role in caring for Nancy. I felt that at times Gillies was describing the conflict between the duty of being a carer *versus* her aspirations and desires for her own life. This is a common experience for those who care for people in need, but I admired the way Gillies articulated it.

I do not want to give away too much of the story in this review, but towards the end of the book I found myself so absorbed by the increasing challenges that the family face. I think that Gillies herself may agree that some of the lightness of her writing becomes shaded by the increasing pressures of coping in the final few chapters. For me, this is where the book changes and deep feelings about caring for other human beings come to the fore. I found this the most profound part of the book. It is the questioning of what it is to be human, living with or caring for someone with dementia that makes these pages so special. This book is accessible, the humour is sensitive, and the darker experiences expressed in such an open way. I would recommend it to professionals and carers alike, but I believe this book has wider appeal. It should and could be read by a wider audience and I can imagine book clubs across the United Kingdom taking on this as their next read. Such is the appeal of the human story, the excellence of how it is written and the profoundness of the subject. Gillies is to be commended for this book.

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Thomas R. Cole, Ruth E. Ray and Robert Kastenbaum (eds), *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: What Does it Mean to Grow Old?*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2010, 400 pp., hbk £31, ISBN 13: 978 0 8018 9433 6.

This is a volume that reminds the reader of the famous curate's egg, good in parts. There are some superb chapters. For instance, Anne Wyatt-Brown's chapter, 'Resilience and Creativity in Aging', has inspirational sections, particularly those to do with fear of dying. With an unusual amount of tact and skill she combines examples from literary memoirs and less literary accounts of experience. From David Rieff's sadness and horror at his mother Susan Sontag's slow and painful death, a death not resolved in his own incomplete grieving, to Calvin Trillin's memoir of his beloved wife Alice, the incurable optimist who just wanted to see her daughters grow up, we encounter the breadth of experience from complete lack of acceptance of imminent death to dealing with it. From Justine Picardie's memoir of her sister Ruth who died aged 32, leaving two small children, and her unbearably painful (to the outside reader) letters to them, to Art Buchwald's 'Too Soon to Say Goodbye', the man who went willingly to a hospice and lasted so unexpectedly long he eventually moved in with his son. We learn how to face death with equanimity with help from the hospice staff, who allowed Buchwald to hold court in the main lounge area of the hospice with astonishing charm. I paid him a visit during those months, and his humour was unabated and his life still had meaning, which is what hospice aims for, facing death whilst living life to the

full. This is a chapter both about ageing and about facing death, at whatever age, and it stands on its own.

Contrast Robert Yahnke's 'The Experience of Aging in Feature Length Films', which may be interesting to film buffs but leaves the general reader dissatisfied. So one wonders why these chapters have been brought together and whether there is, indeed, any overarching plan to the book at all. Add into that Robert Kastenbaum's occasionally irritating but mostly brilliant personal reflection, 'Tread Milling to the Far Side', and the pattern is unclear though the gems are there for all of us to pick out. Kastenbaum poses a wonderful question after a conversation with Ellis, who has begun dementing: 'Dare we wonder if dementia is nature's parting gift? Dare we feel tempted by the offer to avoid the hollows of loss, the stings of regret, and the snares of overmatched reason? Just asking'. This is an extraordinary *apercu*, well worth inclusion. It fits with the question to be found in some Jewish liturgies of what we would do if we were given the chance to live forever, given the proviso, that if we did, there would be no more births, no more children, no more young love. Can there be any doubt as to what the answer would be? Of course it would be renewal, more babies, more young love … but living forever without regret might be attractive too, even if less so for those who have to care for us.

But section three provides the most coherent interest, especially Stephen Katz and Kevin McHugh on retirement communities. Sun City, Arizona, the first of the retirement communities, commands a huge range of what the authors call 'hyperbolic history in place boosterism'. 'People love the community … we definitely have pride in Sun City. Well, it's the greatest place that's ever been put together anywhere in the United States'. But are they communities at all, given they are not mixed, not open and inclusive? Nor are they necessarily a good thing, since older people often remove themselves to them in order not to interfere in their children's lives. But unless they have something more to them beyond leisure, unless they focus in on the need to be needed, part of the human condition, it may be a pointless and unsatisfying existence. When they combine a fortress mentality with an almost enforced leisure lifestyle, it may turn out to be less than good for many people, and not a real life at all.

Add into these reflections on religion and the arts, and a sombre aside about an ageist perspective amongst many arts professionals that older people will not appreciate modern art, and Ronald Manheimer's fascinating short essay, 'The Five People You Meet in Retirement', modelled on Mitch Albom's 'Five People You Meet in Heaven', and there is much to enjoy. Any reader will find nuggets of real interest; most of us interested in ageing will enjoy and learn an enormous amount from some of the chapters. But the whole leaves one pondering whether the editors could not have been more directive, more convinced of the need to 'tell a story'. This is an anthology more than a coherent volume, and suffers from that, whilst within it is much that we should all read, especially Manheimer, Katz and McHugh, and above all Wyatt-Brown.

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