

THE SITE SUNDAY TALKS 2012

Just like a Woman: Meditations on Ageing

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Lynne Segal is Anniversary Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies in the Department of Psychosocial Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her books include *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*; *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*; *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*; *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology and Politics*; *Making Trouble: Life and Politics*. She is currently writing a book on ageing.

Do women have a special affinity with the topic of ageing? Certainly, many of the experiences and emotions of ageing have been associated with the feminine, from its apparent fragilities, abjection and humiliations to the laborious work of caring for those in need. Moreover, women as a group live longer than men and have been uniquely vilified as witches, crones and Medusas. Yet, whatever women's distinct fears of or affinities with ageing, and many men's bleak horror of old age, their differing ways of expressing and experiencing old age, especially in relation to desire, love and intimacy, could hardly be more diverse – even when coming from the very same person. Given the fluid temporalities Freud tried to illuminate in psychic life, and convoluted ties between minds and bodies, young and old, one might anticipate interesting accounts of the ageing process in psychoanalytic writing. However, the morbid dread of aging evident in Freud's own writing led him to disparage old age as a time of uncreative inflexibility, especially in women. When not distinctive for their lack of engagement with the topic, alternative theoretical attempts to analyze women and ageing have moved between the quintessentially heteronormative framings of certain psychoanalytic work to the appearance of feminist voices currently attempting to overturn the noxious interlacing of sexism and ageism in dominant cultural representations by declaring ageing women 'free at last'. My contribution will survey recent moves to redress the classic disdain for the topic of ageing, highlighting the radical ambivalence and ambiguity in the writing of those who, in the footsteps of Simone de Beauvoir, have tried to explore the ways in which women, in particular, are insistently and precociously aged by culture.

The lecture will begin at 6.30pm

Venue: Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

Tickets: £15 available in advance from jane@nairne.com or at the door (cash/cheque only).

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