

Cynthia Laura Vialle-Giancotti  
Ageing in All its Facets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

### Ageing in All its Facets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Instructor: Cynthia Laura Vialle-Giancotti

Pronouns: She, her, hers

Room:

Day and Time:

Office Hours: TBD

### Course Description:

What does it mean to age today? What did it mean to age at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Do we experience aging in the same way across time? Across cultures? How does one go about representing old age? Can it ever be a neutral, realistic, faithful representation? Where does the aging process as the concrete human experience start and where does the cultural construction stop? How does one represent old age when one is young? What about when one is old? What does it mean to age as a woman? What does it mean to age as a man? Throughout this class we will explore disparate answers that different authors have offered for these questions. Several threads will guide our reading and will appear and re-appear in all the texts: memory, loss, decay and degeneration, fear of death. We will also think and re-think our own perception of old age and take into consideration the problem of ageism, a form of discrimination that, in the end, if we really think about it, is quite preposterous since it is directed towards our future selves. (Taught in English)

### Calendar

#### Week 1: Introduction. Ageing, its forms and constructions

**Section 1** Introduction to the class

Rembrandt (1606-1669), Cycle of Self-Portraits (1640-1669)

Portraits and Photographies of Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

**Section 2** Edward Said (1935-2003), *On Late Style* (2004) (Selections)

#### Week 2: Time, Consciousness and Aging

**Section 1** Marcel Proust (1871-1922), opening of *Du côté de chez Swann* [Swann's way] (1913)

*Time regained* [*Le Temps Retrouvé*] (1927) (Selections)

**Section 2** Marcel Proust (1871-1922), *Time regained* [*Le Temps Retrouvé*] (1927) (Selections)

Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896) (Selections)

#### Week 3: Continued

**Section 1** Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), (Selections)

**Section 2** Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-1987), *Memoirs of Hadrian* [*Mémoires d'Hadrien*] (1951),

“Animula vagula blandula”

#### Week 4: Female Aging and its Representations

**Section 1** Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), *The Years* (1937)

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Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), *The Coming of Age [La Vieillesse]* (1970) (Selections)

**Section 2** Marguerite Duras (1914-1996), *The Lover [L'amant]* (1984) (Selections)

Selections from *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999)

**Week 5: Male Aging and its Representations**

**Section 1** André Gide (1869-1953), *Journal* (1942-1949) (Selections)

**Section 2** Fredrik Backman (1981), *A Man Called Ove* (2012)

**Week 6: The Trope of the Old Fool: Lust at the old age**

**Section 1** Thomas Mann (1875-1955), *Death in Venice [Der Tod in Venedig]* (1912)

**Section 2** Marcel Proust (1871-1922), Portraits and Adventures of Charlus in

*Sodome et Ghomorre & La Prisonnière*

Frank Kermode (1919-2010), *The Sense of an Ending* (2000) (Selections)

**Week 7: The Trope of the Old Fool: Losing touch with reality**

**Section 1** Italo Svevo (1861-1928), *A perfect Hoax [Une burla riuscita]* (1929)

**Section 2** Italo Calvino (1923-1985), *Mr. Palomar [Palomar]* (1983) (Selections)

**Week 8: Portraits of Aging Men**

**Section 1** Portraits selected from:

Michel Houellebecq (1956-), *The Map and the Territory [La Carte et Le Territoire]* (2010)

Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), *The General in his Labyrinth [El general en su laberinto]* (1989)

Karl Ove Knausgård (1968-), *My Struggle [Min Kamp]* (2009)

**Section 2** Michel Houellebecq (1956-), *The Elementary Particles [Les Particules Élémentaires]* (1998) (Selections)

Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017), *Mortality, Immortality and other life strategies* (1992) (Selections)

**Week 9: Old Age between Idyll and Satyre**

**Section 1** Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)

**Section 2** Jonas Jonasson (1961-), *The 100-year Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* (2012)

**Week 10: Old Age and Satyre**

**Section 1** Jonas Jonasson (1961-), *The 100-year Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* (2012)

**Section 2** Final Discussions and Poster Presentation

Other suggested readings:

-Ernst Becker: *The Denial of Death*, New York, Macmillan, 1973

- *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. By Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, New York, Routledge, 1998

- John Powell, *Social Theory and Aging*, Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006

-*Handbook of the humanities and aging*, New York : Springer, 1992

-- Robert Butler, *Why survive?: Being old in America*, New York : Harper & Row, 1975. Robert Butler, founder of the Columbia Aging Center, also coined the word ageism.

-Ariès, Philippe, and Helen Weaver. *The Hour of Our Death*. New York: Knopf, 1981. Print.

While these two books deal with cinematic ageism, they contain interesting sociological theory:

- *Fade to gray: aging in American cinema*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2016

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-Amir Cohen-Shalev, *Visions of aging: images of the elderly in film*, Brighton [England]; Portland, Or. : Sussex Academic Press, 2009

### Course Objectives and Learning Goals

Through successful completion of this course, students are expected to be able to:

#### Literary and cultural analysis

- Demonstrate critical thinking and writing skills, mastery of conceptual tools learnt in class;
- Learn to research a social and historical phenomenon, using a variety of resources from different fields;
- Use the vocabulary of literary analysis and develop your interpretations both of fiction and social change, both orally and in writing;
- Identify, isolate and analyse the ways in which a society constructs old age at a given time;
- Show a sense of “cultural” (for lack of a better word) awareness towards ageism and its concealed expressions;

### Evaluations

#### 3 Units

- **Class Participation (20% of the Grade)**
- **Short Oral Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, on assigned topic to kick off discussion.
- **One Page Paper (40% of the Grade)**, six in total.
- **Poster Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, in groups of 2, 3 or 4

#### 4 Units

- **Class Participation (10% of the Grade)**
- **Short Oral Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, on assigned topic to kick off discussion.
- **One Page Paper (20% of the Grade)**, six in total.
- **Poster Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, in groups of 2, 3 or 4.
- **Final Paper or Final Quiz (30% of the Grade)**, 7-8 pages // 5 essay questions to be prepared over a week.

#### 5 Units

- **Class Participation (10% of the Grade)**
- **Short Oral Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, on assigned topic to kick off discussion.
- **One Page Paper (20% of the Grade)**, four in total.
- **Poster Presentation (20% of the Grade)**, in groups of 2, 3 or 4.

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- **Final Paper or Final Quiz (30% of the Grade)**, 10-12 pages / /6 essay questions to be prepared over a week.

**Details on the Evaluation format**

**1. Class Participation:** reading the assigned materials, participating actively in the class discussions;

**2. Short Oral presentation:** 15min max presentation on an assigned topic, decided together with the instructor, to kick off class discussion. Presentations Suggestions:

1) Paraphrase the text (summarize it and describe its logical sequence/narrative structure). Or present an overview of the issue at hand, when the presentation is about background information.

2) Present the two or three passages you find most relevant and analyze them. If you are not presenting about readings on the syllabus, bring mini excerpts from relevant written material.

3) Suggest insightful questions for our class discussion.

Make your presentation a lively one, with or without props such as Powerpoint, handouts, transparencies, etc. You have anywhere from 8 to 12 minutes, even more if you engage the class (it is ideal to combine your role as presenter with that of discussion moderator). Throughout

**3. One Page Paper:** (4-500 word count), due for section 2 of the week. It will be the starting point for Section 2's class discussion. The content should be pertinent to the week's readings: you can expand on a theme presented in a text, contest an author's/ critic's perspective and/or representation, compare different texts, etc. You will have to submit six throughout the quarter, it is up to you when you'll do so.

**4. Poster Presentation:** Students get together in groups of 2, 3 or 4 and present one theme or object priorly agreed with the instructor. Prepare a poster presentation (Paper format / /digital format) and be prepared to walk your classmates and instructors through your poster. The poster should explain the object and how it relates to one of the themes discussed in class. Feel free to be as creative as you want. Visual prompts are strongly encouraged. If you have in mind an ageistic representation of old people in movies, you could present and/or analyse scenes in light of the concepts learnt in class.

**5. Final Research Paper:** Length of the paper will depend on the number of Units. You will expand on a theme or a work explored in class, analyse it critically by using the appropriate concepts and vocabulary learnt in class. The topic is to be discussed in advance with the instructor.

**OR Final Quiz:** You will pick 5/6 essay questions out of the 10 proposed and answer with 4-600 words to each one of them. The questions will be announced on the last day of class and you will have one week of time to submit them. Spelling accuracy, good grammar, good structure and syntax are fundamental, considering the allotted time.

**Affordability, Diversity and Inclusion**

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Since I believe in the importance of free education, I am committed to make this class financially accessible to all students, therefore: **all of the material for the class will be available on Canvas, you are not expected to buy anything.**

Given the sensitive and challenging nature of the material discussed in class, it is imperative that there be an atmosphere of trust and safety in the classroom. We will work on fostering an environment in which everyone feels safe to speak and is open to listening to what the other has to say.

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.