

Performing Age in Modern Drama

This book is the first to examine age across the modern and contemporary dramatic canon, from Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams to Paula Vogel and Doug Wright. All ages across the life course are interpreted as performance and performative both on page and on stage, including professional productions and senior-theatre groups. The common admonition "act your age" provides the springboard for this study, which rests on the premise that age is performative in nature, and that issues of age and performance crystallize in the theatre. Dramatic conventions include characters who change ages from one moment to the next, overtly demonstrating on stage the reiterated actions that create a performative illusion of stable age. Moreover, directors regularly cast actors in these plays against their chronological ages. Lipscomb contends that while the plays reflect varying attitudes toward performing age, as a whole they reveal a longing for an ageless self, a desire to present a consistent, unified identity. The works mirror prevailing social perceptions of the aging process as well as the tension between chronological age, physiological age, and cultural constructions of age.

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