



Courtesy of Elaine Dundy

## BIOGRAPHY

Elaine Dundy (1921–2008) grew up in New York City and Long Island. After graduating from Sweet Briar College in 1943 she worked as an actress in Paris and, later, London, where she met and married the theater critic Kenneth Tynan. After their wedding, she cabled home: “Have married Englishman. Letter follows.” Dundy wrote three novels, *The Dud Avocado* (1958), *The Old Man and Me* (1964), and *The Injured Party* (1974). She also wrote for the BBC’s satirical “That Was the Week that Was” and penned biographies of Peter Finch and Elvis Presley, as well as a play, *My Place*, a study of Ferriday, Louisiana, and a memoir, *Life Itself!*

## THE OLD MAN AND ME

by Elaine Dundy

Introduction by the author

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“Elaine Dundy’s young and sexy American heroine, named (excellently) Honey Flood. . . parks herself in London, hellbent on sleeping and conniving and boozing her way to the top. She’s angry, ambitious, vixenish, Holly Golightly crossed with Kingsley Amis’ *Lucky Jim*. . . I’m not sure who’s claiming to have invented chick lit these days; but maybe Dundy should raise an arm, except that she’s so murderously fierce.” —*Los Angeles Times*

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Elaine Dundy’s follow-up to her hit debut novel, *The Dud Avocado*, again follows the misadventures of an American ingénue living in Europe: Honey Flood has just arrived in London and is charming her way into the city’s literary circle. And though we soon learn that Honey hates nearly everything about London and the people who live there, she’s determined to stick it out until she gets what she wants.

What Honey wants turns out to be C. D. McKee: the stout, pretentious fifty-six-year-old man around whom the Soho scene revolves. She wants his money, but is hardly interested in marrying him and waiting around for it; her plan is a bit more complicated.

Honey Flood’s quest to seduce and destroy C. D.—without attracting the suspicions of the Lady Something-Somethings and the hipster jazz musicians they socialize with—is a darkly hilarious farce that is pure Elaine Dundy. The novel’s narrator, both wickedly wise and hopelessly naïve, has an unmistakable charisma; the author’s wit sparkles on the page.

## FOR DISCUSSION

1. In her introduction to this volume, Elaine Dundy says, “My specific aim in writing this novel was to present an anti-heroine in response to all the anti-heroes so popular of the day” [viii]. Does *The Old Man and Me* fulfill this aim? How does Honey Flood compare to other well-known literary anti-heroes? Did you find her to be a likable character despite her many faults?
2. One of the ironies of *The Old Man and Me* is that its narrator is, at least on the surface, very forthright with the reader about her deception of everyone she meets. But to what extent is Honey an unreliable narrator—dishonest to a fault, even with the reader? Can we believe that the events of the novel happened the way she describes them?
3. Why does Honey refuse the brooch that C. D. offers to buy for her at the antique fair [pp. 75–76]? Would her acceptance of the gift have changed the way the novel’s events played out?

## OTHER NYRB CLASSICS OF INTEREST

**The Dud Avocado,**

Elaine Dundy  
(Introduction by Terry Teachout)

**Cassandra at the Wedding,**

Dorothy Baker  
(Afterword by Deborah Eisenberg)

**A Way of Life, Like Any Other,**

Darcy O'Brien  
(Introduction by Seamus Heaney)

**The Cost of Living,**

Mavis Gallant  
(Introduction by Jhumpa Lahiri)

**Varieties of Exile,**

Mavis Gallant  
(Introduction by Russell Banks)

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*

Truman Capote,  
*Breakfast at Tiffany's*

Elaine Dundy, *Life Itself!*

Henry James, *Daisy Miller*

Frank O'Hara, *Lunch Poems*

J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*

Zadie Smith, *On Beauty*

Evelyn Waugh,  
*A Handful of Dust*

4. Were you surprised by the first twist in the novel, when Honey reveals the truth about her identity and her interest in C. D.? Or, as the narrator asks, "had you guessed already" [p. 86]? How does this revelation change your understanding of the first one-third of the novel? Why does Dundy hold this information back for as long as she does?
5. The young Honey's laundry list of complaints about Pauly—"her confusion when confronted with a finger-bowl; her clothes when she got Dressed Up..." [p. 95]—is remarkably similar to C. D.'s nitpicking about Honey's manners. In what ways are Honey and C. D. alike?
6. The portion of the novel that takes place at the Daggoners' estate is largely concerned with the intricacies of judgment. Is Honey judged fairly by the people there? Does she judge them fairly?
7. Lady Daggoner comments, "Americans are so very different from the English I find, don't you?" [p. 144]. Much of Honey and C. D.'s sparring, too, centers on the differences between America and England. Does the novel itself take a side in the debate? Which country comes out on top?
8. "I hated him. And I'd enjoyed myself," Honey says of sex with C. D. [p. 152]. Is this contradiction in Honey's feelings the result of pure lust, or does it point to something more nuanced in their relationship? How can she love and hate C. D. at the same time? What does Dundy's openness about her characters' sex lives add to the novel?
9. After C. D. passes out at Zazou, Honey prays he won't die. Is her remorse believable? Why or why not?
10. When Honey tries to explain her plan to C. D. at the end of the novel, he tells her he has known almost all along. Do you believe that C. D. figured Honey out so early? Is the letter that Honey finds in his desk drawer at the Daggoners' [pp. 139–40] an indication of his knowledge or his ignorance? Was Honey ever capable of carrying out her plan?
11. Is the arrangement that Honey and C. D. eventually make fair to them both? Does Honey get what she deserves?
12. The last paragraph of the novel finds Honey "standing in the middle of her living-room." Where do you imagine the character will go from here? Can she ever be truly happy?

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