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The Rhetoric of Female Senescence: A Gynocritical Reading of Selected Poems

A B S T R A C T

Drawing on the social pattern of aged women and the factors that contribute to their restricted roles and consequently Otherness, this research examines the discourse of female senescence, a process that biologically indicates the gradual deterioration of functional characteristics in living organisms. Employing gynocritical criticism, the research examines the literary representation of old-age women in selected poems written by women who test the lived experience of growing old and the challenge it offers to individualistic conceptions of selfhood. The research argues that the examined poems implicitly highlight certain perspectives on aging such as social withdrawal, involvement, and social clock, so as to explain how old women might deal with later life experiences. The study further argues that the strategy of literary representation in the examined poems can be seen as a means through which women writers are engaged in an intellectual battle speaking for old women's subjectivity against entrenched ageist beliefs. According to this context, the research aims to answer the question of how female poets can work toward denaturalizing the social pattern of old-age women by presenting unstereotypical poetic representation. The significance of the study springs from the less attention feminist criticism pays to old-age women's literature aiming at debasing the stereotypical models of female senescence.

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بلاغة الشيخوخة الإثنوية: قراءة نقدية لقصائد مختارة

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الخلاصة:

بالاعتماد على النمط الاجتماعي للنساء المسنات والعوامل التي تساهم في تقييد أدوارهن وبالتالي الاختلاف، يبحث هذا البحث في خطاب الشيخوخة الأنثوية، وهي عملية تشير بيولوجيا إلى التدهور التدريجي للخصائص الوظيفية للكائنات الحية. من خلال استخدام النقد النسائي، يدرس البحث التمثيل الأدبي للنساء المسنات في قصائد مختارة كتبتها نساء يختبرن التجربة الحياتية للتقدم في السن والتحديات الذي يقدمه للمفاهيم الفردية للذات. يفترض البحث بأن القصائد التي تم تحليلها تسلط الضوء ضمناً على وجهات نظر معينة حول الشيخوخة مثل الانسحاب الاجتماعي والمشاركة والساعة الاجتماعية، الامر الذي يوضح كيف يمكن للنساء المسنات التعامل مع تجارب الحياة اللاحقة. وترى الدراسة كذلك أن استراتيجية التمثيل الأدبي في القصائد المدروسة يمكن النظر إليها كوسيلة تدخل من خلالها الكاتبات في معركة فكرية تتحدث عن ذاتية المرأة العجوز وصراعها ضد المعتقدات العمرية الراسخة. وفي هذا السياق يهدف البحث إلى الإجابة على السؤال التالي: كيف يمكن للشاعرات العمل على تجريد النمط الاجتماعي للمرأة المسنة من خلال تقديم تمثيل شعري غير نمطي. تتبع أهمية الدراسة من قلة الاهتمام الذي يوليه النقد النسوي لأدب النساء المسنات وبالتالي تحجيم النماذج النمطية للشيخوخة الأنثوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشيخوخة، النقد النسوي، العمر، التقدم في العمر، شعر الشيخوخة

Introduction

Within the realm of literary criticism, the feminist perspective directs its attention towards the intricate dynamics surrounding the role of women in literature. This encompasses their multifaceted involvement as both writers and readers, as well as their portrayal both as active agents and passive recipients within the literary domain. The term "Gynocriticism," as attributed to the highly regarded feminist critic Ellen Showalter, serves as a conceptual framework that delves into the intricate dynamics of the female experience in relation to the quest for selfhood and the intricate web of societal gender constructs. Showalter posits the existence of two distinct categories of feminist theories, each with its own unique focus. The first category, known as feminist critique, centers its attention on women in the role of readers. Conversely, the second category, referred to as gynocritics, directs its emphasis toward women as writers.

Gynocriticism suggests that women began participating in a discourse where they aimed to express and analyze their own experiences through their written works. In this particular phase, Showalter eloquently expounded upon four distinct models of difference that have been embraced by numerous feminists across the

globe. These models encompass the realms of biology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and culture, each offering unique perspectives and insights into the multifaceted nature of gender disparities. The biological paradigm is a complex concept that women authors often explore to shed light on the complex nature of the female experience, particularly in relation to the physical body. The literary works produced by women, particularly those that embody feminist perspectives, can be interpreted as actively engaging in the intellectual struggle to assert individual subjectivity and challenge deeply ingrained ageist and sexist ideologies. Al-Doory, Awfa underscores that women find themselves faced with the important task of challenging the dominant oppressive masculine discourse that has had a significant impact on the field of literature for a long time. Their objective is to establish a literary genre characterized by creative and enlightening writing, appropriately referred to as "l'écriture feminine" or feminine writing. Women are compelled to engage in the act of self-expression and introspection, drawing from their personal encounters, in order to establish their presence within the prevailing androcentric framework of cultural, social, and literary discourse. (2019, 53) Al-Doory's statement is a critical reading of what is already stated by Helen Cixous's "The Laugh of Medusa"

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text as into the world and into history by her own movement (Cixous, 1976, 875)

The dominant influence of males in society has led to an ongoing imbalance, especially when it comes to spoken and written expression. Historically, men have wielded authority over written communication, affording them the ability to shape the portrayal of women according to their own preferences within their literary works. The manifestation of male dominance has created a feeling of fear among women known as the "anxiety of authorship" (Gilbert, 1977, 30), thereby instilling within them a profound apprehension towards the very act of engaging in literary creation.

The representation womanhood is shaped by various discursive and social practices. This implies an influence by external factors rather than possessing

autonomous agency in its self-expression. Conversely, the process of embracing femininity entails a deliberate dismantling of the societal norms and expectations associated with its portrayal. This finds its echo in the way aged women are perceived by the inherited patriarchal system. In Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 book, *The Second Sex*, she dedicated a chapter to the topic of older women titled "From Maturity to Old Age." In this chapter, Beauvoir explores how society imposes the perception of old age as a tragic experience for women. When women are classified as "Other" and expected to support men and their endeavors, patriarchal strategies force them to remain in a state of confined being. Beauvoir asserts that the patriarchal culture no longer values elder women for their traditional nurturing role. As a result, society's expectations and restrictions become less restrictive—a matter that is perceived by de Beauvoir as too late freedom. She developed her ideas to suggest that society perceives the elderly as incapable of contributing, and this belief is internalized by both men and women, placing them in a state of confined being. She also connects their expulsion to their perceived closeness to death, a topic that causes social unease. In her long short story "The Age of Discretion," de Beauvoir expresses this social unease and disturbing confinement as the following:

Should I be able to work or not? ... Would the dread of ageing take hold of me again? Do not look too far ahead. Ahead there was the horror of death and farewells: it was false teeth, sciatica, infirmity, intellectual barrenness, loneliness in a strange world that we could no longer understand and that would carry on without us. Shall I succeed in not lifting my eyes to those horizons? ... Let us hope so. We have no choice in the matter.

This passage exemplifies Beauvoir's assertion that the average individual lacks sufficient assistance in navigating the difficulties associated with the process of aging. The author contends that societal neglect in providing assistance exacerbates these difficulties, leaving individuals to manage them independently. The narrator's fear of old age in this specific climate is depicted as rational. She is unable to surmount the discouraging expectations and criticism she receives from others. Beauvoir primarily equated old age with a loss of love and sexual attractiveness, and that she projected these fears onto her paradigms of aging.

The Literary Paradigm of Female Senescence

The correlation between beauty paradigms and ageist norms serves as a testament to the cultural ubiquity of youthism. At the individual level, the perception of aging as a pathological condition may lead to the prescription of multiple pharmacological interventions for older individuals. On a grander scope, this perspective perpetuates ageist ideologies and categorizes individuals of old age as feeble subjects of a deceitful corporeal vessel (despite the fact that the human body can present challenges at any stage of life due to diverse factors). The common scenario, which portrays the later stages of life as a period characterized by passive anticipation of fatalities, has encountered criticism from scholars specializing in the study of aging, commonly referred to as gerontologists. It postulates that individuals of old age lack a meaningful role within the fabric of society, and further posits that external societal forces do not influence their withdrawal from communal involvement. However, in her *The Witch of Exmore* (1997), for example, Margaret Drabble introduces a captivating deviation from the commonly held notion of the elderly's seclusion by skillfully portraying the character of Frieda Haxby, a spirited and outspoken older protagonist. Frieda, with her recognized wisdom, decides to embark on a journey to a secluded gothic manor, which causes her lavish offspring to disapprove. Nevertheless, she embarks on this endeavor driven by her deep disdain for the triviality and superficiality that captures contemporary society. In her essay "The Double Standard of Aging," (1972) Susan Sontag argues that: "is much more permissive about aging in men, as it is tolerant of the sexual infidelities of husbands. Men are 'allowed' to age, without penalty, in several ways that women are not. "According to the context highlighted by Sontag, women who show physical signs of aging experience the most severe consequences. Their self-esteem is highly affected when their vitality is linked to their ability to bring children away. On the other hand, men are highly respected not only for their ability to have children over a long period of time but also for their other admirable qualities. Accordingly, women who struggle to meet the expectations set by society are bound to face defeat in the long run.

In their scholarly essay titled "The Mask of Ageing and the Postmodern Life Course" (1991), Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth delve into the subject of ageism with great depth and breadth. They explain that the rise of postmodernism

has caused gerontologists to move away from the idea of universalism ageism and concentrate instead on the idea of limited experiences. Also, they believe that life course is less structured because it is getting harder and harder to divide people's lives into different stages based on their age. However, it is important to note that this specific trend is currently a developing cultural phenomenon rather than an ongoing problem. (280) In subsequent sections of the essay, Featherstone and Hepworth elaborate on the concept of "the mask of ageing," a term they employ to elucidate the phenomenon wherein elderly individuals perceive outward manifestations of the aging process as concealing tool of their youthful essence. Featherstone and Hepworth suggest that masks draw attention to the possibility of a disconnect between how someone appears on the outside and their actual abilities. They also highlight how one's perception of his own identity becomes more important as he gets older. (283)

The literary portrayal of an elderly woman, as a grandmother or as an isolated individual, for example, highlights the contrasting roles assigned to women in Western culture. During the later stages of life, women often experience a notable transformation from their adolescent and sexually inexperienced years to a mature and esteemed role as an older woman. This stage is often marked by a decrease or disturbance in sexual or biological activity, feelings of loneliness, and a sense of social exclusion. One factor that contributes to this phenomenon is the societal perception that old age is a phase where individuals are expected to suppress their inner feelings and are considered to have limited usefulness in terms of their capabilities.

In the context at hand, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the delineations of the term "old" frequently intertwine with discourses that perpetuate age-based prejudices. In his seminal study conducted in 1995, esteemed scholar Bill Bytheway astutely encapsulates the multifaceted issue of ageism:

Why not compare the life expectations of the thirteen-year-old and the twenty-three-year-old; or the seventy-eight-year-old and the eighty-eight-year-old? ... By comparing age naught years with age sixty-five years, we are fostering the ageist idea that old age is life in a different country, it's the life of a different species. (127)

This means that Bytheway aptly underscores the notion that this particular cognitive framework regarding age mistakenly perpetuates a dichotomous perception of binary oppositions, them vs. us. Furthermore, it engenders the fallacious notion that ageism exclusively impacts the elderly demographic, although it is reasonable to posit that biased narratives become increasingly conspicuous as an individual advance in age. Females who have experienced the phenomenon of menopause may come to this realization at an earlier point compared to their male counterparts, as there exists no analogous occurrence within the male experience that is socially acknowledged as an initial indication of advancing senescence.

It is imperative to acknowledge the viewpoint that the literary analytical approach of examining fictitious depictions of women is a developmental stage that feminism has surpassed. As Shirley Neuman underscores in the introduction to *Re-Imagining Women: Representations of Women in Culture* (1993), “a more generous and just response might be that it grounds much that we have moved into. And a more politically aware response might urge that such work is more than ever strategically necessary.” (4) The discernment of this particular truth grew more pronounced during the 1980s, as discerning individuals drew attention to the manner in which female authors navigated the realms of race, ethnicity, and sexuality. These astute critics emphasized that these factors held equal sway over one's subjectivity and connection to power, alongside gender.

Beauvoir's portrayal of women as doubly disadvantaged by the interrelated discourses of ageism and sexism is a recurrent theme in the poetry written by aged poetesses, it has always been a powerful medium for expressing the essence of the human experience, delving into the profound emotions that shape women lives. Poetry of senescence and Gynocriticism can provide unique perspectives on aging and the celebration of female voices. Poetry of senescence revolves around the natural process of aging, portraying its complexities and nuances. It often captures the feelings of introspection, nostalgia, and wisdom that accompany the later stages of life. This form of poetry seeks to demystify the notion of aging, emphasizing the beauty and richness of experiences that come with growing older.

Poetry of senescence allows readers to reflect on their own mortality and find solace in shared experiences. It promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the elderly, fostering empathy and respect for the elderly's unique perspectives. By embracing the wisdom and grace of senescence, this poetry celebrates the continuity of life. together exemplify the power of poetry as a means of introspection, empathy, and social change. By engaging with such poetry, readers are invited to reflect on the human condition and the multitude of experiences that shape our lives. Gynocritical poetry of senescence serves as a mirror, reflecting the essence of old women's shared experience of old age and the continued pursuit of a more compassionate and egalitarian world. In her Poem "Warning", Jenny Joseph 1932-2018 provides a gynocritical perspective of senescence. This poem allows readers to reflect on their own mortality and find solace in shared experiences. It promotes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the elderly, fostering empathy and respect for the elderly's unique perspectives. By embracing the wisdom and grace of senescence, this poetry celebrates the continuity of life:

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple

With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.

And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves

And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.

I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired

And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells

And run my stick along the public railings

And make up for the sobriety of my youth.

I shall go out in my slippers in the rain

And pick flowers in other people's gardens

And learn to spit.

(ll. 1-11, Joseph, <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk>)

"Warning," is voted as Britain's favorite poem in 1961, is renowned and appreciated across the world for its message of old age as a time for indulgence

and enjoyment. Poet Jenny Joseph has created a character whose thoughts have been quoted at conferences and funerals, used to cheer up sick friends, and remembered with pleasure by children and adults alike around the world in the poem's respectable middle-aged woman, as she imagines herself in old age as a cheeky rebel with outrageous clothes and dotty behavior. (Brownjohn,2018)

The phrase 'And' is repeated at the beginning of each of the first seven lines, giving the poem a list-like vibe. The assertions pile up until the reader is overwhelmed with the possibilities of old age. The poem draws an interesting contrast between what one could expect from old age and what the speaker learns when she thinks about its reality. Most people think that as they become older, many of their joys must unavoidably come to an end. This is not true in the speaker's reality, though. In fact, when she isn't worried about what people think of her, she enjoys herself even more. By the poem's conclusion, she has even resolved to begin living in this manner right away in order to enjoy as many happy years as she can:

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry

We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practise a little now?

When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

Eventually, when we're elderly and able to retire, we'll be free to ignore all societal obligations and pursue our interests. At the very least, we may indulge the notion that we will act in that way in our later years now that we are mature, responsible adults. This is the fantasy or yearning that Jenny Joseph masterfully and cleverly captures in "Warning." The poem is described as humorous and lighthearted in the title. Most of the things that Joseph cites in the poem are rather harmless (learning to "spit" is probably the most antisocial), so it's not as if we need to be warned about what she will be like when she is an old lady.

Aging: A Symphony of Experience Gained Through a Life's Dance:

The poetry of female senescence invites readers to recognize the transformative power of time and the profound beauty it imparts upon a woman's life. It showcases the wisdom, strength, and grace that accompany the passing years. Through the artful weaving of lines and metaphors, readers celebrate the essence of

a woman's journey, appreciating the tapestry of experiences and the profound resonance that her senescence brings.

Grace Paley (1922- 2007) is an acclaimed Jewish- American writer, and poet, who began writing in the 1950s. She is the author of three highly acclaimed collections of short fiction, *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974), and *Later the Same Day* (1985), published together in *Collected Stories* (1994). She was born to radical Russian-Jewish immigrants in the Bronx in 1922. Grace has dedicated her political activism to fighting for important social issues, from rallies against war to demonstrations against the development of nuclear weapons. Grace is a woman, mother, Jew, and political activist. Through her poignant and evocative poems, Paley captures the essence of growing older with an unwavering spirit and a keen eye for the human experience. Her words resonate with honesty and vulnerability, reminding us of the power and resilience found in embracing the journey of aging.

Paley fearlessly explores the theme of aging in her works. Her poems on aging inspire us to face the passage of time fearlessly and embrace the wisdom and resilience that come with growing older. Her words remind us of the beauty inherent in each phase of life, urging us to celebrate the present moment and find joy in the simple pleasures. Paley's poetry serves as a poignant reminder that aging is not something to be feared, but rather an opportunity for growth, self-reflection, and embracing the richness of the human experience.

Resilience in the face of mortality is one of the recurring themes in Paley's poems. Rather than shying away from this topic, she confronts it head-on, infusing her verses with a fearless spirit. In "Fear" and "Sisters", Paley reflects on the brevity of life and encourages readers to seize the present moment. Through her poignant words, she reminds us that embracing our mortality allows us to live more fully and appreciate the preciousness of each passing day:

**I am afraid of nature
because of nature I am mortal
my children and my grandchildren
are also mortal
I lived in the city for forty years**

in this way I escaped fear

Paley, in these lines, captures the fear of mortality and death which is a common and natural aspect of being human. It can arise from various factors, such as the unknown, the loss of loved ones, or concerns about what happens after death. In this poem, Paley uses personification to evoke the presence of death or mortality in human life, depicting them as shadowy figures, silent observers, or gentle companions. Through her use of a single voice and regular meter, Paley invites readers to confront these universal themes with empathy and introspection. Her approach encourages us to contemplate the transient nature of existence and find solace or meaning amidst the inevitability of our mortality. She appears faithful to her creed that " life is too short and art too long." (Bagnari, 1993:65)

Paley fearlessly encounters aging and death, believing that nature takes its course. In her poem "sisters", she confronts aging head-on, infusing her lines with a fearless spirit:

My friends are dying

well we're old it's natural

one day we passed the experience of "older"

which began in late middle age

and came suddenly upon "old" then

all the little killing bugs are

baby tumors that had struggled

for year's against the body's

brave immunities found their

level playing fields and

victory (ll:1-10, Parley, 2008:78)

In Paley's poem "Here," the author expresses her wish to savor every moment, no matter what, in old age as much as in youth. The title is suggestive of Paley's anchoring in the present:

Here I am in the garden laughing

an old woman with heavy breasts

and a nicely mapped face

how did this happen

well that's who I wanted to be (Begin Again 177)

The poem's transformation, as shown by the suddenly anxiety-free inquiry, "how did this happen," is "the biggest surprise" of old age, as suggested in her short story "Dreamer in a Dead Language" (286). It is shown as a planned surprise in "Here," one that is both expected and wanted, and both a component and a symbol of life. In order to create a complex literary textual object out of common speech patterns, Paley's carefully crafted language tricks the reader into accepting time's flow rather than fighting it. Paley uses time's rich riches and evolving linguistic beauty as the writer's favored source of inspiration. She depicts a full portrait of a fanciful "garden of laughing" where "women with heavy breasts" embrace aging with hope and joy instead of anxiety.

In her acclaimed poem "On Aging" " the African-American poet Maya Angelou's delves into what it means to grow old. Maya Angelou, who was born in 1928, saw some of the greatest discrimination and inequity seen by African-Americans. Despite the fact that slavery had long since been abolished, Angelou observed its impact on both society and African -Americans. The speaker is straightforward and honest, addressing the reader with the truth of aging:

When you see me sitting quietly,

Like a sack left on the shelf,

Don't think I need your chattering.

I'm listening to myself.

The speaker/ poet opens her poem with an imperative voice, telling people surrounding her that there is no need for them to come up and chat to her when she is sitting quietly. She does not require companionship just because she is silent.

Hold! Stop! Don't pity me!

Hold! Stop your sympathy!

Understanding if you got it,

Otherwise I'll do without it!
When my bones are stiff and aching,
And my feet won't climb the stair,
I will only ask one favor:
Don't bring me no rocking chair.
When you see me walking, stumbling,
Don't study and get it wrong.
'Cause tired don't mean lazy
And every goodbye ain't gone.

Later in the poem, the same plea is made. Do not pity me and bring me a rocking chair if I am having trouble getting upstairs. The simile "sitting quietly, / Like a sack left on a shelf" is used to describe the aging speaker in "On Aging." The word "sack" conveys a negative image of something unattractive and disregarded; it may represent how the speaker feels when watched by others owing to an apparently bland demeanor. This also alludes at how shallow people may be, neglecting a person's more essential inner understanding.

I'm the same person I was back then,
A little less hair, a little less chin,
A lot less lungs and much less wind.
But ain't I lucky I can still breathe in.

The speaker/ poet does not want to be treated differently than she was when she was younger. In fact, she claims that despite a few outward changes, she is the same person she has always been. This becomes essential when the speaker claims that she is the same person she was when she was younger, only in a changing body. The posture of being on a shelf might imply that the person is just out of reach to be appreciated and examined, but it can also represent a greater sense of knowledge because the person is above others and has a wider perspective on life. Instead than hearing 'chatter' from other people, the speaker would rather continue 'listening to myself.'

The poem finishes with the speaker recognizing her bodily changes while feeling happy for the fact that she can still breathe at all. This is a single-stanza poem that has twenty lines. The rhyming pattern in these lines changes with time. The irregular rhyme pattern in the poem's structure may be a representation of the speaker's attitude toward not wanting to be constrained and told what to do by society. Additionally, the repeated exclamatory statements, together with the imperatives "Don't" and "hold," drive the reader to complete the phrase aloud in a louder, more dramatic manner. Perhaps the speaker thinks they will not conform to the expectations of becoming older. When compared to others, which are used more frequently but are just as changeable, some finishes, like "-ing," are repeated throughout the text (lines 3, 9, and 13). The phrases "quietly," "me," and "sympathy" in lines one, five, and six, as well as "lazy" in line fifteen, are examples of the latter. Or there are the combinations of "then" and "chin" and "wind" "in" in the final few lines. Maya Angelou employs repetition with an imperative style to emphasize her welcoming of old age as part of Nature's progression. She compares age to the cycles of nature, where each stage brings its own unique allure.

Through vivid imagery, she conveys the sense of freedom and acceptance that can be achieved in later life. Angelou, who died in 2014 welcomes aging positively and disapproves that getting old is like becoming 'a tattered coat upon a stick', as W.B.Yeats calls it: "The most important thing I can tell you about aging is this: If you really feel that you want to have an off-the-shoulder blouse and some big beads and thong sandals and a dirndl skirt and a magnolia in your hair, do it. Even if you're wrinkled." (Angelou, qtd in timegoesby.net,2019:3) Maya Angelou's poem "On Aging" touches upon various facets of the human experience, portraying aging as a phase of life that should be embraced and celebrated. Her words resonate with readers of all ages, reminding us that growing older is not about losing vitality but gaining insight, resilience, and a deeper appreciation for the journey of life. Through her powerful lines, Angelou leaves an indelible mark on the literature of aging, reminding us to embrace the wisdom and beauty that come with the passing years.

Conclusion

It is important to highlight that old age, similar to gender, is a social construct. The interpretations and significance assigned to this stage of life are

influenced by ageist beliefs and discussions. Authors challenge the prevailing status quo by deliberately avoiding the act of marginalizing the older woman and instead, placing her as the central agent in literary works. By doing so, they strongly assert that her outsider status is nothing but a myth.

The focus on female aging in representations helps to address the issue of women's marginalization within modern interpretations of femininity. The examined poems express different hopes and anxieties about senescence, and thus a number of thematic connections and obsessions are tackled. The most obvious link between the works, and perhaps the most important, is the situating of the older female at the heart of the contexts. Authors who use this maneuver work toward rending the silence, in both society and literature, which surrounds certain aspects of the older woman's life. Further, they provide her with a voice with which to challenge those that insist decline and stagnation are all there is to senescence.

The examined poems reflect on a discourse that simply refuses to cooperate with discourses that suggest that senescence is only to be defined by its more disagreeable aspects and that its trials could not be alleviated by a more humane society. The poets, as such, aim to fulfill their reader's desires, one of which is to see the older woman successfully negotiating social hostility. To achieve this sort of sympathetic reaction from the reader, the texts this research examined are adamant that older characters are valuable individuals who experience disappointment, contentment, anger and desire.

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