OLD AGE IN FEATURE-LENGTH FILMS

The two films reviewed below, *Ladies in Lavender* and *Autumn Spring*, both focus on the transformations of characters in old age. In the former, two old sisters live a quiet life in a cottage on the coast of Cornwall in 1936. One of them lost her fiancé in WWI. The other has never experienced a great love in her life. Suddenly their serene life is turned topsy-turvy when they rescue a young Polish man who is washed up on shore below their cottage. Bradley Fisher, the reviewer for this film, analyzes the awakening of love in old age both as a folly for one of the minor characters in the film and as a profound event for one of the two sisters. He proposes that when one of the sisters finally is able to gain a perspective on her feelings of love and loss, she reaches a state of *elderhood*—representing an attainment of identity based upon self-awareness and self-knowledge. She reaches a state whereby she can redirect her passion for the young man. Now she realizes and accepts her status as his mentor and his advocate. At the same time, Fisher proposes that the relationship between the two sisters has been strengthened by virtue of their shared bonds regarding the experiences of love and loss. This film explores some of the tragic elements of old age and examines the desire to seek love and renewal even late in life.

The second film, *Autumn Spring*, appeared on Czech television in 2001. The reviewer, Howard Schwartz, analyzes the relationship between an old couple as an example of the contrasting philosophies of activity and disengagement. Whereas the husband delights in playful creativity and harmless con games—in order to maintain his zest for the possibilities of engagement—his wife has embraced the philosophy that life has ended for both of them. She prefers to make arrangements for the end of life and spends most of her time organizing her funeral and their burial arrangements. Their competing philosophies collide repeatedly, and the results are often hilarious. This film focuses on the comic elements of old age and examines the desire to seek love and renewal even late in life.

In the past several years three other audiovisual columns have included reviews of feature-length fictional films: Aging, Intergeneration, and Community (39, 4, 1999), including reviews of *Waking Ned Divine* and *Tea with Mussolini*; Aging and Loss: Feature-length films (43, 3, 2003), including reviews of *About Schmidt*, *Last Orders*, and *Iris* (United Kingdom); and Reel Images: Feature-length films (43, 4, 2003), including reviews of several international films—*After Life*, *Central Station*, *The King of Masks*, *The Shower*, *Yi Yi*, and *Etre et Avoir* (To Be and To Have)—and one American film, *The Straight Story*.

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