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In *Queer Aging in North American Fiction*, Linda M. Hess examines representations of queer aging in six novels and two films released between 1943 and 2011. Centering core themes of temporality, productivity, and success and failure, Hess situates these texts in relation to key cultural moments in LGBTQ history, and points to further potentials – academic, and worldly – of thinking ‘queer’ and ‘aging’ together. Explicitly not a comprehensive overview, Hess works with the idea of “spotlights” to highlight intersections of aging and non-normative sexuality across the works and the different historical moments in which they emerged (21). Her use of spotlights is highly effective, as it allows close reading and analysis of representations of queer protagonists and the narrative use of aging and age relations in selected works.

In the introduction, Hess tells the story of her emerging realization that representations of aging LGBTQ persons seemed to be missing from both narratives about aging, and in works of queer fiction. This “missing,” the author came to understand, is more an occlusion: it was not that such representations did not exist, but rather that they had received little attention (2). The primary task of this book (an outgrowth of Hess’ dissertation), and one that is achieved in wide-ranging detail, is to attend to this occlusion. Picking up well-worn critiques in aging studies of the “decline narrative” (Gullette 2004) and limitations of the normative paradigm of “successful aging” (e.g., Katz and Calasanti 2015), Hess weaves in queer critiques of heteronormative visions of the life course (e.g., Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2011) to frame her overarching analysis of the significance of representations of queer aging in expressing and shaping social realities.

The body of the book is divided into five parts. Part I, “The Confines of Straight Time,” includes two chapters, which trace the trope of the “older lesbian as predator” and the “menace of gay aging,” respectively. Here Hess examines the predominance of the heteronormative timeline in representations of lesbian aging, and situates the narrativization of gay aging in the cultural climate of the Cold War era. In this section, the author sets up a loosely comparative approach, contrasting representations of lesbian and gay aging across historical chunks of time. She also introduces a critical focus on tropes of gays, lesbians, and age relations, and gay and lesbian aging. For example, in her analysis of *Trio: A Novel*, by Dorothy Baker (1943), Hess astutely examines how age was used as a narrative element to solidify a trope of older predator/younger victim, a frequent move in lesbian narratives of that time (36).

Part II focuses on novels produced “In an Era of Liberation,” in the context of gay liberation and feminism. Here the texts centered are June Arnold’s *Sister Gin* (from 1975), and Andrew Holleran’s *Dancer from the Dance* (1978). Treating *Sister Gin* through a lens of lesbian-feminist aging, Hess explores topics ranging from “menopause as a new beginning,” “defying stereotypes of asexuality” to “anger as politics” (82-93). Examining *Dancer from the Dance* as part of “gay times in NYC,” Hess situates it in the wake of the Stonewall Riots, discussing “the economy of the body,” “failing the heteronormative future,” and “the margins of the cultural screen” (103-117). The breadth of contributions in Part II is exceptional, and shows what I consider the main strength of Hess’ work: not necessarily the grand argumentative arc or overarching key findings, but the detailed, provocative insights.

Part III leads the reader through “Transitions of the 1990s,” where we witness the increasing visibility of narratives of aging in the context of the AIDS crisis and a novel lesbian ‘hypervisibility’ in postmodern Canadian literature. Part IV moves to “Queer Aging in the Young Twenty-First Century,” and to film. Here Hess turns her attention to Mike Mills’ *Beginners* (from 2010), and Thom Fitzgerald’s *Cloudburst* (2011). The cultural work of tropes and the political ramifications of storytelling are brought to the fore particularly strongly in discussion of the latter film. *Cloudburst* is a story of an older couple who seek to escape manipulative family members and nursing home confinement in the United States to the safety of same-sex marriage in Canada. It is a plot that Hess situates as a “road movie,” anchored “in a tradition of rebellion” and social and cultural critique (201). The image of the butch lesbian hero embodied by the character Stella is pronounced here, as are, Hess points to, tropes of aging as disability and immobility (206-207), and tropes of the “tragic queer” (216). Further surfaced are questions of normativity and inclusion, as Hess reveals how the film skirts close to a script valorizing a particular vision of ideal familial relations. As she writes, *Cloudburst* “walks a thin line between highlighting the necessity of having available secure structures, such as equal marriage rights, in order for individuals to retain agency in old age, and challenging heteronormative values of marriage, longevity, and consanguine kinship, at a time when these ideals become more and more attainable for LGBTQ persons and invite participation in the linear life course” (23).

In this book each chapter is anchored “in a significant cultural moment of LGBTQ history” (10). In this way, the reader is simultaneously walked through Hess’ analysis of the texts, and through a (select) history of LGBTQ people in the United States and Canada. Hess states that a chronological approach, despite its linearity, “serves well to provide a historical framework for the presently emerging visibility of queer aging” (10). Yet one limitation, perhaps related to this approach, is that the author relies upon dominant landmarks in a white-washed and largely gay and lesbian history. Hess’ treatment of the Stonewall Riots is one example of a missed opportunity in this regard: Hess does not here recognize the fraught history of the riots, and reiterates this event as a momentous cultural landmark within a history of gay rights liberation which opened up new dimensions of visibility for gay men. Such historicization is one that has been thoroughly critiqued for its occlusion of the leadership and participation of trans women of colour, and Hess’ failure to acknowledge this is a significant occlusion in turn. While Hess is, of course, not responsible for the content of the texts under analysis, a more nuanced historicization could have contributed to a more expansive analysis of ‘queer aging.’ Furthermore, visibility is also taken as an implicit good throughout the work, a value which also may benefit from further problematization.

Narratives of queer aging have fairly recently emerged across the social sciences and humanities (for example through first-person accounts of aging in qualitative research). This book provides a novel depth and breadth of analysis of representations not only in Canadian and American fiction, but in narratives of queer aging in scholarship writ large. In this way, *Queer Aging in North American Fiction* is a novel and critical intervention into studies of aging across disciplines. It will be of interest to scholars

working through questions of gender, sexuality, and aging, including but not only for those with a literary bent. The book avoids jargon and follows a repeated reader-friendly format in each chapter, each of which includes many nuggets of generative discussion, and could be assigned individually or together as an anchoring textbook in undergraduate and graduate courses.

In the conclusion, Hess points to important new developments in representations of queer aging, such as the visibility of a trans protagonist in the HBO series *Transparent*. While wary of tracking a narrative of queer progress, I am interested to read how Hess and other scholars will continue to engage with emergent works of fiction in which diverse narratives of queer aging may be read, and in how queer reading practices in aging studies will develop beyond LGBTQ subjects. Queer narratives do critical work in helping to open up points of reference and spaces for people to form senses of self and belonging, and to imagine alternative futures. Representations of queer aging, as Hess contends, “have the power to crack open heteronormative concepts of time and future that still limit the available perceptions and representations of aging significantly,” by surfacing restrictive norms, and “by calling for transgressions of these norms as well as for the invention of alternative narratives” (8-9). This book stands as an important precedent in looking towards both writing and reading practices of queer aging of the future.

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