

Reference

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Sally Chivers, *The Silvering Screen: Old Age and Disability in Cinema*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2011, 240 pp., hbk \$55.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 8020 4079 5.

The title of Sally Chivers' valuable book needs a little explanation. 'Old age' and 'disability' are not two separate and twinned subjects or concepts in this book. Rather, the subject of the book is old age in cinema: disability, or to be more precise disability studies, is the lens through which old age is studied. This is an important juxtaposition, and one that is being increasingly debated in ageing studies. But it is also a complicated one, and Chivers is clearly aware of some of the risks of inappropriate conflation which her project runs: 'how does one talk,' she asks, 'about old age as disability without vilifying either?' (p. 23). She answers her own question in a detailed theoretical chapter which surveys relevant critical developments in recent disability studies, and also makes a convincing case for the value of bringing the rigour of its critical theory to bear on the subject of ageing in the movies. And while the primary audience for the book will be academics and students in film and cultural studies, this theoretical chapter should be of interest to a wide range of researchers into social ageing, whether they are concerned with film or not. It raises a number of provocative questions about the way in which broader analyses of the social construction of ageing might be framed. Particularly interesting is the way in which Chivers draws upon Robert McRuer's Crip Theory to suggest how 'thinking from the politicized, critical place of disability' (p. 23) can be applied to age studies in order to critique cultural norms of youth, attractiveness and hetero-ability.

There are few better places to watch these cultural norms in action than mainstream Hollywood cinema – and it is Hollywood films in particular which comprise the main subject of the book. The film industry has long fetishised youth, but Chivers' point of entry is the observation that during the past 20 years or so there has been a raft of films in which ageing has been an important theme. She is sceptical whether many of these films are likely to, or would ever want to challenge, critique or change common societal prejudices about or attitudes towards growing old, but this is not really the main point: the book goes beyond handing out rewards or punishments for efficacy in changing public perceptions. What it does, with care and thoughtfulness, is offer a detailed analysis of a series of film texts in ways that suggest how their projections of old age can help us to understand more fully our own responses to and constructions of ageing.

Although recent films are her main interest, Chivers adds a historical dimension by including a chapter on two classic ‘ageing actress’ films from the Hollywood of the 1950s and 1960s: *Sunset Boulevard* and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*. The comparison of these two films works well in terms of the overall argument of *The Silvering Screen*, since *Baby Jane* in particular foregrounds both age and disability, and enables Chivers to ‘clarif[y] the connection between disability and old age in screen projections of ageing characters’ (p. 43). Chivers analyses the way in which both films exploit the irony concerning the relationship between the onscreen narrative about ageing former female stars, and the real-life situation of the films’ leading actresses. When they made these films, Gloria Swanson (*Sunset Boulevard*), Joan Crawford and Bette Davis (*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*) were in their fifties – an age which conventional Hollywood wisdom regarded as too old for star status or star roles. Their performances in these films temporarily revived the careers of Swanson, Davis and Crawford: but it did so at a cost by giving them parts which reflected, or parodied, their own real-life status, playing into the very mechanisms of prejudice which were apparently being critiqued.

Elsewhere the book covers the treatment in movies of themes such as dementia care (in Bille August’s *A Song for Martin*; Tamara Jenkins’s *The Savages*; and Richard Eyre’s *Iris*); monogamy and fidelity (in Sarah Polley’s *Away from Her*; Denys Arcand’s *Barbarian Invasions*; and Eyre’s *Iris* again); and representations of masculinity in the late films of Paul Newman, Clint Eastwood and ageing bad-boy Jack Nicholson. Feminist theory, as well as disability theory, informs Chivers’ approach, and in the two chapters on masculinity the two come together effectively. ‘Disability studies,’ says Chivers in the prefatory material ‘changed my thinking and my life’ (p. ix). *The Silvering Screen* offers a valuable contribution to that growing movement in social gerontology which seeks to make sense of the intersections between age and disability.

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Clare L. Stacey, *The Caring Self: The Work Experiences of Home Care Aides*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2011, 216 pp., pbk \$19.95, ISBN 13: 978 0 8014 7699 0.

Clare Stacey’s very readable book, *The Caring Self: The Work Experiences of Home Care Aides* describes the experiences of home care workers in two cities in the United States of America (USA): one in California and one in Ohio. With her sociologist’s training and a grounded theory approach, she utilised extensive field observation and in-depth interviews with 33 home care aides. In addition, she interviewed public health nurses, social workers and home care agency managers, all of whom worked directly with home care aides. She notes that her intention in doing the research and writing the book was to inform the discussion on long-term care ‘by describing the constraints