler has discovered a similar phenomenon, arguing that the “Pfleheimroman” (care home novel) is a newly emerging, if yet relatively unknown, genre. She argues that recent publications help to create a more diverse public image of care homes. Peter Simonsen refers to the genre of the care home novel in the context of Scandinavian literature in his book *Livslange liv: Plejehjemsromaner og pensionsfortællinger fra velfærdsstaten* (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Although US American and Canadian novels set in care homes have been subject to analysis in a large number of excellent publications, among them Sally Chivers’s and Amelia DeFalco’s insightful work as well as Patricia Life’s recently completed doctoral thesis, the intersection of age, space, and place in care home narratives has not yet been addressed from a literary gerontological perspective that includes spatial theory.

<sup>5</sup> For detailed accounts of the institution’s history and its regional differences, see Katz, *Disciplining Old Age* (61–76), Peter, and Haber and Gratton.

<sup>6</sup> In his groundbreaking essay “Of Other Spaces,” Michel Foucault defines heterotopias (literally: “the other space”) as spaces that in a way simulate reality. Heterotopic spaces are defined through dependence on and in contrast with utopias. While utopias represent imagined perfections or inversions of society without real space, heterotopias are real places, “effectively enacted utopia[s]” (24)—or, in the case of involuntary confinement, dystopias: “There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (25).

<sup>7</sup> Another example of such a narrative would be Debora Moggach’s novel *These Foolish Things*, which has recently been made into the movie *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*.

<sup>8</sup> I am referring to the original script, not a performance.

<sup>9</sup> Erving Goffman coined this term in his classic 1961 work *Asylums: Studies on the Social Condition of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*, in which he analyzes what it means to live in closed worlds such as hospitals, mental wards, prisons, army training camps, monasteries, or nursing homes: “A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (xiii).

<sup>10</sup> A movie directed by Dustin Hofmann and based on Ronald Harwood’s 1999 play by the same name, *Quartet* is set in a luxurious retirement residence for talented musicians, where four singers plan to raise funds for the home by putting on a revival concert.

## WORKS CITED

- Andrews, Gavin J. "Residential Homes: From Distributions in Space to the Elements of Place." *Ageing and Place: Perspectives, Policy, Practice*. Ed. Gavin J. Andrews and David R. Phillips. London: Routledge, 2005. 61-78.
- Arber, Sara, and Jay Ginn. "Class, Caring and the Life Course." *Ageing, Independence, and the Life Course*. Ed. Sara Arber and Maria Evandrou. London: Jessica Kingsley in association with the British Society of Gerontology, 1993. 149-68.
- Arber, Sara, and Maria Evandrou, eds. *Ageing, Independence, and the Life Course*. London: Jessica Kingsley in association with the British Society of Gerontology, 1993.
- Barfoot, Joan. *Duet for Three*. 1985. London: Women's Press, 1986.
- . *Exit Lines*. 2008. Toronto: Vintage Canadas, 2009.
- The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. Dir. John Madden. Perf. Judy Dench, Bill Nighy, Maggie Smith. Blueprint Pictures, 2011. DVD.
- Charise, Andrea. "Let the Reader Think of the Burden': Old Age and the Crisis of Capacity." *Ageing, Old Age, Memory, Aesthetics*. Ed. Marlene Goldman, et al. Spec. issue of *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 4 (2012): 1-6. Web. 30 Aug. 2012.
- Chivers, Sally. *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2003.
- . "Reimagining Care: Images of Aging and Creativity in *House Calls* and *A Year at Sherbrooke*." *Ageing, Narrative, and Performance: Essay from the Humanities*. Spec. issue of *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 7.2 (2012): 53-71.
- Cruikshank, Margaret. *Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
- DeFalco, Amelia. "Dementia, Caregiving, and Narrative in Michael Ignatieff's *Scar Tissue*." *Ageing, Old Age, Memory, Aesthetics*. Ed. Marlene Goldman, et al. Spec. issue of *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 4 (2012): 1-10. Web. 29 Jan. 2013.
- . *Uncanny Subjects: Aging in Contemporary Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010.
- Diamond, Timothy. *Making Gray Gold: Narratives of Nursing Home Care*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House, 1995.
- . "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22-27.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Fountain of Age*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.
- Goffman, Erving. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. 1st ed. Garden City: Anchor, 1961.
- Gubrium, Jaber F. *Living and Dying at Murray Manor*. Expanded pbk. ed. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997.
- Gubrium, Jaber F., and James A. Holstein. "The Nursing Home as a Discursive Anchor for the Ageing Body." *Ageing and Society* 19.5 (1999): 519-38. Web. 19 Oct. 2013.
- Gullette, Margaret M. *Aged by Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.
- Haber, Carole, and Brian Gratton. *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Harwood, Ronald. *Quartet & Equally Divided*. London: Faber, 1999.
- Heinzelmann, Martin. *Das Altenheim – immer noch eine „Totale Institution“? Eine Untersuchung des Binnenlebens zweier Altenheime*. Dissertation. Universität Göttingen, 2004. Web.

- 28 Jan. 2013.
- Jamieson, Sara. "Joan Barfoot's *Exit Lines* and the Pastoral of Old Age." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 42.3 (2012): 370–83.
- Johnson, Julia, Sheena Rolph, and Randall Smith. *Residential Care Transformed: Revisiting 'The Last Refuge'*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012.
- Jones, Kenneth. "John Mighton's *Half Life*, About Memory, Identity and Love, Gets World Premiere in Toronto Feb. 22." *Playbill*, 2005. Web. 16 Jun. 2013.
- Katz, Stephen. *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1996.
- . *Cultural Aging: Life Course, Lifestyle, and Senior Worlds*. Peterborough: Broadview, 2005.
- Katz, Stephen, and Kevin McHugh. "Age, Meaning, and Place: Cultural Narratives and Retirement Communities." *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does It Mean to Grow Old?* Ed. Thomas R. Cole, Ruth E. Ray, and Robert Kastenbaum. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010. 271-92.
- Laurence, Margaret. *The Stone Angel*. 1964. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.
- Laws, Glenda. "Embodiment and Emplacement: Identities, Representation and Landscape in Sun City Retirement Communities." *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 40.4 (1995): 253-80.
- . "Spatiality and Age Relations." *Critical Approaches to Ageing and Later Life*. Ed. Anne Jamieson, Sarah Harper, and Christina R. Victor. Buckingham: Open UP, 1997. 90-100.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Reprint. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- Life, Patricia. "From Horror to Hotel: Canadian Literary Depictions of the Nursing Home." *Our Future is Aging: Current Research on Knowledge, Practice and Policy*. Mount Saint Vincent University. Halifax. 22 Nov. 2012. Conference Paper.
- Maierhofer, Roberta. "American Studies Growing Old." *Crossing Borders: Interdisciplinary Intercultural Interactions*. Ed. Bernhard Kettmann and Georg Marko. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999. 255-68.
- Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity, 1994.
- McDowell, Linda, and Joanne P. Sharp. *Space, Gender, Knowledge: Feminist Readings*. London: J. Wiley, 1997.
- McHugh, Kevin E. "Three Faces of Ageism: Society, Image and Place." *Ageing & Society* 23 (2003). 165-85.
- Mighton, John. *Half Life*. 1st ed. Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 2005.
- Moggach, Deborah. *These Foolish Things: A Novel*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2004.
- Quartet*. Dir. Dustin Hoffman. Screenplay by Ronald Harwood. Perf. Maggie Smith, Michael Gambon, Billy Connolly. Headline Pictures, 2012. DVD.
- Peace, Sheila M., Leonie A. Kellaher, and Caroline Holland. *Environment and Identity in Later Life*. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2006.
- Peter, Elizabeth. "The History of Nursing in the Home: Revealing the Significance of Place in the Expression of Moral Agency." *Nursing Inquiry* 9.2 (2002): 65–72. Web. 29 Sept. 2012.
- Rowles, Graham D., and Miriam Bernard, eds. *Environmental Gerontology: Making Meaningful Places in Old Age*. New York: Springer, 2013.
- Sarton, May. *As We Are Now*. 1973. New York: Norton, 1992.

- Scotten, Neil. *Half Life. A Workbook for Teachers and Students Prepared for the Centaur Theatre Company*. Web. 13 Oct. 2013.
- Simonsen, Peter. *Livslange Liv: Plejehjemromaner og Pensionfortællinger fra Velfærdsstaten*. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2014. University of Southern Denmark studies in Scandinavian languages and literatures 118.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Waxman, Barbara F. *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature*. New York: Greenwood, 1990.
- . "Literary Texts and Literary Critics Team Up against Ageism." *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does It Mean to Grow Old?* Ed. Thomas R. Cole, Ruth E. Ray, and Robert Kastenbaum. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010. 83-104.
- Wheelwright, Julie. "Exit Lines, by Joan Barfoot: The rage of the aged: a haunting, disturbing tale of growing old disgracefully." *The Independent* 17 Sep. 2008. Web. 21 Jun. 2013.
- Wyatt-Brown, Anne M. "Resilience and Creativity in Aging: The Realms of Silver." *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does It Mean to Grow Old?* Ed. Thomas R. Cole, Ruth E. Ray, and Robert Kastenbaum. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010. 55-82.

---

**Ulla Kriebnerneegg** is Associate Professor at the Center for Inter-American Studies (C.IAS) at the University of Graz, Austria. Her emphasis in research and teaching is on (Inter-)American literary and cultural studies, interculturality, Jewish migrations to the Americas, and Age/Aging Studies. Her current book project, *Age into Place: Age, Space, and Identity in Anglophone North American Care Home Narratives*, focuses on representations of long-term care institutions in Canadian and US American film and fiction. She is chair of ENAS (European Network in Aging Studies) and coeditor of the *Aging Studies* book series. Readers may write to Ulla Kriebnerneegg at [ulla.kriebnerneegg@uni-graz.at](mailto:ulla.kriebnerneegg@uni-graz.at).

©2015 Ulla Kriebnerneegg

*Age, Culture, Humanities* 2 (2015)

Published by the Athenaeum Press at Coastal Carolina University. All rights reserved.

For permissions, please email [athenaempres@coastal.edu](mailto:athenaempres@coastal.edu).