or critique images: indeed sometimes it is useful to let images stand alone so that viewers can freely associate. However, in the case of the less-straightforward photographs, it seems likely that more context would have enhanced viewers' appreciation of the images, as in the series 'Helga'.

For me the stand-out chapter is 'Couples – Intimacy' which includes the first prize-winning photograph. This is an image of a couple standing by their bed holding each other, dressed in their underwear. My personal favourite is a photo entitled 'Kiss' showing a close-up of a couple, with closed eyes, open-mouthed kissing. One partner has her hand on the other's cheek: the other has their arm around their partner's shoulders. This intimate image signifies both love and sexual desire. It is also unclear if the subjects are a man and a woman, or two women. This is the only image in the book which might depict homosexual love or intimacy. Another very noticeable and surprising omission is the lack of an image of a person of colour. The contest organisers may cite the lack of submissions of photos depicting black or minority ethnic people, but if this was the case one feels that more efforts ought to have been made explicitly to solicit contributions from a more diverse range of communities.

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Jeannette King, *Discourses of Ageing in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, 2012, 240 pp., hbk £50, ISBN: 978-0-230-29856-9.

It is one of life's ironies that I had just begun reading this book – subtitled 'The Invisible Woman' – in the week Margaret Thatcher died. Discourses and images of ageing were to be found everywhere in the media that week. Margaret Thatcher – invisible woman? Not that week. A proponent of feminism? I don't really think so. Ensconced in a cottage in remote West Wales, I happily turned to this book seeking a more nuanced and enlightened discussion and debate about representations of older women, and I was not disappointed.

The premise of the book is a deceptively simple one: namely that successive waves of feminism have failed to address the situations of older women and that, instead, we can usefully learn from fiction of the time.

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The nub of Jeannette King's argument, encapsulated in the blurb on the back cover, is that 'novels offer a feminist understanding of the "invisible" woman sometimes lacking in feminism itself'. She sets out, moreover, to 'compare literary representations of older women with perceptions of older women within medical, psychological and social discourses of ageing current at the time of writing' (p. xv). This is no modest undertaking: it builds not only on her previous scholarly work and interests in female novelists like George Eliot, Toni Morrison and Doris Lessing, but also on conversations and advice from colleagues at the University of Aberdeen where she is Emeritus Professor in English. Joining the Department of English just before she turned 50, King came into contact with the late Mike Hepworth. As a sociologist, Mike had a major impact on the development of gerontology and will be well known to many readers of *Ageing & Society*. His work with Mike Featherstone on the 'mask of age'; their writings on cultural aspects of age and ageing; and, especially, Mike's own groundbreaking *Stories of Ageing* (Hepworth 2000) are all key influences on King's book. The conversations she had with Mike and others encouraged her to embark on this project in the years leading up to her retirement.

The book is divided into three parts: Part One on 'Becoming Visible'; Part Two on 'The 1960s and After'; and Part Three on 'The 1990s'. These three parts are intended to coincide with three waves of feminist and literary history: the emergence of the women's movement in the Victorian period and the first half of the twentieth century; second-wave feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement; and what has come to be known as third-wave feminism. In presenting her accounts of these three periods, King focuses on a number of themes, most notably medical and psychological ones. The dominant medical discourse throughout all three historical periods is centred on the menopause: long regarded as the marker of old age in women. Alongside this, she charts the ways in which feminism has evolved, illustrating her historical narrative with familiar images of the suffragists and of women's lib demonstrators in the 1960s. Readers will find this historical account informative and interesting but its main purpose is to set up her argument that the concerns and interests of older women were notable by their absence – certainly in second- and third-wave feminism. This paves the way for her consideration of women novelists and the ways in which they have portrayed older women.

In Part One, she focuses on Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. Whilst noting that both were constrained by 'form' – particularly the *Bildungsroman* which traces a central character's growth from childhood to maturity, and the Romance form – they also begin to give us a more nuanced view of what it is to be an older woman. King highlights a number of Gaskell's protagonists who, in their different ways, challenge the dominant stereotypes of disengaged older women and some of the more deterministic views of gender whilst, at the same time, endorsing certain aspects such as the caring function of motherhood. These ambiguities are also illustrated in her discussion of the seemingly powerful older woman Mrs Transome in Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866). After years of running the family estate because

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of her husband's incapacity, this role is taken away when her son Harold returns from many years abroad. Eliot draws attention to a central notion of much subsequent feminist discourse – namely power – and in this case the loss of status that goes with it and, as the novel unfolds, her loss of sexual power too.

Both Gaskell and Eliot moved away from the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* in some of their other novels, shifting from a focus on the individual to close examinations of a community. This, King suggests, gave them much more scope for exploring women's, and men's, lives, as evidenced in Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–2) and Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853). For those who know *Cranford* – or perhaps saw the BBC series back in 2007 – its central themes of female friendship and cross-generational sisterhood, its concentration on the present and on interpersonal relationships, challenge the decline narrative of old age and move older women, in King's words, 'from the margins of fiction to its centre' (p. 32). The third and final chapter of Part One also begins to highlight the work of Simone de Beauvoir who introduced us to the notion of 'the Other'. To illustrate this 'othering', King chooses to examine dementia through the lens of Norah Hoult's novel *There Were No Windows* (1944). Here, writ large, are the old stereotypes associating madness with deviant female sexuality. At the same time, the novel illuminates the fragmentary and multiple nature of identity – both self-identity and identity as viewed by others. I found this exposition and discussion particularly interesting because I don't know the novel and, although based on the true life story of Violet Hunt – partner of Ford Madox Ford – it is written from 'the inside' and deals with our fear of ageing and the threat to identity posed by memory loss and the encroach of dementia.

The challenge of covering 100 years (1850–1950) in just three chapters is considerable. What Part One of the book does do successfully is provide a platform for Parts Two and Three in which feminist concerns around stereotyping, power, sisterhood, female friendship, othering and identity are all overtly the purview of younger women. The generational distancing within the women's movement contrasts sharply with the identification and naming of ageism at this time. Here, King provides a sensitive and detailed discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's *La Vieillesse* (1970) – translated as *The Coming of Age* in 1972. She discusses the hostile reaction it received from some quarters at the time (the late Robert Butler included) as well as later critiques by feminists and feminist gerontologists. Yet, while second-wave feminists may have been indifferent to de Beauvoir's arguments, King contends that novelists from the 1960s to the 1980s picked up and explored the issues she wrote so passionately about including: identity and the ageing process; the role of culture in the ageing experience; generational conflict, self and Othering; and resistance to Othering. Doris Lessing's *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988), Sara Maitland's *Three Times Table* (1990) and Emma Tennant's *Faustine* (1992) are all presented and skilfully dissected as exemplars of these themes. These novels challenge us on many levels: they confront us with the harsh realities of ageing, as in

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Lessing's graphic descriptions of sickness and incontinence, but also counterpoint that with challenges to the invisibility of the old and the recognition that old age is an integral a part of the lifecourse. As King observes though, 'these novels speak *for* old women' (p. 101), so she goes on to contrast them with first-person autobiographical novels, notably Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (1964), Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger* (1987) and May Sarton's *A Reckoning* (1978). These all explore the idea of a 'core' self and demonstrate different approaches to 'life review' and to that final taboo of all – death and dying.

The historical dimension of Part Three of the book is marked out by the ageing of second-wave feminists themselves: in the 1990s, Germaine Greer is in her fifties when her book on the menopause – *The Change* – appears; Betty Friedan is in her seventies when *The Fountain of Age* comes out. Both authors challenge existing discourses of ageing – and third-wave feminism itself – which still render older women invisible. While second-wave feminists are now writing about ageing from direct experience, contemporary novelists too are ageing. King thus returns to the novels of Doris Lessing, whose career and novels she first wrote about nearly 25 years ago in 1989. She looks at Lessing's (1973) 'midlife progress narrative' (Gullette 1998), *The Summer before the Dark*, before comparing and contrasting it with *Love, Again*: her 1996 novel exploring post-menopausal freedom, ageing and sexual desire. These themes are reiterated in Lessing's 2003 novella, *The Grandmothers*. King is excellent at showing the complex ways in which Lessing has explored female sexuality and ageing and, in these last two texts in particular, how she has challenged us in her depiction of relationships between older women and younger men. King's examination of identity and intimacy is further developed through her analysis of Bobbie Ann Mason's (1988) *Spence + Lila* and then, in the concluding chapter, through Angela Carter's (1992) Rabelaisian novel about the 75-year-old Chance twins: *Wise Children*.

This book is erudite and scholarly as one would expect. However, for gerontologists unfamiliar with literary criticism it might prove a little hard going. Disappointingly too, there is no reference made to the work of social researchers who might have illuminated some of the themes in a more rounded way. In particular, the copious amount of research during the third wave – much of it from a feminist perspective – about informal care, carers and the role of women, is notable by its absence. Likewise, there is no mention at all of key figures in social gerontology apart from a solitary reference to the work of Sara Arber and Jay Ginn (1991) and this, simply to point out that 'we can all become victims of ageism, unlike sexism or racism' (p. 43).

Whilst there is much to admire and enjoy in this scholarly book, at the end I was left wondering who exactly the audiences for it might be. Literary scholars interested in ageing certainly; and, like me, those who believe that novels have as much to offer our understanding of the experience of ageing as more conventional social, scientific and medical research. Literary gerontology is still far from being mainstream and there is much to be done

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to convince students and colleagues alike of the value of such novels alongside the journal articles and books we all strive to keep on top of. If you don't want to add this book to your personal reading list, I would encourage you to at least read one of the novels – you won't regret it.

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