

Gerámata

The New Ageing Woman in *Juanita* (2019) and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022):

Against a Narrative of Decline

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1 Introduction

Historically, growing old has been perceived with negative connotations. According to philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca “old age is a disease” (30) (*senectus morbidus est*) and is unavoidable for all humans. It is due to this that its representation is often a debated topic in visual culture. However, as the number of people reaching old age has increased over the last five years a demand for more films to problematize social concerns surrounding the ageing experience, and the portrayal elder characters have in Western cinema has increased. This has allowed multiple discourses to re-evaluate and redefine the self in different parts of the ageing process. For instance, films such as *Blackbird* (Roger Michell, 2019), *The Lost Daughter* (Maggie Gyllenhaal, 2021), or *The Father* (Florian Zeller, 2020) are dramas that have showcased the complexities that the ageing experience presents through different representational strategies that accentuate the social aspects of ageing. Along with this, they have also created a deep focus on middle-aged women, a trait not so common in previous cinematic representations. Yet, this portrayal still leaves a reductive storyline for the characters, that suggest a troubled or ambiguous outcome for them and perpetuates some negative ageist stereotypes around ageing women. In comparison, Western comedy films often present a different approach towards representations of the ageing process and have managed to challenge the portrayal elder women have on cinema by extensively exposing and exploring certain contemporary issues, such as sexuality, that are normally missing or muted in the ageing discourse. Through the comedy films *Juanita* (2019) by director Clark Johnson and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022) by Sophie Hyde new pathways for cinematic representations of old age that highlight the interconnected structures surrounding care, age and gender, can be appreciated in a social as well as aesthetic sense.

As a part of a research project targeting the contemporary Western cinematic representation of elder women, this paper focuses on these two films, as they do not reduce ageing into a biomedical perspective linked to the decline of the elder characters but create new paths in pre-existing storylines that expand the discourses surrounding old age. Both movies do so by presenting multifaceted female main characters, that defy traditional patterns that associate ageing and decay, that are present in previous films. The cinematic language of both films highlights the gendered aspect of growing old and the current care related anxieties present in contemporary discourses circling old age. Even though the films problematize other relevant topics through its secondary characters, such as the destigmatization of sex work, the primary

focus of this essay will be on the struggles and development of the main female protagonists in each film, Nancy and Juanita, and how their characterization showcases the effects of the crisis of care and yet presents a positive outcome for the characters. This paper claims that *Juanita* (2019) and *Good Luck to you Leo Grande* (2022) actualize and reconstruct the iconography of the middle-aged woman into an active character who incorporates cultural anxieties regarding ageing but still presents a dynamic narrative about transformation and progress. The two films analysed focus on constructing new discourses about the relationship between ageing and care and help to create new pathways for the depiction of the senescent female body as a symbol of persistence and continuity, rather than decline.

The following sections will examine the cinematography, storyline, and depiction of the social aspects of ageing experience from the perspective of the female protagonists. To support the analysis of these films, this paper will rely on several notions surrounding care, age, and gender and a multidisciplinary approach will be used, drawing upon relevant insights of gender studies, film studies, and literary gerontology. The notions of age and care utilized in this paper will be adapted from Sally Chiver's analysis of how "care might seem to limit what we imagine later life to be, the question especially of long-term care propels social and cultural meanings of population aging" (Chivers 19). In addition, this paper will also rely on Margaret Gulleite's theory on how individuals not only age in a physical sense but are affected by what she defines as being 'aged by culture', a process where "the meanings of age and aging are conveyed in large part through the moral and psychological implications of the narrative ideas we have been inserting into our heads, starting when we were very young indeed" (Gulleite 200) and how "our age narratives become our virtual realities" (Gulleite 203). The notions and theories from each respective author helped to analyse the selected films.

2 Middle Age and The Decline Narrative

In order to better understand the characters and the dynamics in each film it is important to comprehend certain concepts and conventions that surround ageing women in cinema in the 21st century as there are specific gendered issues in old age especially regarding the representation of middle-aged characters. This section will analyze previous filmic representations of ageing and old age in mainstream global cinema, with a specific focus on the ageing experience for women and explain how the concepts of decline are present in the characterization and cinematography in majority of Western movies.

While some films have focalized and depicted profoundly the ageing experience for women, majority fall under traditional narrative cinematic patterns and are embedded in what is known as the decline narrative, a kind of storyline that has “equated old age with the loss of agency and social invisibility” (Falcus 12). According to age critic Margaret Gullette, “The story that mainstream culture insists on is that midlife aging is a disaster to be feared and warded off: dangerous or boring, banal or risky, mainly the onset of the decline into old age” (Gullette 20). This creates limiting arches for women as they age and presents their outcome in a film, often as a form of physical or mental decline such a bitterness, death, solitude, or institutionalization. These outcomes tend to be present in most films in Western Cinema, shaping and leaving then a reduced interpretations and visions of old age, usually equating old age with something negative.

This negative connotation is not only present in the outcome of the story but in how the elder character is portrayed and its behavior throughout the film. “Older characters throughout the ages are either depicted as figures of fun because of their social ineptitude and inappropriate desires, or punished by narratives for being interfering and outdated in their attitudes” (Brennan 26). Along with this, ageing female bodies representations “include poor health, declining mental ability, the perception that older people are more conservative, unhappy, lonely and undervalued” (Antosik 305). This representation of the ageing experience shapes the cultural perception younger generations would have towards growing old and leads women that reach decline to perceive their life as a series of events leading to decline. In addition to this, author Margarete Gullette expresses the decline narrative has become a “contemporary shared narrative about later life that hammers the inevitable slide into decline with a better now

and worse later” (Gullette 12). This reinforces negative stigmas against the old as passive subjects and highlights the internalization of elder invisibility and subjugation.

Ageing studies have emphasized the need to dive deeper into the representational strategies of middle and old age as the depiction of ageing characters helps individuals visualize and understand their own ageing procedure. In earlier films in 21st century, characters that reached older age were marginal characters and othered within their own stories. Ageing struggles were often reduced to biomedical perspective where the main focus of their storyline was in the slow decline of their physical and mental condition. While films such as *Away From Her* (2017) and *Emmerdale* (2017) help create an understanding of the medical conditions that can affect women as they age, they neglected another social aspects that women also experience, such as sexual desire or construction of identity in later life.

In contrast, films such as *Something's Gotta Give* (2003) have managed to showcase elder women as sexually active, yet from a visual cinematic standpoint they neglect aspects regarding the ageing woman's body. In *Something's Gotta Give*, the main character Erica while standing naked in front of the mirror is seen by her husband, an act which surprises her, generates her to scream and hide her body. Instance like this are repeated throughout the film, where when the characters are about to perform a sexual act, something or someone interrupts it. These highlights the comedic message of the movie; however, it locates the elder female body and her desire for sexuality as something uncomfortable embarrassing and eventually, something to be hidden from the view. The lack of fulfilment in their actions and images about elder characters leads to link old age and decline.

The decline narrative is not only present in the lack of visuality on screen but also in the negative storyline that ageing characters are subjected to, where old age is perceived as a threat. “Characters in these films either manage to heroically hold off the threat or succumb to it as a victim” (Rick 169). Films like *Clouds of Sils Maria* (2014) exemplify this plot, as the main character, Maria a middle-aged actress that offered a role in the same play that made her famous in her youth, with the exception that she is now set to play the elder antagonist. In the film she heavily attaches herself to her past success and is unable to see the future of her career due to the constant reminder that she is not young anymore. This eventually leads her to have a bitter ending in the film.

However, as “the overall demographic structure of the population is changing, the interpretation of different age groups inevitably shifts as well, which is bound to show in all fields of culture” (Kalmár 28). Along with this, due to shift occurred after 2017, with the widespread of the metoo movement, cinema has begun to analyse the interplay that gender and sexuality have on screen and breakaway from the decline narrative. “This systemic view of women’s world cinema by no means excludes aesthetic critique or formal analysis; rather, it aims to situate such methodologies in relation to the geopolitical economies that shape and delimit any gendered politics of aesthetics” (Hennefeld 202). As a result, new movies in the last few years have started to create newer storylines for women where the ageing process can be perceived under a more positive light. In the base of this, the films that were selected for this analysis help contribute to this trend and create a new image of ageing women while managing to still portray the complexities within the ageing procedure.

3 An Analytical Look at Care and The New Ageing Woman in Mainstream Global Cinema: *Juanita* (2019) and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022)

Continuing to focus on the Western cinematic reassessment of the traditional structures surrounding age and women in cinema, this section focuses on *Juanita* (2019) and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022) as the storylines presented highlight socially relevant concerns around the ageing experience. Both films occupy distinct positions in comedy, as even though they work over a base of recurrent themes present in films about old age, such as conflicted main characters and dysfunctional family relationships, the manner in which the main characters manoeuvre themselves in particular situations, challenges canonized storylines in the frame of the ageing experience. Both films centre on the journey of a middle-aged woman and how the circumstances they experience go beyond society’s expected behaviour for older women. The film *Juanita* (2019), tells the story of 49-year-old Juanita Lewisnton, who abandons her family and travels to Montana where she reinvents herself, on the other hand the movie *Good luck to You Leo Grande* (2022), tells the story of 55-year-old Nancy Robinson, who decides to hire a sex worker in order to obtain more sexual experience. Throughout the films, the journey, and the interactions that the two women have with others and themselves lead them to a more complex understanding of old age that defies traditional patterns written within the decline narrative. Both *Juanita* (2019) and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022)

focus on constructing a new representation of the ageing woman while at the same time questioning the relationship care, gender and age have.

Gerontology studies have highlighted the importance care has in the conceptualization of the self in later life, especially in middle age. In majority of Western societies, age and gender work as referential for the division of caring roles, where the caretaker position is often seen as a part or “facet of the adult female role, intimately bound up with those of ‘mother’ and ‘wife’” (Thomas 652). Therefore, since a young age, women internalize that as they grow older, they will be the ones to act as carers for other people and equates older age with a reorganization of the self where the needs of others are a priority, which frequently leaves out the fact that women are also in need of care. This often creates conflicting feelings regarding the ageing experience for and contributes to the crisis of care that is present in the 21st century.



Figure 1: Juanita and Nancy opening scenes. *Juanita* 01:11 and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* 01:38

The film problematizes the effects that the crisis of care has on ageing women from the beginning in each film. The aesthetics in both movies establish a problematic scenario from their opening scenes. In *Juanita*, the film begins with a cartoon sequence of her life, where it is shown how in her youth she was abandoned by her husband, and she is depicted heartbroken taking care of her children. Similarly, the opening scenes in *Good luck To You Leo Grande*, introduce a nervous and agitated Nancy waiting for someone to arrive in her hotel room. The narrative technique used in both opening scenes helps establish the uneasy relationship that the

characters have with their current state of life. This uneasy state is further emphasized later in the story when both women talk about their lives, particularly regarding them caring for others.

The narrative strategy surrounding the characters remarks how identity in old age is still being dominated by societal notions and reflects the current crisis of care for women present in middle and old age. At the beginning of the film, Juanita while taking care of her granddaughter, states how she loves her family, yet she tells the audience how “my mama told me to wait to have kids so I waited, but I should have kept on waiting” (Johnson 2019). Although at first, she is very attentive to her children and granddaughter she finds herself wishing to have time off from the constant caring activities she is supposed to perform, to the extent where she desires on occasion to not have had children in order to experience a sense of freedom. Here, the film deconstructs dominant narratives about care as a satisfactory experience for older women. As Juanita explicitly states her inner thoughts, the ageing self that results from the narrative provides an insight to the effects of the current crisis of care, where tending to other’s needs can lead to neglecting personal desires.

Like Juanita, Nancy is depicted as overwhelmed by her caretaking position throughout the film. This becomes evident when asked about her son by Leo Grande, she confesses that she doesn't like spending time with him because “the truth is that he is boring” (Hyde 2020). The admission is quite surprising for Leo, as he replies how never heard anything similar before. The social construction surrounding the caretaker position for women tends to portray them as devoted to their children with a constant “assessment of children’s needs and wants and an extreme selflessness” (Chodorow 83), and the allusion to some other feeling within the mother-child relationship becomes shocking for others. Similarly, when referring to motherhood, Nancy also states: “we are all stuck with whatever we get, aren’t we? Parents and children alike” (Hyde 2020). Nancy challenges traditional conventions with this statement, as motherhood is not enough for her to feel fulfilled and by not being content or behaving in a completely selfless manner and seeking to build her identity beyond her caretaker position.

Juanita (2019) and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022) indicate the effect that the crisis of care has in an individual level in order to express a collective issue over how caring for others can have detrimental consequences for caretakers. The way ageing emerges in the films correlates the characters not only to their mother roles but to their professions. The two

protagonists perform traditional caring roles associated to women, Juanita is a nurse in a hospital and Nancy is teacher in an all-girls catholic school. The film showcases how even outside of the family unit they have to perform caring tasks and how it affects the development of their personal identity up until middle age.

Gendered notions of ageing establish socially constructed limitations for women and “caring tends to be associated not only with women, but with those private places where intimate relations with women are found” (Thomas 650). Both women express their frustration in private settings, Nancy in the room with Leo and Juanita in the inside of her own mind, when she breaks the fourth wall and talks to the audience. Societal norms would not make it acceptable for these feelings to be expressed in the open, so the two women have to acknowledge these issues in private. The cinematic language and dialogue present in the films make it possible to convey the conflictive relationship between care and female identity have in older age.

The extent in which both women present conflictive feelings and have trouble reconciling with their expected caring roles distinguishes them from other cinematic portrayals. While in past years comedy films have depicted frustrated mothers, the direct manner in which the characters in *Juanita* (2019) and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022) express their frustration creates a new pathway for the depiction of ageing women. The movies’ narrative technique creates depicts the characters as dissatisfied caretakers in order to demonstrate how societal expectations took a toll into their lives, often creating or emphasizing the lack of personal development due what a caretaker role demands. The films highlight how the extent of this demand becomes present with the reminder of death, for Juanita it is the death of one of her patients, Mrs Burman and for Nancy is after the death of her husband.

The films explore the gendered aspect of growing old, as the main patriarchal figures in the life of Juanita and Nancy are missing. This lack of patriarchal figure allows the women to redefine themselves as individuals in a new context. Not being presented with a male figure deconstructs patterns attached to female ageing where women are always present within the domestic setting, and the nature of caring is intertwined with “the social constructed location of women within the ‘intricate relationships’ of the family, of the marriage” (Thomas 652). Straying from these scenarios, allows both Nancy and Juanita to not being constructed as part

of the family unit or within the spousal division, but as individual characters. In this respect, the narrative permits the characters to reconsider outside of societal patterns, what they want in order to live a fulfilling life.

3.1 Desires as Catalysts

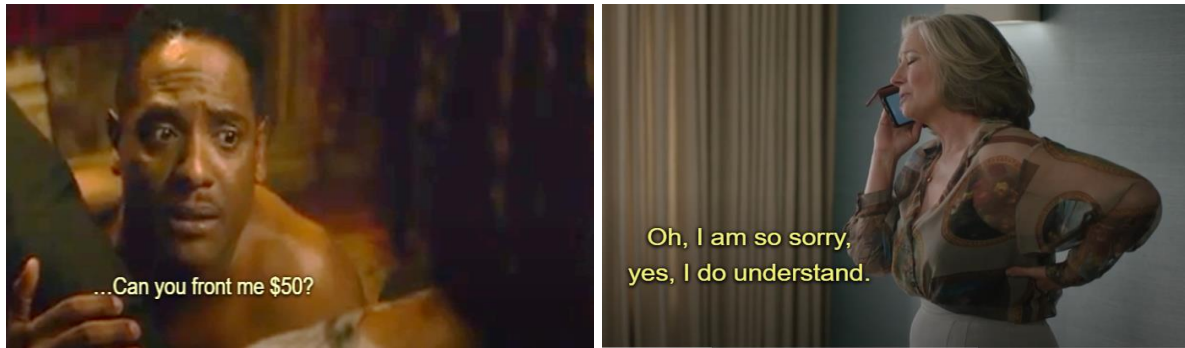


Figure 2: Juanita's fantasy. (*Juanita*, 12:38) and Nancy being interrupted by her daughter (*Good Luck to You Leo Grande*, 44:18)

The necessity to experience a more fulfilling life becomes the main motivator of Nancy's and Juanita's actions. To a large extent, both women express how they experience a level of dissatisfaction in relation to their sexual life. Traditionally, "sexuality is generally removed from the lives of elderly characters" (Bell 1991: 309), yet in the films it is stated explicitly. In the case of Juanita, her lack of gratification is evident from the beginning of the film, as she has regular fantasies with actor Blair Underwood, up until the moment she leaves her home. These fantasies, at first appear to be sexual in nature, but eventually the fantasy develops in a way which resembles how her children or even her patients act, constantly requesting to be cared for in some manner, to the extent that the actor starts requesting for money from her. Even in her own imagination Juanita cannot find fulfilment since she is either interrupted by her children or by her own mind which cannot seem to locate her personal wishes outside of her caring role.

Similarly, in *Good luck To You Leo Grande*, Nancy's unfulfilled desires are also linked to her sexual experience, and correlate with the conflicting relationship with care. Throughout her encounters, she expresses to Leo Grande that she hired him due to the lack gratification from her previous sexual encounters with her late husband and also confesses how she never

had an orgasm and how she wishes to experience one. The struggle to maintain social harmony within her marriage and the lack of imagery in relation to women and later age, led her to prevail her husbands' needs over hers throughout the years, and to not express her discontentment.

The movies not only attempt to create an individual story but to problematize the relationship between care and gender that is present today in most Western societies. By stressing the effects it creates on both women, the narrative constructs new discourses to explore the development of the self in old age. Therefore, the focus that the films have of women as dissatisfied caretakers that recognize their dissatisfaction, not only exposes the crisis of care as something gendered, but also leaves place for new narratives where the female characters' desires are not displaced but serve as catalysts for the two women to act and change in their lives. These desires are what ultimately causes Nancy to contact Leo more times and for Juanita to finally leave her family and job. The recognition of the care-crisis effects while depicting active characters reinforces how the story works against the stagnation aspect that is present in the decline narrative, as both women take action to change their current situations.

3.2 Active Characters

As seen in traditional portrayals, majority of elder women are not depicted to have a dynamic form of old age and are secluded to the household or rarely present in other spaces. Traditionally, elder women are associated with inactivity and recurring portrayals of elder female characters are trapped as "a figure who lives in the past and cannot cope with the present, much less the idea of the future" (Brennan 12). This is heavily emphasized in films where characters often rejoice in the glory of their youth and neglect their present situation, leading them to be perceived as crazy, silent, or static and eventually falling into the decline narrative. Whereas Nancy's and Juanita's portrayal leads to a different arch and a new characterization of the ageing woman as an active character within their storylines.



Figure 3: Nancy in the room with Leo (*Good Luck to You Leo Grande* 28:19)

The story in the films showcases the two protagonists most of the time in movement and in a series of ‘nonconventional’ scenarios. In majority of the scenes in both films, Juanita and Nancy are constantly crossing spaces, walking from one corner of a room to the other and even crossing state borders. The aesthetics of the films highlight how the characters as constantly in motion, as well as the spaces they inhabit throughout the film. The spatial framing in the two movies reinforce the symbolic aspect of the character’s actions as a way of crossing or transgressing social boundaries. In *Good Luck to You Leo Grande*, this is exemplified in how Nancy is with a sex worker in a hotel room. The bedroom is a space mostly associated with the youth and with sexual encounters, both concepts that are disconnected with narratives regarding elder women.



Figure 4: Juanita outside throughout the film (*Juanita* (2019) - 43:39-01:05- 01:25-01:36)

On the other hand, Juanita spends most of her time in Montana being out in the open air and participating in several outdoor activities such as taking part in traditional native American retreat in the mountains. As previously mentioned, elder women are usually confined to domestic or filial spheres and almost exclusively these are locked spaces. These locked spaces contribute to invisibility of elder women and the association of them within a collective setting. Juanita being on the outside disrupt naturalized conventions of old age and suggests a form of visibility of the ageing self.



Figure 5: Juanita and Nancy in movement (*Good Luck to You Leo Grande* and *Juanita*)

Another element that reinforces the visibility of the ageing woman is speaking. Throughout most of her encounters with Leo, Nancy spends her time engaging in conversation, and Juanita throughout most of the film recurrently breaks the 4th wall and talks straight to the audience about her inner thoughts. While talking serves for the two women to delay certain events it also allows them to validate their agency, as both express explicitly what they want, whether that is their sexual fantasy, their need for things to change or their wish to move forward. As “ageing is also a highly embodied experience because the physical changes women encounter lead to perceptions of older women as physically vulnerable, asexual and silent, rendering them invisible” (Antosik 305) when Nancy clearly expresses in relation to having an orgasm, how she “won't be faking it, not anymore” (Hyde 2020) and Juanita states that she needed to “leave or she would have end up hating the people I am supposed to love” (Johnson 2019), they counteract past experiences where they were subjected to situations that repressed them and located them as passive subjects. This interpretation of past events defines the present experienced by the ageing self as one with positive outcomes, by allowing the characters to go through a breakthrough by talking and expressing their needs.

The depiction of the characters as active, helps reject the ideological system that positions the elder woman as silent and invisible. Both women confirm their presence by moving and defying the limits of traditional social conventions. For Juanita that is to move forward, travel and engage into a romantic relationship as she always desired to do, while for Nancy it is to understand pleasure, herself, and her body. The two women do not fall under the decline pattern where they are quietly dissatisfied until their final days, instead they alter their situation. This change of their circumstances allows the narrative to focus on continuity, progress, and for the image of the ageing woman to be interpreted within this particular aspect.

4 The Senescent Body in *Juanita* (2019) and *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* (2022)

The image of the ageing female body has often been presented in reductive terms in most cinematic representations. This has created narrow pathways for ageing bodies where the narrative has focus on either a biomedical or comedic aspect. However, the films *Good Luck to you Leo Grande* and *Juanita* showcase through its narrative and cinematography how the social complexities of female ageing construct alternative views for the senescent body. By utilizing an ageing studies approach, this section analyzes how visually the main characters are

presented on screen and their intersection with the narrative, and how from a narrower respect, the ageing body can be read as a sign of persistence instead of decline.

According to ageing studies the underrepresentation of the elder female body is not only due to its lack of visibility but also to the social connotations that surround elderly bodies. The ageing body does not only encompass the outer physical appearance, but the perception elders and other members of society have regarding old age, as it is normally associated as a stage previous to death. Due to this association with decline, all visible signs of ageing tend to be eradicated from visual culture, not due to the actual condition of the elder body but to the connotations attached to it. This reflects how “society dictates that aged bodies should be covered to allow for a comfortable distancing; they should be prevented from telling ‘stories of getting old’ ” (Chivers xxv) which leads to a representation that tends to mock or censor the ageing body in some form, particularly in cinema.

In this respect the display of the ageing body on screen locates characters under very dim lighting with visible signs of ageing such as sunken, wrinkled faces, saggy breasts and stomach covered or simply cut off from the frame. This is something more prevalent in elder women than men. The “ageing women are doubly stigmatised in that they not only lose the potential for childbirth but also their youthful beauty is viewed as diminishing with age” (Chivers 2011: p. xv). Therefore, films tend to avoid any bodily aspects of old age and in doing so create prevailing ageist normativities around how age and narrative interact, especially when women and any form of sexual activity are related. The narrative allocates the elder body, especially female, as something comedic and sexual desire in old age as something to be ridiculed or to be ashamed for, leaving little space for sexuality to be explored as characters age. Gerontologist Susan Liddy refers to this as “the missing discourse of desire” (69) where an in-depth exploration of sexuality in old age has been absent, creating limiting discourses of ageing where “the middle-aged woman must somehow both acknowledge her sexual identity and at the same time, put it back down somewhere within her” (Tally 47).



Figure 6: Nancy refusing to look at herself in the mirror (*Good Luck to you Leo Grande* -59:27)

In *Good Luck to you Leo Grande* this is problematized early in the film as Nancy states “I’ve always been ashamed of myself. My body, I mean” (Hyde 2020). In her admission “there is a stigmatization of natural ageing processes, which involves a self-recognition of ageing cues as symbol of personal and social decline” (Rocio Gonzales 89). In several instances in the film, she mentions her age to Leo as something negative and she refuses to look at her own reflection. Nancy embodies several concerns women experience as they age regarding their appearance and sense of self. Her body is presented as something foreign to her and as a source of shame which led her in the past to neglect feelings and put her own sexual needs aside and which as she aged, became intertwined with the negative cultural connotations that surround old age. Throughout the film this perception continues to be a recurring presence, however as she interacts with Leo her perception gets altered as her encounters with Leo continue.

The notion of continuity and age become embedded within the ageing female body in the storyline presented in both films. At a particular point in each film, Juanita and Nancy look at themselves in the mirror. In *Good Luck To You Leo Grande*, after her last encounter with Leo, Nancy stands in front of the mirror, takes off her robe and appreciates her naked body. On the other hand, in *Juanita*, the protagonist, after she leaves her children and starts travelling, goes to a bathroom in a restaurant, where she talks and stares at herself in the mirror for a long time. “In popular culture, the body (especially the face) is presented, and meant to be felt as, the sinister index of aging” (Gullette 14) yet, here the characters do not hide away or equate their ageing faces as something menacing, instead they decide to continue staring into their reflection.

Anne D'Alleva, defines how “to look at oneself is to assert power, to control and to challenge authority” (13) and the characters in the film demonstrate that by the manner in which they look at themselves in the mirror. Therefore, as their ageing faces are not hidden from the view, the cultural constructions of erasure present in most discourses of ageing disappears. The established model that locates the elder women as culturally invisible is disrupted by the contemplation of their ageing selves in the mirror. The manner in which characters contemplate their reflection is non-judgemental, and their sense of self and journeys throughout the narrative, are no longer dissociated with the physical ageing experience. Due to this particular focalization, the ageing body enters the configuration of the narrative discourse with a positive connotation. When the characters look at themselves in the mirror, the split between body and identity is broken, and they become visible to themselves.



Figure 7: Nancy and Juanita stare into their reflection (*Good Luck to you Leo Grande* and *Juanita*)

Due to the focalization of the ageing self in the mirror, the characters become hyper visible to the viewers. The camera viewpoint prompts the audience to feel and view what the characters are seeing, and the cinematic language puts the viewers in the position both Juanita and Nancy take in front of the mirror, as we are faced directly with their reflection. As previously mentioned, it is rare that elder female characters are illuminated and central in the frame, as normally they would be hidden by shadows. The compositional order in these two films positions the elder body not as neglected or secondary but as the primary focus within the narrative. This order helps align with the character's perception of their own body and contributes to make their ageing selves as hyper visible as there is nothing but themselves and the perception of their bodies for the audience to observe.

The mirror scenes are aimed to counter the traditional erasure of women's bodies by challenging cultural stereotypes embedded in the decline narrative where elders see their physical selves as fragile, passive, grotesque, shameful and as an interference for their lives. In *Juanita* this becomes more evident in how she is not repulsed or negatively affected by her reflection, instead looking at herself acts as a grounding experience to remark what she wants for her life and allows her to continue with her journey to Montana. The bodily aspect is evident as well in *Good Luck to You Leo Grande*, when the audience can directly see Nancy's naked body on screen and the way she touches herself (see Figure 5). In this scene, the camera concentrates on showcasing how she stares at her breasts, stomach, and pelvic area and how pleased she is with herself. As both, Juanita's and Nancy's bodies are visually included in the narration, the mirror scene helps re-evaluate dominant narratives since the ageing body is perceived in an unprejudiced manner. These specific instances help disrupt the naturalized assumptions about the body of the ageing woman as a source of shame as here they are both satisfied with the outcome of their reflection, they see themselves in both aesthetically pleasing terms and content with their life in that moment. In this respect the narrative in the films not only showcases the ageing experience but creates a discourse that provides a consequential story of how ageing bodies can be perceived.

Overall, the two films selected frame elder bodies on an aesthetic that advocates straying away from the social ties that profoundly affect the ageing experience and suggests a re-examination of the perceptions that surround elder female bodies in cinema. This new approach to the ageing experience is conveyed through the visual and psychological implications of the characters and the narrative. The storyline promotes engagement with a new conceptualization of ageing, which links growing old not with decline but presents it as a dynamic and broad experience.

Conclusion

As the portrayal of the ageing experience for women continues to become a more frequent topic in cinema, it is important to explore and to analyse new models of representation of the ageing procedure and how they problematize the concerns that surround the ageing population.

Approaching the issue of representation and ageism from a mainstream cinematic perspective allows to create a concrete form to materialize the social issues about care, age and gender that affect elder women in contemporary Western society.

The main aim of this paper was to offer a review on how new feature films help break with ageist traditional portrayals of elder women in cinema. In support of this research, two films, *Good Luck to You Leo Grande* and *Juanita*, were analysed, each presenting elements that promote a new image of the ageing woman as a multifaceted and complex persona, and where the senescent body is associated with persistence.

The above-mentioned films, contribute to trend of ‘silvering the screen’, allowing a better portrayal of the complexity of the ageing experience. They do so by presenting similarities in the characterization and storyline of the protagonists where the influence of the metoo movement and new cinematic trends in mainstream cinema can be appreciated. Both movies explore not only the personal journey of the characters but also the social issues that affect their ageing experience and the development of their identity in later life. An akin characteristic within the films is the conflictive consequences that age, care, and gender present have on the characters. As in both films showcase the imbalanced situation of the caregiver where caring for others becomes problematic with how the characters wish to live their lives.

A specific scene in each film illustrates the shift in cinematic perspective towards ageing bodies, as both characters stare at themselves. The characters’ reflection is not a depiction of female narcissism but a way to counter the oppression elder women have in contemporary society. This common determining quality is also reflected in how the two women are presented as active characters and senescent body is portrayed on screen. The elder body is not just an accumulation of deteriorating characteristics, but it becomes a new form to rediscover and reinterpret the self. This reinterpretation creates a metacommentary over how elder bodies in society are perceived in a new contemporary context. Both films contribute to relate senescence with progress and transformation and contribute to create a more in depth understanding of ageing process by highlighting and inserting the ageing body in the narrative. The journey the characters have becomes intertwined with their ageing selves and not dissociated by it.

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