

# Op-Ed

*Out in the Mountains*

## Three Little Letters – and Not the Ones You’re Thinking Of

by Alverta Perkins

‘Old,’ such a negative term in our culture! Just think about the terms we use every day: old biddy, old hen, dirty old man, old goat, geezer, old fool, old maid, old fogey, old fart, over the hill, out of date, gomer, finished, querulous, gnarled, crazy, grandma, gramps, out to pasture, down the drain, little old lady.

One has only to look in the greeting card displays to see the common joke of old age. It’s pathetic; it’s funny; it’s to be avoided at all costs. The word ‘old’ has such a bad connotation that more and more people now refuse to use the word. Instead, they call themselves ‘older.’ But what exactly does that say? Older than what? It’s a relative term: compared to a two-year-old, a three-year-old is ‘older!’

The media portrays old, especially old women, in a mostly negative way. The late unlamented TV show *Golden Girls* was an example of playing the old woman for a clown, characterized by many stereotypes. To be fair, there are a few positive roles on the screen, but mostly of very attractive ‘young old’ women. Men, of course, generally get better treatment.

Looking at popular magazines, it is difficult to find anyone over the age of 25. Even *Modern Maturity* magazine pictures the old as white, affluent, heterosexual and aged around 50 or so!

It is hard to have a good youth and a good life when the future looks so grim, is so dreaded – and looms ever closer. Think about it: the average life span of a person in the United States is about 76 years. When we define old age as beginning at 40 (yes, 40, and even 35: look at the greeting cards that pity the 40-year-old as ‘over the hill’), it means that for the average man or woman, they will be defined as old for almost half of their life.

And everyone knows they had better live it up for the first half, because the last half is going to be pretty bad.

Other stages in life lead one to look forward to the next. A child can’t wait to ‘grow up;’ one looks forward to Junior High, then Senior High, then college, finding a significant relationship, children, and ‘making it’ in the so-called real world. So why do we dread the next phase, the phase in which we get to use all of our earlier experiences and hard-gained knowledge? Why does our society tell us to live life to the fullest when we are young, but expect that will all be negated when we get old?

Let’s face facts – it is actually pretty hard getting old! Going through the problems, the failed relationships, the mistakes, and the regrets do not make the process easy. How much better off we would be if we looked to being old as the time when we benefit from some of those hard lessons we learned while we were getting old!

Since we all will get ‘older,’ and the alternative isn’t so great, it is time to reclaim the word. Actually, it is past time for us who are old to stand up and say “I am old” and say it proudly. It is time to refuse to buy demeaning cards or to patronize stores that sell them. It is time to stand up and get ‘bloody minded’ (thanks to Alex Comfort for the term) and confront ageist remarks and actions.

Lesbians have taken the word ‘dyke’ for their own and found it can no longer hurt. By using the word ‘old’ – not ‘older’ – ourselves, we take the word for our own. We can take the word and make it ours – proudly. By using the word ‘old’ with pride and self-respect, we can make it a symbol of attainment, not one of losses and loathsome remarks. ▼

## Queer Wars: A New Hope for Episodes II and III

by Laura Miller

Dear Mr. Lucas:

Okay, I’ve experienced the hype, I’ve been to the damned movie, and while you’re now \$7.75 richer, I must say I’m somewhat disappointed. The special effects were very impressive, and I never get tired of viewing your latest computer-generated critters, but there’s something missing here. I think it’s high time that you bring some much-needed balance to the Force.

With four movies down, and two to go, I have yet to see any African-American with anything more than a cameo role. We have Lando, a double-crosser of dubious morals who sells out his best friend to the Empire; Mace Windu, who has a total of five lines in *Episode I*; and Captain Panaka who...well, let’s just say there’s a fine line between guarding Queen Amidala and driving Miss Daisy. We’ve had two major female characters. Leia started off well enough in the 1970s, but by *Return of the Jedi* she was mostly lounging around in a titanium bikini and swooning over Han Solo. Amidala, with her endless frou-frou wardrobe and her already-obvious cradle-robbing tendencies, I’m not even going to discuss. The few fleeting glimpses of female fighter pilots in *Episode I* were nice, but other than these folks, virtually everyone in the series who is not white, male, and overtly heterosexual is either furry, slimy, or battery-operated. Among our humanoid population, there’s just not a lot of diversity.

Now, the parallels to World War II, which have always been implicit in the Star Wars movies, are all the more obvious now that we’ve all had a glimpse of the pre-Empire days. The Old Republic is a rough equivalent of the Weimar Republic, the hopelessly ineffective regime that controlled Germany from 1918 to 1933. The Empire is, of course, the unabashedly evil and fortunately short-lived Third Reich. And Palpatine, the ambitious senator who connives his way into the position of Chancellor and then establishes himself as dictator for life, only to be betrayed by one of his top lieutenants and to die a mysterious

death, might as well be named Adolf.

So let’s complete the parallels. The Nazis set out to exterminate

Aryan robot. That’s what made them so evil – their terrifying dreams of utter homogeneity. If you want Palpatine’s Empire to

*I’m not talking about some Yoda clone with a wig sitting on her ass in the Jedi Council chambers, either. I’m talking about a shit-kicking, ball-busting, saber-swinging Jedi Bitch from Hell.*

Jews, gays, Gypsies, left-wing intellectuals, and basically anyone else who didn’t fit the image of a blond-haired, blue-eyed

appear truly evil, you really should import this characteristic

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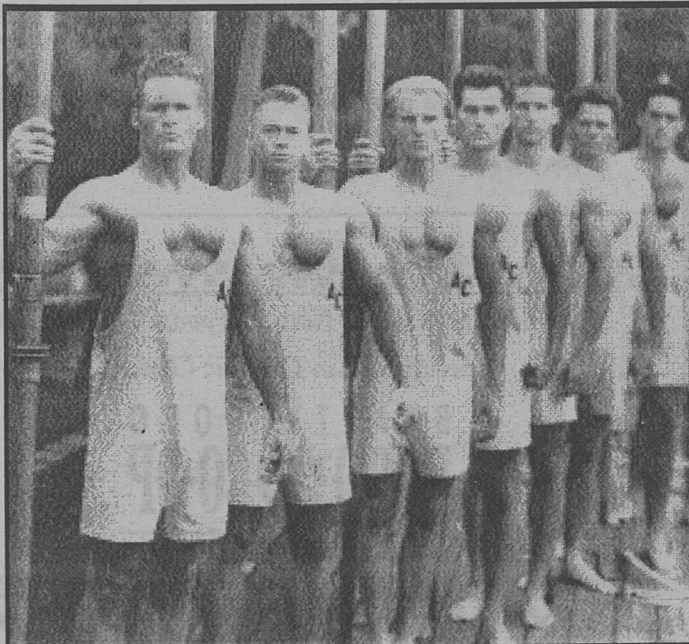
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