

pattern of presence-in-distance and distance-in-presence eventually establishes a permanent longing in her that she called her "blue longings."

Although the suffering was an obstacle to Johanne Luise in her personal develop-

ment, it did, according to Wamberg, give nourishment to her talent as an actress. On stage pain could transform itself into passion and here her unsatisfied desire could assert itself behind the artist's mask.

Thomasine lived her passions in her ac-

tual life; Johanne Luise lived her passions in the world of illusion on the stage. Both life stories, full of contradictions and ambivalences, give an exciting insight into the complexity of the possibilities for women in 19th century Denmark.

WOMEN AS ELDERS: IMAGES, VISIONS, AND ISSUES

Edited by Marilyn J. Bell. New York:
Haworth Press, 1986.

Myra Rutherdale

Women as Elders is a valuable addition to a growing, but still very small, literature on aging women. This specially published edition of the journal *Women and Politics* (Summer, 1986), is a collection of eight articles which range in topic from images of older black women in Toni Morrison's novels and aging of religious sisters, to women business owners' retirement planning and health care for older women. In her introduction, editor Marilyn J. Bell, a sociologist who has focused her research on older women, observes that the articles selected for this symposium are "diverse, but they belong together." Bell notes the emphasis which each author places on the importance and urgency for women to face the future and plan for their later years. Women must confront issues of health care, economic security, and social support systems today so that we will be able to find a "supportive community in which to live rather than a 'cubicle' in retirement housing."

The authors all forward the idea that only women will be able to find solutions to the problems we face as an aging population. As such, this book is a call-to-arms for women to take a leading role in collectively shaping our retirement years. While reading *Women as Elders*, I was reminded of the epigraph Margaret Laurence selected for *The Stone Angel* from a Dylan Thomas poem: "Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." The papers included in this collection all make suggestions on how to face issues such as housing and health care for elderly women, and on how to create a new image of older women as "strong, wise and dignified" to replace the traditional 'grandmotherly' portrayal

which we are accustomed to seeing in the work of Norman Rockwell or on television. Yet the authors are by no means utopian dreamers. In fact, their visions are very realistic and attainable.

In her "Crones Nest: The Vision," Nancy Breeze lays out the hopes and aspirations of a project which is still in the planning phase. Breeze maintains that "at a time when increasing ageism and sexism work to ignore and devalue older women, it is essential to discover ways that women can remain healthy and independent for as long as possible." In St. Augustine, Florida a number of women are working together on the Crones Nest project, an alternative residential community where older heterosexual and lesbian women will be able to live in private quarters, but participate in running the home and other recreational activities, if they choose.

Similarly, in "Aging: Religious Sisters Facing The Future," Rita L. Margraff presents her vision for sisters who must prepare for retirement by securing adequate housing and health care. In the author's congregation, Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, 73% percent of the women are over sixty, yet the majority of sisters have not arranged for retirement. Margraff argues that nuns must prepare to move away from their congregations into apartments or small houses and learn how to use their retirement and leisure time profitably by either taking other careers, like social work, or by becoming actively involved in community voluntary work until such time as their health demands that they return to their Motherhouses. One problem with this suggestion is that most nuns could not afford to live on their own. This is one of the major challenges which religious congregations must face, and soon: "Who is responsible for the woman religious? She herself? Her younger sisters? Professional administrators?"

Just as Margraff is very concerned about the future of aging sisters, so too does Jean M. Coyle express outrage at the fact that no empirical data has yet been gathered on retiring business women. In her article

"Retirement Planning and the Woman Business Owner," Coyle notes that this gap in social research is astounding — particularly when we consider that, according to the 1980 Census, of the 701,957 women who own businesses in the United States, 42% are over the age of 55. Coyle sets out directions for future research and boggles at the fact that society has so decidedly ignored the issue of retiring women business owners.

While some articles present visions of the future and suggest research directions, others concentrate on images of older women. In their article "Remembering Our Foremothers: Older Black Women, Politics of Age, Politics of Survival as Embodied in the Novels of Toni Morrison," Karla Holloway and Stephanie Demetrakopoulos explore images of older black women. This biracial collaboration (Holloway is a young black professor of English and Demetrakopoulos is a middle-age white professor of English) examines the portrayal of black women in Morrison's novels in terms of their African heritages and American experiences. Most importantly, this article points to cultural differences between black and white perceptions of the aging female. As the authors remark, "our essay shows how black women's feelings about being women must differ radically from white women's because black culture values the feminine and the aged so much more than white culture does." Holloway demonstrates how this tradition can be traced in Morrison's characters to their African heritage and how, in many ways, her women represent "feminist icons."

Like Holloway and Demetrakopoulos, psychologist Doris Hammond is concerned about the image of older women. In her article "Health Care For Older Women: Curing The Disease," Hammond argues convincingly that most older women "find themselves the victims of neglect and disrespect within the health care system, their complaints belittled, and their symptoms attributed to 'post menopausal syndrome,' old age, hy-

pochondriasis, or 'senility.'" Hammond makes two suggestions to help overcome this mistreatment. First, older women must develop confident self-images and an awareness of their exercise and nutritional needs, as well as an understanding of how they can benefit from social support systems. They must learn that the male physician figure who they were taught to revere and worship is not divine and should be questioned and challenged. Hammond's second suggestion, which is probably less achievable, is that the United States must

consider adopting a national health service because older women, on average, only earn about \$6,000 annually and can scarcely afford to pay for 60% of their medical care. Hammond insists that health care for older women must become a feminist issue: "the fact remains, and history substantiates," she asserts, "that it is only through women themselves, that the best solution will be found."

Women as Elders is not a book which attempts to interpret the past, nor is it a book that offers endless theories on the

subject of aging women. Rather, it is a straightforward blueprint for the future. The editor's diverse selection of articles is a convincing demonstration of the book's central theme that women, both young and old, must take an active role in creating new images and visions for the future as well as confronting issues pertinent to all women, especially older women. As a young feminist, I was impressed with the endless potential for women of all races and occupations to shape our later years by taking action now.

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