The Female Ageing Body and Sexuality in Contemporary Fiction:

A Comparative Analysis of Deborah Moggach's and Doris Lessing's Novels

Student: Aina Maria Bergas Nicolau

Supervisor: Maricel Oró Piqueras

University of Lleida

Department of English and Linguistics

Double Degree in English Studies and LLETRA

2023-2024

Table of contents

Abstract

Contemporary Western Societies have been experiencing an unprecedented demographic revolution in which the number of elderly people has nearly doubled. This ageing of the population has resulted in a renewed interest in the topic of old age, which has emerged as a focal point in literature. Stories in Western fiction portraying older women have a long history of presenting them from a pessimistic narrative of decline. Nevertheless, the literary representation of older women has undergone a series of modifications. In the last couple of decades, fiction in English has seen a proliferation of novels with female protagonists in their sixties, seventies, and eighties who come to terms with their ageing process. Two of the main concerns that these women reflect upon during their internal development are the changes in their bodies and their sexuality. This paper sets out to study this evolution in the literary portrayal of female ageing through a comparative analysis of Deborah Moggach's and Doris Lessing's portrayal of the female ageing body and later-in-life sexuality. In order to conduct this comparative analysis, the four following novels have been selected: *These Foolish Things* (2005) and *Something to Hide* (2016) by Deborah Moggach, and *Love, Again* (1996) and *The Diaries of Jane Sommers* (1984) by Doris Lessing. The analysis of these novels within the framework of feminist literary gerontology aims to show how these multifaceted portrayals of older women reflect a revolutionary trend in contemporary English fiction that helps subvert gender norms as well as redefine the sociocultural connotations of female ageing.

Key words: literary gerontology, female ageing, the ageing body, later-in-life sexuality.

Resum

La societat occidental està experimentant un canvi demogràfic sense precedents en el qual les xifres de persones grans s'han gairebé duplicat. Com a resultat d'aquest envelliment de la població, la vellesa s'ha convertit en un tema d'interès central en la literatura. Històricament, les històries occidentals que representaven dones grans ho feien des de la narrativa del declivi. No obstant això, la construcció literària de personatges femenins grans ha canviat significativament i, en les últimes dècades, es pot observar en la literatura anglesa contemporània una proliferació de novel·les que se centren en dones de seixanta, setanta i vuitanta anys que es troben en un procés d'acceptació del seu envelliment. Dues de les preocupacions principals d'aquestes protagonistes són el seu cos i la seva sexualitat. A partir d'aquest context, el present treball té l'objectiu d'estudiar aquesta evolució en la conceptualització literària de la dona gran per mitjà d'una anàlisi comparativa de les novel·les de Deborah Moggach i Doris Lessing i la seva representació del cos femení envellit i la sexualitat en la vellesa. Amb aquesta finalitat, s'han seleccionat les següents quatre novel·les: *These Foolish Things* (2005) i *Something to Hide* (2016) de Deborah Moggach, i *Love, Again* (1996) i *The Diaries of Jane Sommers* (1984) de Doris Lessing. L'anàlisi d'aquestes novel·les a través de la perspectiva de la gerontologia literària feminista pretén demostrar que aquesta construcció intricada de personatges femenins grans reflecteix una tendència en la ficció contemporània anglesa que ajuda a subvertir les normes de gènere i a redefinir les connotacions socioculturals de l'envelliment femení.

Paraules clau: gerontologia literària, envelliment femení, el cos envellit, sexualitat en la vellesa.

Resumen

La sociedad occidental está atravesando un cambio demográfico sin precedentes en el que el número de personas mayores se ha casi duplicado. Debido a este envejecimiento de la población, la vejez se ha convertido en un tema de interés central en la literatura. Históricamente, las historias occidentales que representaban a mujeres mayores lo hacían desde la narrativa del declive. No obstante, la construcción literaria de personajes femeninos mayores ha cambiado significativamente y, en las últimas décadas, se puede observar en la literatura inglesa contemporánea una proliferación de novelas centradas en mujeres de sesenta, setenta y hasta ochenta años que se encuentran en un proceso de aceptación de su envejecimiento. Dos de las principales preocupaciones de estas protagonistas son su cuerpo y su sexualidad. Partiendo de este contexto, este trabajo tiene por objetivo el estudio de la evolución en la conceptualización literaria de la mujer mayor a través de un análisis comparativo de las novelas de Deborah Moggach y Doris Lessing y su representación del cuerpo femenino envejecido y la sexualidad en la vejez. Con este fin, se han seleccionado las siguientes cuatro novelas: *These Foolish Things* (2005) y *Something to Hide* (2016) de Deborah Moggach, y *Love, Again* (1996) y *The Diaries of Jane Sommers* (1984) de Doris Lessing. El análisis de estas novelas bajo la perspectiva de la gerontología literaria feminista pretende demostrar que esta construcción intrincada de protagonistas femeninas mayores refleja una tendencia en la ficción contemporánea inglesa que ayuda a subvertir las normas de género y a redefinir las connotaciones socioculturales del envejecimiento femenino.

Palabras clave: gerontología literaria, envejecimiento femenino, el cuerpo envejecido, sexualidad en la vejez

1. Introduction

Contrary to popular belief, ageing cannot be reduced to a physiological process of decline. Instead, the understanding of old age is largely shaped by social constructs, and, as stated by Gullette (1996, p. 24), "we are aged by culture". Fiction is one of the cultural manifestations contributing to the conception of old age. According to Brennan (2005), literature interferes with the discursive construction of old age by dramatizing its prospects. That is to say, the construal of literary stories centred around ageing or focused on elderly characters contributes to the general perception of this life stage. In Western culture, the narrative of decline, which views senescence as a time of physical and cognitive deterioration, has dominated literary portrayals since ancient times (Woodward, 2006). Older women have been particularly affected by this gloomy picture of ageing. Due to the "double standard of ageing" (Sontag, 1972), female old age has resulted in the invisibility and loss of sexual identity of elderly women in fiction. Indeed, stories about older women are scarce unless they are portrayed as either affable and helpless grandmothers or as sinister crones (King, 2013). Therefore, it seems like old age only reinforces the discrimination and inequality that women go through in their lives (Molina-Luque et al., 2018). Notwithstanding this, there has been a paradigm shift in the representation of elderly characters as a result of a demographic revolution.

Currently, the world is going through an unprecedented demographic shift in the global population age (Bloom et al., 2015). Until the Industrial Revolution, the proportion of old people in any country never surpassed 3 or 4 per cent (Jackson & Howe, 2008). However, due to the decreasing fertility rates and increasing longevity, the percentage of elderly people has nearly doubled (Bloom et al., 2015). Particularly, the number of older women has risen to almost 5 million (Molina-Luque et al., 2018) and old age has become increasingly feminized. In light of this context, a need for new models and alternative readings of old age has arisen (Hepworth, 2000). Accordingly, "a new coming of age of literature" has emerged (Falcus, 2015, p. 53).

Since the 1990s, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of stories giving a central role to the voice of older characters (Casado & Vidal, 2004). Most notably, it can be observed a proliferation of ageing genres which bring visibility to older female characters and examine the interplay of age and gender (Falcus, 2015). Doris Lessing and Deborah Moggach are two of the authors whose novels contribute to this new literary trend through their kaleidoscopic representation of the female ageing body and sexuality in later life.

Based on this observation, this paper will adopt the general framework of feminist literary gerontology to conduct a comparative analysis of the novels *These Foolish Things* (2005) and *Something to Hide* (2016) by Deborah Moggach and *Love, Again* (1996) and *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984) by Doris Lessing. The main aim of this content-based comparative analysis is to study how their portrayal of the female ageing body and sexuality reflects a revolutionary trend in English fiction that helps subvert gender norms as well as redefine the sociocultural connotations of female ageing.

This paper will be divided into several sections. First, it will present a brief introduction to the field of literary gerontology and its contribution to the study of old age. Then, it will provide a literature review of the master narrative of the decline and the ageing genres (which are presented as counter-narratives of the latter). Once this overview of the two main cultural narratives of ageing is outlined, this paper will offer a concise survey of the literary themes "the female ageing body" and "female sexuality in later life", focusing on their representation within these narratives. This theoretical framework will then conclude with a justification of why a comparative analysis of Doris Lessing and Deborah Moggach merits investigation despite these authors' literary differences. In the next section, the previous theoretical framework will be exemplified by a comparative analysis of the portrayal of female ageing and sexuality in the four selected novels. Lastly, this paper will conclude with some final considerations in relation to the research question.

2. Literary gerontology and contemporary fiction by women

Gerontology is the field dedicated to the study of old age (Chivers, 2003). Although the humanities occupied a marginal position in this area of study for a long time, a theoretical gap was identified in its exclusive medical approach that led to an appreciation of interdisciplinarity as well as of images of ageing (Featherstone & Hepworth, 2005). In short, gerontologists realized that there was a need for a multidisciplinary approach that contemplated the individual and general aspects of the ageing process as well as its contradictory and multifaceted nature (Chivers, 2003). The addition of literary criticism to the study of old age would help fill this gap for three main reasons.

First of all, based on the fact that literature has a strong impact on the general understanding of senescence, it becomes evident that content-based studies of fictional texts offer valuable insight into representations of ageing and themes such as the ageing body and sexuality (Oró-Piqueras, 2013). Secondly, narratives of old age are valuable sources of gerontological analysis because literature can embrace the abovementioned contradictions and possibilities of old age (Falcus,

2015). Finally, fiction adds to the study and understanding of ageing because it enables readers to immerse themselves in the minds of other characters. Thus, a 20-year-old reader can inhabit vicariously the mind and body of an 80-year-old person, which contributes to closing the intergenerational gap (Waxman, 1990).

In light of this, in 1975, literary scholars started to consider the topic of old age after the contribution of the participants Leon Edel, Leslie Fiedler, and Erik Erikson at the Conference on Human Values and Aging and their use of interdisciplinarity in their papers (Wyatt-Brown, 1990). Subsequently, by the 1980s and 1990s, literary gerontology started to develop as a branch of knowledge within gerontology (Wyatt-Brown, 1990). Notwithstanding this, researchers also realized the need to incorporate a gendered approach to the literary study of old age since the characterization of male old age was thought to differ from the struggles of older women's lives (Waxman, 1990). As a consequence of this, in the last 20 years, narratives of female ageing have begun to receive attention as a subject of study in feminist and literary gerontology (Falcus, 2015). Accordingly, this paper will adopt this general framework of feminist literary gerontology for the comparative analysis of Deborah Moggach and Doris Lessing's novels.

2.1. The master narrative of decline

As mentioned earlier, the meaning of old age is socially constructed; hence, its perception has varied across time and cultures (Blaikie, 1999). In ancient China, for example, the elderly population was venerated and a man's 50th birthday was celebrated with great respect (Achenbaum, 2005). However, in the West, the narrative of decline has been the master narrative of ageing since ancient times. Master narratives are defined by Laceulle (2018) as those stories shared by one culture that occupy a more dominant position, and the theme of ageing as decay has been prevalent in Western societies for centuries (Woodward, 2006). For example, already in Ancient Greece, old age was described in overwhelmingly pessimistic terms (Achenbaum, 2005). As an illustration of this, Aristotle thought that a man matured until he reached the age of fifty and, after that, he entered a period of degradation where they lost their heat, which he considered to be an essential condition of life (de Beauvoir, 1972). This negative view of old age worsened with the introduction of another cosmology that substituted the medieval cyclic perception of life with an image of life stages as rising and descending a staircase (Johnson, 2005). These stages are successfully depicted in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, where senescence is likened to a "second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans tastes, sans everything" (1623, Act 2 Scene 7).

Overall, the master narrative of decline equates old age to a time of inescapable decay where elderly people are thought to be disengaged from their lives and are pictured as vulnerable and as a financial burden to the working population (Laceulle, 2018). In relation to this, since old people are perceived as weak because of their ailing bodies, they are frequently infantilized in these narratives (Gott, 2005). Additionally, this discourse of old age establishes a sharp binary between youth and old age, healthiness and disease, and beauty and asexuality (Woodward, 1999). Such portrayal of old age contributes to a form of discrimination based on age, labelled as ageism by Robert Butler (1969), that dehumanizes old people and promotes a stereotypical perception of them. In fact, the ageism prompted by this master narrative is particularly alarming because, on the one hand, it denies any possibility of growth in old age (Gullette, 1997), and, on the other hand, several sources have concluded that the internalization of these stereotypes can affect the way ageing people view themselves and even their health (Chivers, 2005; Cruikshank, 2013). For instance, the World Health Organization (2021) reported a correlation between ageism and higher rates of depression, social isolation, and financial instability. Likewise, Losada Baltar (2004) linked this form of discrimination to elevated cardiovascular stress.

That said, even though both men and women are affected by ageism, owing to the double standard of ageing (Sontag, 1972), old women are subjected to different standards that put them in a double position of otherness on the basis of their gender and age. According to Brennan (2005), the "horns effect" interferes with the representation of older female characters, who are portrayed as ugly, antisexual, and evil. What is more, such is the rejection of older women, that in Victorian children's literature, they were presented as warranting deportation, just like criminals (Mangum, 1999).

For all these reasons, the master narrative of decline has been harshly critiqued by several literary gerontologists (Gullette, 1997; Cruikshank, 2013), and there has been an attempt by authors such as Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, and Penelope Lively to present alternative images of female old age in fiction. The following subsection will explore the traits of these counter-narratives in more detail.

2.2. The ageing genres

The ageing genres refer to those fictional narratives that emerged in Anglo-American culture in the 1980s and 1990s that embrace alternative discourses of ageing (Falcus, 2015). This definition matches Lindemann Nelson's (2001, p. 6) description of counter-narratives: "a story that resists an

oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect". Hence, it could be determined that the ageing genres function as counter-narratives of the master narrative of decline.

Before focusing on the traits of these counter-narratives, a distinction should be drawn between this notion of ageing genres and the concept of age-defying narratives. Although in both cases an attempt is made to challenge the prototypical view of ageing as decline, age-defying narratives such as the discourse of successful ageing (popularised by Rowe and Kahn (1997)) simply exchange the stereotype of the weak and burdensome elder for that of the productive, healthy, active, and consumerist old person (Laceulle, 2018). Therefore, instead of challenging the ageism of the master narrative of decline, age-defying narratives simply incorporate another form of discrimination (Marshall, 2015). In both cases, a one-dimensional image of old age is provided. The narratives included in the ageing genres, however, do not reduce ageing to inevitable doom or simplistic positivism. Rather, they portray ageing as a kaleidoscope that contains shifting and contradictory images (Cruikshank, 2013). As mentioned by Brennan (2005), these narratives do not deny the struggles that might come with old age; they just do not become the sole focus of the story. In these stories, there is still room for growth.

Another trait of the ageing genres is that they do not present an exclusive model of old age and these fictions may also vary in form and point of view. Hepworth (2000) offers some examples of these variations: they might focus on an older main character, who is also the narrator; they may be centred on a group of elderly characters; or they could focus on intergenerational relationships and family interaction. Variations aside, literary gerontologists such as Barbara Waxman and Margaret Gullette have identified and named a genre within these counter-narratives. Waxman (1990) named this genre *Reifugnsroman* or novel of ripening while Gullette (1996) used the term midlife women's progress novel. Notwithstanding these labels, this study will use Falcus' (2015) more general term "ageing genres" instead of "*Reifugnsroman*" or "midlife women's progress novels" because it includes all those counter-narratives that coincide in their aim to challenge the view of old age as decline and replace it with kaleidoscopic stories in which there is still potential for further development.

Apart from the shared goal of the works ascribed to this genre, literary gerontologists have established the following common links between them: On the one hand, these novels put the older woman, invisible from fiction and public discourses for centuries, at the core of the narrative (Brennan, 2005). Usually narrated in first person, omniscient third person or stream-of-consciousness, these stories focus on complex heroines who are "neither cloyingly sweet and

poignant, nor completely dotty, nor impossibly haglike" (Waxman, 1990, p. 184). Through this narrative choice, these novels already defy the longstanding tradition of portraying older women as one-dimensional characters. Additionally, these narratives do not only give voice to the physical "ripening" of older women but also to their emotional journey. That is to say, these novels devote pages to describing the bodily changes undergone by the ageing protagonists as well as to their new interests and passions (Waxman, 1990). This focus is also reflected in the typical themes of this genre of fiction, which include (but are not limited to): loneliness, pain, estrangement, grief, insecurities, cross-generational relationships, self-discovery, and self-affirmation.

As opposed to the traditional female Bildungsroman of the nineteenth century, these novels show that life for women does not necessarily reach its peak with marriage, but that it continues outside the private sphere, where the protagonist can finally develop as a person (King, 2013). In relation to this, one of the recurring elements of these narratives is the life review (Doblas, 2005). The older female protagonist often looks back to her youth and early adulthood. Notwithstanding this, instead of praising girlhood as the best time of a woman's life, these novels show the fear of pregnancy, and the encumbrance of marriage and raising children, among other struggles experienced by women in their youth (Gullette, 1996). This way, these counter-narratives show that old age can be more fulfilling and liberating than young age.

Finally, the aforementioned interplay of past and present corroborates the notion that they are coexistent. Contrary to the binarism endorsed by the master narrative of decline, in this fictional genre, the notion of age is not sharply divided into young and old age; rather, it is presented as a continuum (Waxman, 1990). On the whole, through their use of themes, their kaleidoscopic approach to old age, their notion of time, and, especially, their focus on the older woman, these novels constitute a form of antisexist and anti-ageist resistance.

2.3. The female ageing body

The study of old age requires the consideration of the physical aspects of ageing alongside its sociocultural connotations. According to Cruikshank (2013, p. 1): "Learning to be old means fully experiencing the physical, bodily changes that accompany aging while at the same time recognizing that those changes occur in a particular social setting, influenced by our ethnicity, class, and gender, and by the political and economic climate". Indeed, albeit socially constructed, there is a materiality of the ageing body that cannot be ignored and demands that the older body is brought into focus (Woodward, 2006). As an illustration of this, in her book *The Coming of Age* (1972, p. 5), Simone

de Beauvoir observes some of the physical realities of ageing that eventually arrive to everyone: “the hair whitens and grows sparse [...], the skin becomes wrinkled. The teeth drop out [...] muscular atrophy and sclerosis of joints cause difficulties in working and movement”.

Regardless of the generality of this phenomenon, some social gerontologists have shown reticence to putting too much emphasis on the body as it could imply a return to biological determinism (Twigg & Martin, 2015). Feminist gerontologists have also expressed similar concerns regarding the emphasis on the body as an object of study since it could affect their efforts to challenge the excessive scrutiny of women’s bodies (Cruikshank, 2013). Admittedly, the importance that Western culture gives to the female body plays a pivotal role in the general perception of ageing (Woodward, 1999). Notwithstanding these critiques, there seems to be a general agreement among gerontologists that it is crucial to study how the ageing body is framed in society (Blaikie, 1999). This is because the study of images of ageing adds to the inspection and transformation of a culture’s attitude towards ageing (Woodward, 1999), and it also contributes to voicing a reality that has been silenced and othered since ancient times (Chivers, 2003).

The distinctive signs of ageing that can be observed on the body and face do not necessarily involve any physical pain or discomfort, but they are given a symbolic value through the attribution of moral and aesthetic qualities (Hepworth, 2000). Traditionally, these signs have been presented in Western culture through the lens of the master narrative of decline (Achenbaum, 2005). For instance, both Tulle (2015) and Featherstone & Hepworth (2001) maintain that physical changes evading our control, such as incontinence, are often stigmatized as revolting. In the case of older women, the effects of this discrimination are heightened (Clarke & Bennett, 2015). Any sign of ageing in their bodies is not only viewed as decay but as something abhorrent. This general aversion to the ageing body, and to the female ageing body in particular, has been found to alienate elderly women from society (Cruikshank, 2013). Taking this into consideration, it is understandable that older women often resort to strategies of “age-passing” or to the notion of “the mask of old age” to dissociate themselves from their ageing bodies and the exclusion that comes with them.

The practices aimed at disguising yourself as younger than you are, known as “age-passing”, are of particular relevance, and they include the use of make-up, hair dye, fashion, and face-lifts, among other appearance management activities (Gilleard & Higgs, 2013). For example, in his study of hair and old age, Richard Ward (2015) points to the intersection of grey hair and attitudes to ageing. According to him, grey hair is viewed in the West as desexualizing and is one of the causes leading to the invisibility of older women. Hence, older women’s choice to dye or not their hair could be

highly influenced by this context. In a similar vein, Twigg (2015) also establishes a connection between age and dress. In her study, she claims that the appropriateness of clothing is determined depending on the age of the person who wears it. As for older women, they are expected to dress in darker tones and with clothes that cover a higher portion of their bodies. They also have to constantly check their clothes to ensure that they are fashionable enough (out-of-date looks are considered a moral transgression) and that they adhere to the codes of appropriateness (Twigg, 2015). Otherwise, older women risk being called "muttons dressed as lambs" (Featherstone & Hepworth, 2001, p. 380).

Scholars such as Garnham (2013) have defended these practices of age-passing as a way of defying the master narrative of decline. In his view, anti-ageing practices such as cosmetic surgery constitute a creative activity of redesigning old age. However, other scholars regard these strategies as a manifestation of internalized ageism (Ayalon & Twigg, 2018). Furthermore, since women endure greater pressure to preserve a youthful appearance, these practices can be particularly injurious to them. As mentioned by Andrews (2009), strategies of passing may result in a splitting of the self of older women. In this Cartesian division of the self and the body, women are alienated from their ageing bodies (Weiss, 2014). Another consequence of this relentless effort to conceal the signs of ageing is the betrayal of women's status as adults (Sontag, 1972). Essentially, this denial of old age forces women to remain as underdeveloped girls.

The notion of "the mask of ageing" epitomizes the splitting of the self that Andrews (2009) warns about. According to Featherstone & Hepworth (2001), "masking" refers to the strategy where elderly people view old age as a sort of mask that hides their core self. Consequently, this idea establishes a division between older people's sense of continuous selfhood and their ageing bodies (Hepworth, 2000). In this Cartesian separation of the self and body, the self is imagined to be younger than the external appearance; therefore, phrases such as "I don't feel old" or "young at heart" are often used to express this idea (Featherstone & Hepworth, 2005). As an illustration of this, Miller (1999, p. 14) expresses a similar experience in *Figuring Age*:

> To my great perplexity, my mother used to say, "Inside, I still feel sixteen." I'd look at her and think: you, sixteen! I've begun now to understand this feeling in a new way. On a good day, when I forget who and where I am, and find myself completely absorbed in what I'm doing, if I turn and see myself in the mirror, I often have the shock of misrecognition Ozick describes. Who is that yenta in the mirror, that matron walking down Broadway? It's… my mother, but it's also me. How did I get there? When did I stop being twenty-eight?

Although this dissonance between older people's assessment of their "look age" and "feel age" is a common experience, it should also be acknowledged that this Cartesian split of the self may lead to identity trouble (Anderson, 2019, p. 165), especially when it is complemented with other protective strategies in which older people attempt to distance themselves from their ageing body.

The ageing genres enact this splitting of the self through scenes in which the female older protagonist gazes at herself in the mirror to look for signs of bodily ageing (Brennan, 2005). Woodward (1991) defines this tendency to look in the mirror and the feelings it evokes as the mirror stage of old age. In fiction, mirror scenes are moments of ageing in which the older woman protagonist becomes aware of her "ripening" (Doblas, 2005). Accordingly, they provide insight into the main character's outlook on her ageing process. Some other purposes of these scenes are that they reveal how old women internalize ageist attitudes (Whelehan, 2014); they function as exercises of writing the body and thereby provide visibility to the silenced bodies of older women (Whelehan, 2014); and they work as a device to dramatize how others view the female ageing body (Hepworth, 2000). This last goal is achieved because, while people look at themselves in the mirror, the image they receive is partially moulded by the way their culture views them.

As in Miller's (1999) previous example, when the main character notices the first signs of ageing in her body during these mirror scenes, she often does not recognize herself and experiences a sense of disintegration. Whereas infants achieve a sense of unity by looking in the mirror, Woodward (1991) argues that the opposite occurs with elderly people. Regarding this experience, feminists such as Miller (1999) and Woodward (1991) use the expression "shock of recognition", and there have been several attempts to explain it. Beauvoir's (1972) explanation of this identification crisis is that our ageing body is the Other, and when the Other within us is revealed in our reflection, we reject it. Leder (1990), on the other hand, attributes this phenomenon to the intervention of the "dysappearing body". According to him, human beings are unaware of their bodies unless they experience pain or discomfort. Nevertheless, when the body is in pain, this peaceful sense of unity is disrupted, and the body suddenly feels like an alien presence. Old age is one of those moments when the body makes its presence known and the harmonious sense of unity is rattled. However, this theory has been criticized by other gerontologists. Drawing upon feminist theory, King (2013) argues that women are made conscious of their bodies throughout their whole lives. She states that, since women are taught to restrain and watch their bodies from the moment they become aware of their gender, they never experience this lack of bodily awareness.

Regardless of the trigger of this identification crisis, "after a first shock of recognition, it follows a process of refusal, disguise or gradual acceptance" (Oró-Piqueras, 2015, p. 14). In order to resolve this crisis, the older female protagonist has to acknowledge her new image and she must also discard the Cartesian dualism of mind and body as well as the negative connotations associated with the ageing female body (de Beauvoir, 1972). Doblas (2005) suggests that the life review is one of the means of coming to terms with this new image. By revisiting and learning from her past, the main character is able to welcome her ageing process and the physical changes it brings. In the end, those who manage to reconcile themselves with their image, instead of resorting to masking or age-passing, are more apt to redefine the models of old age.

2.4. Female sexuality in later life

Similarly to the ageing body, female sexuality in later life is another topic whose representation requires exploration. Overall, two main myths dictate fictional portrayals and contemporary perspectives of sexuality in old age: the stereotype of "asexual old age" and the "sexy oldie" (Gott, 2005). The most widespread assumption is that sexual desire starts to decrease when a person is forty and it reaches rock bottom when they turn sixty (Butler, 1976). Indeed, it is presupposed that older women's sexual feelings disappear as they age, and they are only left with feelings of the affectionate grandmother (Molina-Luque, 2018). Therefore, if elderly women exhibit any signs of desire, they tend to be ridiculed and regarded with revulsion. As a consequence, female sexuality in old age is treated as a taboo topic in literature that is often invisible or hyper-visible, but rarely treated with normality.

This prevailing myth of "asexual old age" has been challenged by research. Beyond decreased lubrication and some hormonal changes, it has been demonstrated that the sex drive of old women remains fairly consistent (Cruikshank, 2013). For example, in their creative writing workshop on sexuality and ageing, Stončikaitė and Mina-Riera (2020) showed that sexuality and intimacy continue to be a relevant matter for ageing people. What is more, they reported that the intensity of sexual relationships may even increase in old age. Despite these findings, the notion that women become desexualized with old age remains the predominant conception of sexuality in later life for several reasons.

The attribution of desexualization to the older woman is chiefly due to the definition of sexuality. Far from being solely a matter of biology, the notion of sexuality is actually socially constructed, and it comprises much more than penetration. As stated by Gott (2005, p. 12), sexuality

"brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities — gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires and fantasies — which need not be linked together". However, when talking about sex, it is commonly assumed that it refers to heterosexual penetrative intercourse (Gott & Hinchliff, 2003). This equation of sexuality to heteronormative penetration contributes to the desexualization of older people because they oftentimes prefer to engage in other forms of sexual activity that do not involve intercourse, such as cuddles and caresses (Sandberg, 2015).

Along these lines, the definition of sexuality in Christian tradition also supports the myth of "asexual old age" as well as the shaming of older women who feel desire. According to Christian beliefs, sexuality should be attached to reproduction (Sandberg, 2015). Since it is unlikely that an older woman will bear children, if she were to engage in sexual relationships, it would be sexuality for its own sake. Hence, older women's desire is viewed as morally reprehensible and even neurotic (King, 2013).

Another belief about sexuality that is partially responsible for the maintenance of this myth is the strong link between sexuality and appearance (Hinchliff, 2014). Also, it is in this convention of sexuality that the double standard of ageing can be more clearly observed. The conditions that women have to fulfil in order to be deemed attractive (and therefore sexually suitable) are distinctly harsher than those applied to men (Sontag, 1972). As an illustration of this, Gott (2005, p. 18) argues that "The norms against which women's sexual attractiveness and, thereby, inherent sexuality are measured, leave little room for the old body. With every wrinkle, grey hair and pound gained, women move away from the 'sexy' body and, crucially, become perceived as less sexual".

This double standard of ageing becomes evident in the representation of age-gap relationships. While a relationship between an old man and a young woman is generally naturalized, this does not occur when the roles are reversed (Sontag, 1972). On the contrary, if an old woman initiates a romantic or sexual relationship with a younger man, she is often condemned as predatory and hysteric. Further, the predominant opinion in the West is that the only reason why a young man could be attracted to an older woman is that he is afflicted by an Oedipal fixation (Sontag, 1972). A final cause contributing to the myth of "asexual old age" is the infantilization of elderly people. Albeit attributed to the realm of the young, sexuality is depicted as an adult activity that requires a certain degree of cognitive maturity (Gott, 2005). Because the master narrative of decline links old age to decay in mental capacities, older people are perceived as children; hence unsuitable for engaging in any sexual practices.

The amalgamation of all these factors results in establishing the myth of "asexual old age" as the most pervasive stereotype regarding female sexuality in later life. A major consequence of this pervasiveness is the internalization of the myth, leading to the repression of desire in old women. As explained by de Beauvoir (1972), elderly people come to accept this myth of desexualization as the only acceptable option and feel forced to suppress their desire in order to avoid public ridicule. Additionally, they tend to feel embarrassed by their own sexual feelings.

Stigmatizing as it might be, the myth of "asexual old age" has been found to have some beneficial aspects. Particularly, for those women who have conceived sexual intercourse as a marital duty, the desexualization of old age can be liberating (Gott & Hinchliff, 2003). Likewise, Stončikaitė and Mina-Riera (2020) claimed that the desexualization of older women frees them from the male gaze as well as the fear of getting pregnant. Whereas the myth of "asexual old age" regards sexuality in old age as something repulsive and to be hidden, the myth of the "sexy oldie" is at the other end of the spectrum. Motivated by this increasingly sexualized world, there has been a shift in the representation of female sexuality in later life and the archetype of the sexy midlife woman has entered media culture (Hinchliff, 2014). This new stereotype is also a reflection of the crossing of sexology and biomedical gerontology as well as the growing influence of age-defying narratives such as the discourse of successful ageing, which claims that sexual activity is a mandatory element of ageing well (Gott, 2005).

In comparison to the myth of "asexual old age", this new stereotype has some benefits. Mainly, it questions the master narrative of decline in which older women are devalued and invisible (Hinchliff, 2014). Nevertheless, the negative implications of this myth outweigh its possible advantages. First of all, by conceptualizing sex as an essential part of ageing successfully, sexuality becomes an imperative and is no longer a choice (Gott, 2005). This is alarming because, as mentioned, some women would rather be freed of the obligation to have penetrative intercourse (Gott & Hinchliff, 2003). In relation to this, another deficiency of this myth is that it does not consider how sexual abuse can affect sexuality or any other options beyond heteronormative relationships (Oró-Piqueras, 2019). Additionally, the sexualization of older women is a setback in the struggle against the objectification of the female body (Chivers, 2003).

On the other hand, although this myth has been presented as an alternative to the master narrative of decline and the myth of "asexual old age", it is not as revolutionary as it may appear. Rather, the myth of the "sexy oldie" only seems to admit the representation of sexuality in later life provided that older women conceal any visible signs of ageing through strategies of passing (King, 2013). In

Gott's words: "Deep old age is never sexy" (2005, p. ix) and this second myth only reinforces the incompatibility of old age and sexiness by its limited inclusion of youthful-looking bodies.

On the whole, it becomes apparent that neither of these dominant myths provides a faithful representation of female sexuality in later life (Sandberg, 2005). Notwithstanding this, the novels belonging to the ageing genres offer another possibility. Since the 1990s, authors such as Angela Carter and Doris Lessing have written fiction that questions the assumptions regarding older women's sexuality and that presents new models of intimacy (Brennan, 2005). In these narratives, sexuality is not strictly paired with heterosexual penetrative intercourse; instead, they propose more nuanced ways of delineating sexuality, which include other aspects apart from penetration such as touching, caring for each other and sexual self-esteem (Oró-Piqueras, 2013). According to King (2013), this new understanding of desire proposed by the ageing genres helps break binary gender roles as well as the idea that there is only an adequate form of sexuality. Also, these narratives do not suggest that older women must always engage in sexual activities. In fact, even when the older woman protagonist wants to act on her desire, her journey is not reduced to that aspect of her life (Gullette, 1996). Lastly, these novels are revolutionary in that they show an older female body feeling and giving pleasure and therefore break the taboo of female sexuality in later life (Brennan, 2005).

Considering all this evidence, it can be concluded that the ageing genres do not solely question the Cartesian splitting of the self, but they also provide an alternative reading of older women's sexuality that is neither stigmatizing nor universalizing. Hence, these novels embrace all the nuances and complexities of female ageing in a way that defies ageism and sexism.

2.5. Doris Lessing and Deborah Moggach

Doris Lessing and Deborah Moggach are two British writers belonging to different generations and with notably different literary styles. Born in 1919, Doris Lessing was a Nobel Prize winner and very prolific author who wrote over seventy titles in a variety of genres (Mba, 2023). Her work dealt with highly critical issues of the 20th and 21st centuries such as race, politics, and gender and it has been extensively studied from a variety of angles (García Navarro, 2021). Deborah Moggach, on the other hand, was born in 1948 and has written twenty novels and two collections of short stories. She is also an associate of the Royal Society of Literature and several of her novels have been adapted for television and film (Moggach, n. d.). Notwithstanding this, Moggach's work has been largely understudied as literary criticism tends to overlook popular fiction and instead prefers

to study the classics (Brennan, 2005). In spite of their differences, both writers coincide in the fact that their late fiction presents nuanced portrayals of female ageing.

Neither Lessing nor Moggach focused on older female protagonists at the start of their writing careers. For example, Lessing's first book *The Grass is Singing* (1950) centred on a failed marriage and it mainly dealt with racism and postcolonialism. Although older women are present in most of her works, they were relegated to the margins of the narrative until *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984) (Saxton, 2010) was published. Similarly, Moggach's first novel *You Must Be Sisters* (2006) is a coming-of-age novel. It is only as she grows older that the age of her protagonists starts to increase. In fact, in her description of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2004), Moggach explains: "This book came about because I'd been thinking a lot about growing older, about what is going to happen to us all. The population is ageing – for the first time the over-50s outnumber the rest of us – and it's getting older. Where are we all going to live?" (n.d., para. 1). Indeed, it seems like the writer started to wonder about the topic of old age and social concerns such as the pension system because of her own ageing process and her realization that the demographic revolution of the West required transformation.

Moggach's shift in her narrative focus could also be related to some of the personal experiences and epiphanies she had in relation to old age. For instance, her mother was imprisoned for helping a critically ill friend end her life (Shepherd, 2021). Although Moggach claims that she has never considered writing about this experience, she became a patron of dignity in dying after this event (Moggach, 2013b). Thus, this belief in dignity in advanced age and death could have also influenced her portrayal of old age in her late fiction. Additionally, she also had a realization connected to the idea of the "core self". In her interview with Shepherd (2021, para. 10), she states: "Now that I'm 72 I realise one is exactly the same person one always was. A few more wrinkles, but the same jealousies and love and all that". As can be seen by this quote, Moggach echoes some of the ideas connected to the mask of old age (Featherstone & Hepworth, 2001), which reveal the socially constructed nature of this life stage. Accordingly, her later works are shaped by the idea that elderly people struggle with the same emotional affairs as young people, even if they now "come with extra baggage" (Moggach, 2013a, para. 17).

As for Lessing's late fiction, even though she has rejected any attempts to label her work as feminist, the novels she wrote about women in their forties, sixties, seventies, and eighties offer a critical examination of gender binaries as well as any assumptions about female old age from a

perspective of self-conscious doubt (Rashcke et al., 2010). Like Moggach, Lessing's study of the older woman in society might also stem from personal experience.

As she grew old, Lessing had some encounters with gendered ageism. When she tried to publish *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* (1983) using a pseudonym, she was rejected because her depiction of illness and poverty in old age was considered too depressing (Williams, 2021). Also, in her correspondence with Sparks, Lessing talks about how her concerns about her health problems were dismissed by a doctor:

> All last summer I was afflicted with various bugs and beasties, there was a doctor, who I maintain was hysterical, and obsessed, was sure I had cancer because I had lost weight. The reason for that was that I hadn't eaten anything due to one of the bugs removing my ordinary sense of taste, so that every mouthful was so strong I couldn't bear to put anything in my mouth. This particular symptom is not on their list of symptoms and no doctor believed me (Lessing, 2006, as cited in Williams, 2021, p. 77).

In addition to these experiences, her ageing process also prompted some revelations about old age that could have influenced her later portrayal of the topic. First of all, she revealed in her interview with Billy Gray (2004) that she had been involved with a network of old people for seven or eight years, which taught her that there is a choice in how one grows old. Then, in her essay "Old", she mentions that whereas the ageing process has been mainly presented through the master narrative of decline, old age also brings "a fresh liveliness in experiencing. It is as if some gauze or screen has been dissolved away from life, that was dulling it" (Lessing, 2005, p. 216). Thus, she shows an awareness that ageing is not an entirely detrimental process but one that can bring growth and new awakenings. In fact, she refers to some of those benefits in her interview with Billy Gray (2004) when she affirms that the loss of male attention on her ageing body came as a great relief to her. Lastly, in a similar way to Moggach, Lessing (2005) also argues that inside the changing body of the older person, their core remains the same.

In short, Deborah Moggach and Doris Lessing are part of two different generations of writers with reasonably different literary careers and writing styles. Nonetheless, they coincide in their belated interest in the topics of the female ageing body and sexuality as a result of their own personal experiences with old age. Additionally, they also appear to share similar beliefs in the unchanged core and the idea that ageing may also bring new opportunities. For these reasons, a comparative analysis of their novels may bring relevant insight into the representation of female ageing in popular fiction and canon literature in English.

3. Comparative Analysis: Lessing's and Moggach's fiction under the spotlight

The four novels considered in this paper present some substantial differences in their plot, narrative form, and point of view. Doris Lessing's *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984) follows Janna, an ambitious magazine editor in her forties who develops a friendship with ninety-something Maudie Flowers after seeing her at the chemist's. Whereas this book mostly revolves around the intergenerational relationship between these two women and how it fosters Janna's development, Lessing's *Love, Again* (1996) focuses on Sarah Durham, a sixty-five-year-old scriptwriter who is one of the managers of the theatre company The Green Bird and falls in love twice during the production of a play. Specifically, Sarah falls in love with the twenty-eight-year-old actor Bill and the thirty-five-year-old director Henry, and the novel mainly focuses on Sarah's coming to terms with a reawakening of her desire as well as her ageing body. As for Deborah Moggach's novels, *These Foolish Things* (2005) is a comedy of manners in which several British pensioners are sent to a retirement home in India while *Something to Hide* (2016) deals with three major storylines, one of which is centred on Petra, a woman in her sixties who falls in love with her best friend's husband and finds herself propelled to West Africa. Upon first glance, these novels may indeed appear quite disparate. Notwithstanding this, this paper argues that they coincide in their reflection of a relatively new trend in contemporary English fiction that helps defy conventional gender norms and redefine the general perception of female ageing. Particularly, this study contends that this literary subversion is achieved by these authors' portrayal of the female ageing body and sexuality in later life. Therefore, this analysis will be organized into those two main themes.

3.1. Theme: The female ageing body

To begin with the theme of the female ageing body, Doris Lessing's and Deborah Moggach's novels challenge the invisibility of older women by bringing into focus the alienation to which they are typically subjected (Cruikshank, 2013). In *The Diaries of Jane Somers*, Janna's character and her initial perception of older people serve as a reflection of society's attitudes towards ageing people. As an illustration of this, although Maudie, as well as other older people, lives near her, Janna does not notice any of them until she meets Maudie. As she puts it: "I had not seen them. That was because I was afraid of being like them. I was afraid, walking along there beside her. It was the smell of her, a sweet, sour, dusty sort of smell" (Lessing, 1984, p. 13). As highlighted by this quote, society relegates the ageing body to a position of invisibility because it is a reminder of their own mortality. In fact, when Janna first starts to spend time with Maudie, she desperately tries

to wash away Maudie's sour and dusty smell as soon as she gets home. It is almost as if she was trying to scrub off her mortality: "I was in a frenzy of irritation, a need to shake something off – Mrs Fowler. I filled the bath. I put every stitch of clothing I had worn that day ready for the launderette. I could feel the smelly air of Mrs Fowler's place on my skin and hair" (Lessing, 1984, p. 22).

This desire to turn away from older people and their association with death is also portrayed in *These Foolish Things* by the family members who decide to send their elders away to a retirement home in India, ignoring their wish to stay in England. For instance, when Evelyn's daughter Theresa breaks the news to her, she thinks: "No longer a human being, she was a problem to be solved by the local authority, like a drug addict or one of the homeless […] she was to be shunted away out of sight" (Moggach, 2005, p. 42). Therefore, not only are older characters rendered invisible by society (as exemplified by Janna's initial blindness and aversion to ageing), but they are also removed from their homes so that their ageing bodies stay "out of sight."

In addition to these examples of ostracism, these novels also shed light on the ridiculing, infantilization and overmedicalization of the ageing body that Cruikshank (2013) graphically describes in her research. For example, when Christopher informs his son that they are going to visit his grandmother Evelyn (one of the residents in T*hese Foolish Things*), he responds with the degrading comment: "Will she be wearing a diaper?' Joseph snorted with giggles" (Moggach, 2005, p. 193). By showing this interaction, Moggach is illustrating the dehumanization of the ageing body and how physical changes such as incontinence are treated as a source of ridicule. Then, *The Diaries of Jane Sommers* also exposes the infantilization and excessive medicalization of elderly people by doctors. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Doris Lessing herself received discriminatory treatment by one doctor who dismissed her health concerns (Williams, 2021), and she seems to denounce this behaviour through Maudie's experience with hospitals. For instance, on one occasion she confides to Janna that she doesn't like hospitals because "they fill you with pills and pills and pills, you feel as if your mind has been taken away from you, they treat you like a child" (Lessing, 1984, p. 43). What is more, not only is she forced to ingest numerous pills that make her feel disoriented, but her doctors decide not to tell her that she has cancer, despite her knowing that something is happening to her body. Thus, she is essentially treated as a child who cannot handle the truth.

On the other hand, the authors under analysis also challenge the invisibility of the female ageing body by drawing attention to the materiality of ageing, but in a way that does not reduce this life stage to physical deterioration. Admittedly, there is a physicality of ageing that cannot be ignored (Woodward, 2006) and neither Lessing nor Moggach gloss over the struggles and changes that can be brought about by old age. Instead, the protagonists of the four studied novels reflect upon some of the physical limitations they are experiencing as a result of their advanced age. From dealing with arthritis, fatigue, and back pain to memory loss, Lessing's and Moggach's protagonists' ailing body is portrayed in great detail. Further, in *The Diaries of Jane Sommers* Lessing even devotes several pages to describing a day in Maudie's life. In this part of the novel, the reader vicariously experiences the difficulties of facing a day in the body of a ninety-year-old woman who has to adjust her routine to "the demands of her bladder, her bowels" (Lessing, 1984, p. 117). However, although these authors do not shy away from this aspect of ageing, they do not make it the sole focus of their stories and they do not frame it from a pessimistically reductive perspective. In *These Foolish Things*, Graham Turner (one of the characters sent to the retirement home) proclaims: "People think we're waiting to die. Well, I'm starting to live" (Moggach, 2005, p. 262). In a similar vein, Maudie confesses to Janna that "this is the best time of [her] life" (Lessing, 1984, p. 122). Albeit sick and weak, Maudie is still described full of vitality and anger. This way, Deborah Moggach and Doris Lessing create a depiction of old age that embraces its kaleidoscopic nature and narrates its challenges as well as the possibility of progress.

This approach to the ailing body as a natural part of ageing is also used as a device to disrupt the "body-as-taken-for-granted" (Brennan, 2005, p. 83) and change their characters' outlook on ageing. That is, some of the characters in these four novels endure a sudden *coup d'âge* that makes them face their own mortality. In *Something to Hide*, Petra contracts an illness and what starts as a stomachache evolves into knee pain and worsened eyesight. As stated by Petra, "It was as if my body held itself together for Jeremy, its last hurrah, but now he has gone it has succumbed to a coup d'âge. I've started to feel truly old" (Moggach, 2016, p. 307). Similarly, Janna finds herself confined to her bed for two weeks due to an unexpected back pain:

> For two weeks, I was exactly like Maudie, exactly like all these old people, anxiously obsessively wondering, am I going to hold out, no, don't have a cup of tea, the nurse might not come, I might wet the bed … At the end of the two weeks, when at last I could dispense with bedpans (twice a day) and drag myself to the loo, I knew that for two weeks I had experienced, but absolutely, their helplessness (Lessing, 1984, p. 131).

In both examples, Petra's and Janna's sudden illnesses force them to bear the weight of true old age and acknowledge the vulnerability of the human body, which ultimately causes them to confront their mortality. In the case of Janna, this experience (together with her time with Maudie) makes her sympathize with older people and overcome her fear of death. Whereas at the beginning of the book she is so fearful of death that she looks away from her older neighbours, by the end of the book she sits for hours to watch old people in the streets and "marvel and wonder and admire" (Lessing, 1984, p. 237). In her words, "I love sitting on a bench by some old person, for now I no longer fear the old" (Lessing, 1984, p. 166). Therefore, apart from showing the ailing body from a complex angle that does not deny its hardship nor its possibilities, Deborah Moggach and Doris Lessing afflict their protagonists with a *coup d'âge* to represent it as an unavoidable part of the human experience that can lead you to transcend the dread of old age.

Thus far, it has been proven that the novels subject to comparative analysis contribute to the subversion of the master narrative of decline and its gloomy perception of the ageing body for several reasons. Firstly, they point out to the alienation and discrimination of the ageing body by doctors, family members, and society in general. Then, these novels also voice the physical challenges of old age without restricting their characters to said difficulties, and they use the *coup d'âge* device to present the vulnerability of the human body as a trigger for character development. Next, this paper will explore how Lessing's and Moggach's examination of the female ageing body helps confront gender norms and the conception of female ageing through their representation of the mirror stage of old age.

As noted in the literature review of the female ageing body, the ageing genres are characterized by dramatizing the "mirror stage of old age" (Woodward, 1991) in which the female protagonists experience a Cartesian split of the self upon gazing in the mirror. This feeling of dissonance between their "look age" and "feel age" (Anderson, 2019, p. 165) is illustrated in the four examined novels. All of them include multiple scenes in which the female protagonists look at their ageing bodies in the mirror and undergo a shock of recognition at noticing signs of ageing. The enactment of this mirror stage accomplishes various functions. On the one hand, Moggach and Lessing break the taboo surrounding the female ageing body by including scenes in which the physical changes are thoroughly described. As an illustration, in *Something to Hide*, Petra characterizes her bodily appearance in the following way: "Naked, I stand in the lamplight in my terracotta bedroom. The mirror reflects my ageing body. It's sinew and lean, the breasts tragic flaps, the stomach puckered from childbearing. But it's loved" (Moggach, 2016, p. 144). In this excerpt, the overt narration of

Petra's sagging breasts and folded belly is already defiant to the master narrative that condemns the female body to invisibility unless it meets the harsh requirements for being deemed sexually attractive. This defiance is only reinforced by the fact that her ageing body is presented as a vessel of love.

On the other hand, these mirror scenes also serve as trackers of the female protagonists' relationship with their ageing bodies. Following this initial shock of recognition, these characters tend to identify with the mask of ageing, or they resort to strategies of age-passing (Oró-Piqueras, 2015). In relation to the mask of ageing, these protagonists vocally express a discrepancy between the age they feel and how their body looks. For instance, in *These Foolish Things,* Evelyn declares: "her own face, in the mirror, had been replaced by that of an old woman […] seventy-three wasn't her; it floated nearby, as irrelevant as a sum on a blackboard. She didn't connect it to herself" (Moggach, 2005, p. 43-50). Indeed, Evelyn exemplifies the notion of the mask of ageing because she feels disconnected from her body as if her external and internal selves were two separate parts.

Nevertheless, some protagonists do not merely stop at expressing a sensation of disunion, but they also take active steps to appear younger than they are. These strategies of age-passing include careful management of their appearance by dying their hair or diligently attending to their clothes. For example, when the reader is first introduced to Janna in *The Diaries of Jane Sommers*, she is represented as an attractive woman in her forties who devotes a lot of energy to projecting a good image of herself. In fact, she initially spends all her Sunday nights polishing her clothes in order to ensure a perfect impression. Likewise, Sarah Durham in *Love, Again* also dresses carefully and acknowledges that "women of a certain age (and older) have to do this. What she wore became her, certainly" (Lessing, 1996, p. 145). Hence, these protagonists engage in several beauty practices to display a younger image of their bodies that aligns better with their internal age and is generally more appreciated than the image of the older woman. However, in doing so, they often betray their status as mature women and are liable to being labelled "a mutton dressed as lamb." (Featherstone & Hepworth, 2001, p. 380). As an example of this, in *Love, Again* Sarah finds herself "buying beauty creams, trying to find her mirror comfort in this aspect of her face or that, and buying clothes too young for her" (Lessing, 1996, p. 212). Additionally, in *Something to Hide,* Petra assesses her best friend's appearance in the following way: "Bev glares at me. Her skin is too white for the black hair, so obviously dyed; it gives her an odd, stagey look, like an ageing clown" (Moggach, 2016, p. 335). Through these two cases, Lessing and Moggach appear to question the utility of age-passing as a strategy to overcome the Cartesian split because, in spite of the time and efforts devoted to

managing their ageing bodies, these female characters are still judged for having an inappropriate look for their age.

In order to solve the identification crisis provoked by the mirror stage of old age, Lessing and Moggach seem to propose the life review as a device that allows their protagonists to come to terms with their ageing bodies. As will be further discussed in the next subsection, in *Love, Again*, the reawakening of Sarah's desire after not being in love for twenty years prompts a series of memories and self-realizations that she had kept buried for years, but that eventually lead her to align her internal and external selves. This evolution is perfectly captured in the following excerpt:

> Months have passed. Sarah is looking into her mirror, just as on the evening when we first saw her. At a first glance she has not much changed, but a closer look says otherwise. She has aged by ten years. For one thing, her hair, which for so long remained like a smooth dulled metal, now has grey bands across the front. She has acquired that slow cautious look of the elderly, as if afraid of what they will see around the next corner. Sarah has changed, and so have the rooms she lives in. […] She feels as if a weight has been lifted away out of her rooms, leaving her lighter and freer too (Lessing, 1996, p. 349).

Rather than the mask of old age or the strategies of age-passing, this passage shows that it is only after reflecting on and learning from her past that Sarah's "look age" and "feel age" are in perfect synchrony. She now looks and feels her age, and it is in this state that she feels lighter and freer, as opposed to when she wears clothes that are "too young for her." In a similar way, thanks to her intergenerational relationship with Maudie and the life review it triggers, by the end of *The Diaries of Jane Somers*, Janna no longer has the inclination to spend hours grooming herself. Therefore, Doris Lessing and Deborah Moggach also redefine the models of old age by pinpointing the life review and intergenerational relationships as a means to embrace the female ageing body and solve the Cartesian split.

3.2. Theme: Female sexuality in later life

Due to the asexual myth of old age (Gott, 2005), it is commonly believed that older women do not feel any sexual desire and those who dare to exhibit any signs of sexuality are shamed for it. Since the ageing genres present a more nuanced perspective of ageing that embraces its complexities as well as its contradictions (Cruikshank, 2013), Doris Lessing and Deborah Moggach acknowledge the presence of this stereotype in their novels. As a matter of fact, their protagonists have often internalized some of those beliefs. For instance, at the beginning of *Love, Again*, Sarah thinks that she cannot ever be in love again because this stage of her life has already passed.

Further, at one point she reflects on the invisibility of old age and expresses that, as an older woman, she has become deprived of love: "There is now no difference between me and those people barred from love" (Lessing, 1996, p. 140). Indeed, Sarah seems to have internalized the idea that old age is a sort of "physical impairment" that renders her unsuitable for love. Likewise, this notion of the invisibility of old age is also expressed by Theresa, Evelyn's daughter in *These Foolish Things*:

> Men no longer tried to chart her up. Everywhere she went, of course, there were questions — 'Where do you come from? What is your name please?' — but this was just the friendly curiosity one encountered in India. It was no longer sexually pressing […] This was, of course, liberating. True freedom only came through the transcendence of the flesh (Moggach, 2005, p. 179).

As can be seen in this quote, now that she is approaching fifty, Theresa does not receive the same sexual attention as when she was younger. Nonetheless, this passage already shows how Moggach and Lessing question the fatalistic perception of this loss of male attention by demonstrating that it also presents itself with some benefits, such as the transcendence of the flesh. In other words, being freed of the male gaze means that older women no longer need to expose themselves to the strict criteria of feminine attractiveness. Therefore, although Moggach and Lessing display the existence of the asexual old age myth and its consequences, they do it in such a way that challenges its validity or effect.

In connection with the previous argument, the two authors under analysis also subvert the myth of asexual old age by showing the older woman as both subject and object of desire. Contrary to the idea that older women's sexual desire has vanished, and they cannot be considered sexually attractive at their age, Lessing and Moggach depict their female protagonists as experiencing arousal as well as being desired. For example, in *Something to Hide*, Petra is so in love with Jeremy that they scarcely leave her bed during the six days he visits her. Then, in *These Foolish Things*, Evelyn states that "she missed being touched. She missed Hugh's arms around her" (Moggach, 2005, p. 39). Similarly, when Janna falls in love with Richard's son, she wakes up at night with "[her] arms out, [her] breasts burning, for him" (Lessing, 1984, p. 463). Lastly, this idea of being enflamed with passion is also described in *Love, Again*, through Sarah's perception that "she was raging with desire" (Lessing, 1996, p. 120). As illustrated by all these examples, far from having extinguished their passion, these four protagonists are presented with a fervent yearning for intimacy. The uninhibited characterization of sensual older women is significantly revolutionary, considering that, as King (2013) states, they are typically portrayed as affable grandmothers or bitter crones.

This subversive approach is further confirmed by the fact that these protagonists' feelings are clearly reciprocated. For instance, in *The Diaries of Jane Sommers*, both Richard and his son Michael fall in love with Janna. In a similar vein, Sarah mentions in *Love, Again* that "Henry was in love with her. And Andew. Bill had been, in his way" (Lessing, 1996, p. 243). It is noteworthy that in these two novels, Lessing has included age-gap relationships in which the woman is older than the man. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, due to the double standard of ageing, age-gap relationships are solely normalized provided that the older partner is the man and not the other way around (Sontag, 1972). Lessing is not oblivious to this social convention and includes some scenes in her books that reflect on this matter. To exemplify this, Sarah's friend Stephens happens to be in love with the ghost of a younger woman than him. However, whereas his situation is regarded as normal (despite being all the more bizarre), Sarah feels like her feelings for Bill are more unacceptable and therefore cannot be publicly shared: "No, for him to be in love with Julie was certainly crazy, but for a woman her age to be in love with a beautiful youth… even if the said youth was in love with her" (Lessing, 1996, p. 86). By putting these two situations together, Lessing could be commenting on the hypocrisy of a society that deems it more improper for an older woman to be in love with a younger man than for an older man to be enamoured with the idea of a younger woman who is dead.

As for Moggach, her novels also display an awareness of the cultural norm that judges age-gap couples differently depending on the gender of the two parties involved. As it happens, Petra denounces this situation in *Something to Hide*:

> But with my advancing years even these have petered out. Men want young women. That's the brutal truth. They want to cheat death, don't we all? They want a reflection of their younger selves, not a wrinkled face that mirrors back their own mortality. That rush of renewal must be intoxicating, the bastards (Moggach, 2016, p. 45).

In this excerpt, Petra's statement that men only want to be with young women demonstrates her recognition of the double standard of ageing. Additionally, it is worth highlighting Petra's word choice when describing how these men might feel. The fact that she believes this experience could be intoxicating suggests that she would also like to be with younger men if it was not as frowned upon and she was presented with the opportunity. In relation to this, this passage also points to the fear of mortality as the reason why older men would rather be in a relationship with a considerable age gap. This way, Moggach appears to criticize the moral hypocrisy that prevents women from being with younger men while also hinting at a possible reason for age-gap relationships.

Up until this point, it has been proven that Moggach's and Lessing's approach to female sexuality in later life redefines gender norms and the conception of ageing because they acknowledge the presence of the stereotype of asexual old age while also questioning its validity. In order to achieve this, they confront the invisibility of female ageing by presenting it as an opportunity for liberation; they portray older female protagonists who are simultaneously subjects and objects of desire; and they comment upon the sexist bias against age-gap relationships. Apart from this, these authors can be considered representatives of the ageing genres in that they do not resort to the myth of the sexy oldie as a means to discredit the asexuality of old age. On the contrary, they present sexuality as a choice; one that includes alternative modes of intimacy besides heterosexual penetrative intercourse.

Lessing's and Moggach's depiction of sexuality in later life is undeniably revolutionary because they also consider the possibility that the decrease of sexual life can sometimes be perceived as a relief. In a conversation with Maudie, Janna notices that "it has been enormous and awful to her, and she has never understood it or ceased to be tormented by it" (Lessing, 1984, p. 110). As evidenced in this quote, Maudie's intimacy with her former abusive husband was not enjoyable, and so, the closure of this "marital duty" has been like a reprieve for Maudie. Likewise, in *Something to Hide*, Jeremy confesses that he found upkeeping with his highly sensual wife "a bit of a strain" and that "in their recent years their lovemaking had dwindled to almost nothing, which to be perfectly frank he finds a relief" (Moggach, 2016, p. 114). It can thus be observed that Moggach and Lessing balance the characterization of ardently desirous protagonists with the inclusion of characters who have been comforted by the waning of their sexual lives. By doing so, these authors avoid falling into a clichéd and polarizing representation of this theme.

In addition to this, the two studied authors are unconventional in their exploration of alternative modes of sexuality in old age. For example, in *Something to Hide*, Petra is pondering on the fact that her best friend was with Jeremy during his youth whereas she is with his older version. Instead of being deterred by this thought, she is glad to be with Jeremy's older self because "our failures have made us more frank and vulnerable, more open with each other. He's becoming a delicious body as he gets to know my body" (Moggach, 2016, p. 109). In this case, Moggach is challenging the general negative perception of sexuality in later life by showing that the pleasure of intimacy can increase with age, due to your added experiences and vulnerability.

As for Lessing, literary scholars such as Saxton (2010) have criticized her novels because neither Janna nor Sarah have sex with their respective lovers. When confronted about this choice in her

2004 interview with Billy Gray, Lessing replies: “There is a question of physical pride here […] if you have been young and beautiful, the idea aged fifty, of going to bed with someone else, is too much a blow to your pride” (Gray, 2004, p. 94-95). Undeniably, Lessing’s answer could be viewed as further proof that she leaves the uneasiness of describing an older woman having sex unchallenged. Nonetheless, this literary decision is more complex than that. First off, both Sarah and Janna consider the possibility of going to bed with the men they love. To exemplify this, in *Love, Again,* Sarah appraises the following thought: “He wanted to be in bed with her, certainly, and if he did come into her bed it would be passion, most certainly” (Lessing, 1996, p. 245). Correspondingly, Lessing includes several scenes in which Janna assesses this prospect: “I think, Would I like to go to bed with him, and I feel quite shocked. There is a no there, but why?” (Lessing, 1984, p. 271). In these quotes, it can be seen that these protagonists do not completely discard the thought of intimacy. In fact, Sarah even displays a certainty that this encounter would be passionate. However, they end up deciding against it because there is a fear of being fetishized and of raising old ghosts.

In Sarah’s case, she chooses not to have sex with Henry because “with him, there would be, too, curiosity. What is it like having sex with a woman twice my age?” (Lessing, 1996, p. 245). This quote establishes that there is admittedly a question of physical pride involved, but that it could be related to the fear of being vulnerable with a man who solely wants to satisfy the curiosity of being with an older woman. With regard to Janna, she refrains from engaging in sexual relationships with Richard because it would be “as if [she] [was] proposing to bring a ghost to a feast” (Lessing, 1984, p. 296). Further, she states that “when a young person gets married, there’s not much to them […] but people of our age, it’s like two continents in collision” (Lessing, 1984, p. 347). Essentially, the principal reason for this choice is that both Richard and her have their own problems and emotional scars, and if they were to have sex, it would only complicate matters for them. That said, Lessing also makes sure to demonstrate that the intimacy of these relationships is not reduced as a result of the lack of penetrative intercourse. On the contrary, Janna’s and Richard’s relationship is like “a marriage of true minds” (Lessing, 1984, p. 498), and Janna wonders at one point “why is it we have made an imperative of sex” (Lessing, 1984, p. 326). Altogether, it is reasonable to infer that Lessing’s literary decision serves the role of suggesting that the intricacies of sexuality in later life (due to matters of physical pride, vulnerability, and life wounds) might make alternative ways of intimacy such as caresses and embraces a more intimate and constructive option.

Finally, another reason why the four novels under comparison are subversive in their approach to this second theme is that love in later life is portrayed as a trigger for life review and character development. When the four protagonists fall in love, it prompts a re-evaluation of their past marriages and life choices. In *These Foolish Things*, Evelyn expresses that "the sight of Dr Rama had stirred feelings she had long ago thought extinguished" (Moggach, 2005, p. 125). As shown in this quote, before going to the residential home and meeting Dr Rama, Evelyn used to think that love only came once. After this, however, she reconsiders this thought and admits to herself that:

> She could have fallen in love with any number of people. There were men, perhaps dead now, who could have made her as happy as Hugh had done. Maybe happier, who knew? If she hadn't been so well behaved, she could have fallen in love during her marriage. […] If she had allowed herself, she could have found both men desirable. Exciting, even (Moggach, 2005, p. 172).

This passage proves that embracing her sexuality as an old woman leads Evelyn to question her previous conception of love and marriage. What is more, by the end of the book she gets married to one of the other residents and feels like "she [isn't] the same person who arrived so apprehensively three months earlier. Now she [feels] freer" (Moggach, 2005, p. 201). This way, Moggach shows that the life review that stems from experiencing desire in old age can result in these older women experiencing newfound liberation and taking on previously inconceivable options.

Love also sparks internal evolution in the case of Lessing's female protagonists. For instance, when Sarah falls in love with Bill, she "[enters] the whirlpool" in which she passes the stages of her age and youth (Lessing, 1996, p. 164). This idea is further developed in this quote: "Memories she had refused to admit for years now stood around her in beguiling or accusing postures, forcing her to attend them. She was being forced to remember past loves" (Lessing, 1996, p. 107). Essentially, Lessing presents love in old age as an opportunity for dealing with unresolved trauma and making peace with the different stages of her main character's life, which ultimately enables the restoration of a unified self. As a matter of fact, this recovery of the self is exemplified in *Love, Again* by the development Sarah experiments in her sexual fantasies:

> Her erotic self had been restored as if the door had never bee slammed shut. Above all, she was no longer divided. Her fantasies were as romantic now as when she was an adolescent, and as erotic as when she had been a 'love woman', and were of herself, herself now, and this was because, embraced by Bill, she has felt his desire for her so strongly announce itself (Lessing, 1996, p. 145).

At the beginning of the book (when Sarah is unable to think of herself as a love woman), her fantasies are occupied with images of younger bodies. In contrast, after accepting that she can still

be a subject and object of desire, her erotic self is revived, and she re-establishes herself as the protagonist of her imagination. Additionally, although she finishes the book single, this experience teaches her that "the gates separating her from [the country of love] are flimsy" (Lessing, 1996, p. 341), and not as remote as she originally thought.

In short, Doris Lessing's and Deborah Moggach's novels coincide in that they provide a kaleidoscopic exploration of the theme of sexuality in later life that allows for contradiction and development. Specifically, they make visible the harmful effects of the master narrative of decline, including the internalization of those beliefs, the invisibility of female old age, and the double standards when judging age-gap relationships. Nonetheless, they simultaneously challenge this narrative through their inclusion of alternative (but heightened) modes of intimacy as well as their depiction of older female protagonists who are both desired and desiring women.

4. Conclusions

With the 'greying' of the population and the feminisation of old age, a need for new literary models of female ageing that challenge the master narrative of decline has become prominent in the last decades. Considering these circumstances, this study conducted a comparative analysis of Doris Lessing's and Deborah Moggach's novels to show how they are representatives of a new genre of fiction that helps subvert the pessimistic outlook on female ageing through its treatment of the older body and sexuality in later life.

One of the main findings of this comparative analysis is that both authors are revolutionary in their portrayal of the female ageing body and sexuality because they present a nuanced image of these two themes. In other words, their representation of female ageing embraces the hardship that might come with it, but without neglecting the possibility of progress. In the case of the female ageing body, the four novels acknowledge that older people are often alienated from society and that there is a materiality of ageing that cannot be denied. Nevertheless, their inclusion of society's treatment of the ageing body serves as a critique of this behaviour and shows that a lot can be learned from engaging with older people. In a similar way, although these authors do no shy away from some of the physical changes that might be brought about by old age, such as incontinence or arthritis, they demonstrate that these *coups d'âge* can serve as a trigger for evolution. Further, they are presented as an opportunity for these characters to come to terms with their mortality.

This nuanced portrayal of female ageing is also applied to the theme of sexuality in later life. Indeed, whereas the two authors depict the influence of the myth of asexual old age on their

protagonists, and how it sometimes leads them to think their desire shameful or inappropriate, they defy this taboo in several ways. On the one hand, they frame the invisibility of old age as a chance to be liberated from the male gaze and its scrutiny of the female body, as well as from the perception of sexuality as a marital duty. Conversely, their portrayal of older female characters as subjects and objects of desire helps to reject the generalization that older women are unsuitable for love.

Another key finding is that these authors' representation of the two analysed themes contributes to the subversion of gender norms through their exploration of the life review and alternative modes of sexuality. Deborah Moggach and Doris Lessing show how the epiphanies prompted by the reawakening of these protagonists' desire are the element that leads them to come to terms with their past and their ageing bodies. In that sense, it is truly revolutionary that the older female protagonists do not find the solution to the Cartesian split in the mask of old age or age-passing strategies, but in reconciling themselves with their past and their new image. On the other hand, it has also been found that the two analysed authors are subversive in their inclusion of other forms of sexuality that do not necessarily involve heteronormative intercourse but are nevertheless just as intense and pleasurable.

The last significant finding of this article is that there seems indeed to be a trend in English contemporary fiction that strives to present an alternative image of female ageing. This study has compared four novels from two significantly dissimilar authors, and they all coincide in their subversive treatment of the female ageing body and sexuality. Despite their different literary careers, both Doris Lessing and Deborah Moggach build a kaleidoscopic image of older women in their novels that embraces the possibility of adversity and progress, and that goes beyond the patriarchal norm that only accepts youthful-looking bodies and heteronormative models of sexuality. Therefore, it can be concluded that this literary trend can be found in canon authors like Doris Lessing and popular fiction authors such as Deborah Moggach.

Admittedly, this study has some limitations. Mainly, it has solely compared two white British writers and four of their novels. Further studies could analyse a larger sample of data and widen the scope of the paper to include authors from different backgrounds. This way, the existence of a general literary trend could be more firmly established, and it could also foster investigation into how other social markers such as race, nationality, and class intersect with female ageing. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study has added to the field of Ageing and Gender Studies because it has compared two authors with notably disparate literary careers and writing styles, and it

has demonstrated that both of them could be considered representatives of the ageing genres. Finally, this study has hopefully contributed to the fight against gendered ageism in two other significant ways. Fundamentally, it has offered an alternative reading of female ageing that breaks free from clichéd formulas, and it has also contributed to closing the intergenerational gap and the alienation of older women by bringing their representation into focus. In that sense, this paper fulfils de Beauvoir's (1972, p. 4) suggestion that "If we do not know what we are going to be, we cannot know what we are: let us recognize ourselves in this old man or in that old woman".

5. References

5.1. Primary Sources

Lessing, D. (1984). *The Diaries of Jane Sommers*. London: Flamingo

Lessing, D. (1996). *Love, Again*. London: HarperPerennial.

Moggach, D. (2005). *These Foolish Things*. London: Vintage.

Moggach, D. (2016). *Something to Hide*. London: Vintage.

5.2. Secondary Sources

Achenbaum, A. W. (2005). Ageing and Changing: International Historical Perspectives on Ageing. In M. L Johnson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing* (pp. 21-29). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, C. (2019). *Discourses of Ageing and Gender: The Impact of Public and Private Voices on the Identity of Ageing women.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Andrews, M. (2009). The Narrative Complexity of Successful Ageing. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 29* (1/2), 74-83.

Ayalon, L., & Tesch-Römer, C. (2018). Introduction to the section: Ageism—Concept and origins. In L. Ayalon & C. Tesch-Römer (Eds.), *Contemporary perspectives on ageism* (pp. 1-10). Cham: Springer Nature.

Blaikie, A. (1999). *Ageing and Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Bloom, D. E., Canning, D., & Lubet, A. (2015). Global Population Aging: Facts, Challenges, Solutions & Perspectives. *Daedalus*, *144*(2), 80–92.

Brennan, Z. (2005). *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Butler, R. N. & Lewis, M. I. (1976). *The New Love and Sex After 60*. New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group.

Butler, R. N. (1969). Age-ism: Another form of bigotry. *The Gerontologist*, *9*(4), 243–246

Casado, N. & Vidal, M. (Eds.). (2004). *The Polemics of Ageing as Reflected in Literatures*. Lleida: University of Lleida.

Chivers, S. (2003). From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narratives. Columbus: Ohio University Press.

Clarke, H. L. & Bennett, V. E. (2015). Gender, ageing and appearance. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 133-140). London: Routledge.

Cruikshank, M., (2013). *Learning to Be Old*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

de Beauvoir, S. (1972). *The Coming of Age*. G. P. New York: Putnam's Sons.

Doblas, R. A. (2005). Moments of Ageing: The Reifungsroman in Contemporary Fiction. In B. J. Worsfold (Ed.) *Women Ageing Through Literature and Experience*. Lleida: University of Lleida.

Falcus, S. (2015). Literature and ageing. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 53-60). London: Routledge.

Featherstone, M. & Hepworth, M. (2001). The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course. In M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth & B. S. Turner (Eds.) *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* (pp. 371-389). London: Sage Publications.

Featherstone, M. & Hepworth, M. (2005). Images of Ageing: Cultural Representations of Later Life. In M. L. Johnson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing* (pp. 354-362). New York: Cambridge University Press.

García Navarro, C. (2021). "Affectivity and Intimacy in Doris Lessing's *Love, Again* and Rosa Montero's *La Carne"*. *Lectora, 27*: 227-242.

Garnham, B. (2013) Designing 'older' rather than denying ageing: Problematizing anti-ageing discourse in relation to cosmetic surgery undertaken by older people. *Journal of Aging Studies* 27: 38–46.

Gilleard, C., & Higgs, P. (2007). *Cultures of ageing: Self, citizen and the body*, 2nd ed. Harlow: Prentice Hall

Gott, M. (2005) *Sexuality, Sexual Health and Ageing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gott, M. and S. Hinchliff. (2003) 'Sex and ageing: a gendered issue', in S. Arber, K. Davidson and J. Ginn (Eds.), *Gender and Ageing: Changing Roles and Relationships* (pp. 63-78). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Gray, B. (2004). "Lucky the Culture Where the Old Can Talk to the Young and the Young Can Talk to the Old." In Conversation with Doris Lessing. In N. Casado & M. Vidal (Eds.), *The Polemics of Ageing as Reflected in Literatures* (pp. 83-98). Lleida: University of Lleida.

Gullette, M. M. (1996). Midlife Heroines, "Older and Freer". *The Kenyon Review*, *18* (2), 10-31.

Gullette, M. M. (1997). *Declining to Decline*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.

Hepworth, M. (2000). *Stories of Ageing*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hinchliff, S. (2014). Sexing Up the Midlife Woman: Cultural Representations of Ageing, Femininity and the Sexy Body. In I. Whelehan (Ed.), *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones* (pp. 63-77). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jackson, R., & Howe, N. (2008). *The graying of the great powers: demography and geopolitics in the 21st century*. Washington: CSIS.

Johnson. M. L. (2005). The Social Construction of Old Age as a Problem. In M. L. Johnson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing* (pp. 563-571). New York: Cambridge University Press.

King, J. (2013). *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Laceulle, H. (2018). Chapter 3: Cultural narratives and counter narratives about ageing. In H. Laceulle (Ed.) *Ageing and self-realization: cultural narratives about later life* (pp. 63-92). Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Leder, D. (1990) *The Absent Body*. London: University of Chicago Press.

Lessing, D. (2005). *Time Bites*. London: Harper Perennial.

Lindemann Nelson, H. (2001). *Damaged identities, narrative repair.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Losada Baltar, A. (2004). ‘‘Edadismo: consecuencias de los estereotipos, del prejuicio y la discriminación en la atención a las personas mayores. Algunas pautas para la intervención”. Madrid, Portal Mayores, *Informes Portal Mayores*, nº 14

Mangum, T. (1999). Little Women: The Ageing Female Character in Nineteenth-Century British Children’s Literature. In K. Wooward (Ed.) *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (pp. 59-87). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Marshall, L. B. (2015). Anti-ageing and identities. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 210-217). London: Routledge.

Mba, G. (2023, May 25). Where to start with Doris Lessing: a guide to her best works. The Booker Prizes. Retrieved from Where to start with Doris Lessing: a guide to her best works | The Booker Prizes

Miller, N. (1999). The Marks of Time. In K. Wooward (Ed.) *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (pp. 4-19). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Moggach, D. (2013a). Interview. *Deborah Moggach*. Retrieved from https://www.deborahmoggach.com/landing-page/deborah-moggach/deborah-moggach-biography/deborah-moggach-interview/

Moggach, D. (2013b). Q & A with Deborah Moggach. *Deborah Moggach*. Retrieved from https://www.deborahmoggach.com/landing-page/deborah-moggach/deborah-moggach-biography/deborah-moggach-q-a/

Moggach, D. (n. d.). Biography. *Deborah Moggach*. Retrieved from Deborah Moggach – Biography | Hachette UK

Moggach, D. (n. d.). The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. *Deborah Moggach*. Retrieved from The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel by Deborah Moggach | Hachette UK

Molina-Luque, F., Casado Gual, N., & Sanvicen-Torne, P. (2018). Senior Women Also Active, Creative and Strong Models to Break Stereotypes. *Revista Prisma Social 21*(2), 43-74.

Organización Mundial de la Salud. (2021, March 18). *El edadismo es un problema mundial* [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/es/news/item/18-03-2021-ageism-is-a-global-challenge-un

Oró-Piqueras, M. (2013). Narrating ageing: Deconstructing negative conceptions of old age in four contemporary English novels. *Journal of Aging Studies 27,* 193-200.

Oró-Piqueras, M. (2016). The complexities of female aging: Four women protagonists in Penelope Lively's novels. *Journal of Aging Studies, 36,* 10-16.

Oró-Piqueras, M. (2019). Representations of female ageing and sexuality in Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger, Angela Carter's Wise Children and Doris Lessing's 'The grandmothers'. In K. Almack & A. King (Eds.) *Intersections of Ageing, Gender and Sexualities: Multidisciplinary International Perspectives* (pp. 83-98). Bristol University Press.

Raschke, D., Sternberg, P., & Singer, S. (2010). Introduction. In D. Raschke, P. Sternberg, & S. Singer (Eds.) *Doris Lessing Interrogating the Times* (pp. 1-8). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Rowe, J., & Kahn, R. (1997). Successful aging. *The Gerontologist*, *37*(4), 433−440

Sandberg, L. (2015). Sex, sexuality and later life. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 218-225). London: Routledge.

Saxton, R. O. (2010). Sex after Sixty love, again and The Sweetest Dream. In D. Raschke, P. Sternberg, & S. Singer (Eds.) *Doris Lessing Interrogating the Times* (pp. 202-210). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Shakespeare, W. (1623). *As You Like It.* New York: Modern Library.

Shepherd, R. (2021). Age is no deterrent - Deborah Moggach. Saga Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.saga.co.uk/membership/articles/Age-is-no-deterrent-Deborah-Moggach

Sontag, S. (1972) 'The double standard of aging', *Saturday Review of The Society*, 23 September: 29–32.

Stončikaitė, I., & Mina-Riera, N. (2020). A Creative Writing Workshop on Sexuality and Ageing: A Spanish Pilot Case Study. *Societies 10*(3), 75, 1-12.

Tulle, E. (2015). Theorising embodiment and ageing. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology (*pp. 125-132). London: Routledge.

Twigg, J. (2015). Dress and age. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 149-156). London: Routledge.

Twigg, J., & Martin, W. (2015). The field of cultural gerontology: An introduction. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 1-15). London: Routledge.

Ward, R. (2015). Hair and age. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 141-148). London: Routledge.

Waxman, B. F. (1990). *From the Hearth to the Open Road.* Westport: Greenwood Press.

Weiss, G. (2014). The myth of woman meets the myth of old age. In S. Sotller (Ed.), *Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy of Age: Gender, Ethics, and Time*. Boston: Walter de Gruyter.

Whelehan, I. (2014). Fiction or Polemic? Transcending the Ageing Body in Popular Women's Fiction. In I. Whelehan (Ed.), *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism: Harleys and Hormones* (pp. 29-46). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Williams, N. (2021). 'No Hip Muffs': female ageing in Doris Lessing's fiction and correspondence. *Critical Quarterly, 63*(1), 67-81.

Woodward, K. (1999). Introduction. In K. Wooward (Ed.) *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (pp. ix-xxix). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Woodward, K. (2006). Performing Age, Performing Gender. *NWSA Journal, 18*(1), 162-189.
Wyatt-Brown, A. M. (1990). The coming of age of literary gerontology. *Journal of Aging Studies, 4*(3), 299-315.