



# **The Older Woman in Recent Fiction**

Zoe Brennan

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This critical study explores late twentieth century novels by women writers - including Doris Lessing, May Sarton and Barbara Pym - that feature female protagonists over the age of sixty. These novels create alternate discourses on aging to those largely pejorative ones that dominate Western society. They break the silence that normally surrounds the lives of the aged by creating narratives that refuse to deal purely in discourses of stagnation and decline. One strategy they share is placing an older female protagonist at the heart of the narrative, and this book investigates how she is represented in relation to areas such as sexuality, dependence and everyday life. process and surveys a variety of hypotheses from disciplines including gerontology, psychology and feminism. It also reviews literary critical attitudes toward fictions of aging. Chapter Two analyzes representations of physically dependent characters. Anger is often seen as a response to the difficulties caused by their failing bodies, which is exacerbated by society's neglect but eased by relationships with their female friends. Chapter Three discusses how paradigms of female sexuality are constructed in such a way as to exclude the possibility of older women being sexually desirable. Chapter Four covers characters that live a contented life. Treating the novels from both an age and genderaware perspective reveals a more polemical side to them than is noted in more conventional literary critiques. Chapter Five analyzes the aged sleuth in classical detective fiction.



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