

## APPROACHES TO OLD AGE: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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### The development of ageing studies as a field

In 2004, Julia Johnson edited a collection of five articles entitled *Writing Old Age*. In the introduction, Johnson pointed to the emergence of researchers such as Andrew Blaikie, Thomas Cole, Chris Gilleard, and Paul Higgs, who argued that gerontology needs the humanities. Broadly speaking, these researchers advocated looking at ageing from a multitude of perspectives, extending the traditional gerontological reliance on positivist and scientific approaches. *Writing Old Age* exemplified this humanities-based intervention by focusing on 'how ageing is treated in everyday texts in the form of popular fiction and auto/biography' (Johnson, 2004: 2). These 'everyday texts' are understood as those written from observation and experience 'unconstrained by the disciplines of empirical research' (2). The collection of literary analyses of ageing in *Writing Old Age* is an example of a broader trend within English studies, which has seen contributions to gerontological thinking from scholars in many disciplines, including sociolinguistics, theatre and film studies. Fourteen years after its publication, the EJES issue entitled 'Approaches to Old Age' aims to explore how this dialogue between English studies and ageing studies contributes to enlarge our understanding of ageing and old age.

*Writing Old Age* may have been published in 2004, but the desire for cultural and humanities-based approaches to play an active part in the study of ageing predates the early twenty-first century. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, both gerontologists and sociologists, as well as scholars from linguistic and literary backgrounds, argued that the humanities and cultural studies had much to offer gerontology. Nikolas Coupland, Justine Coupland and Howard Giles (1991) studied language and interaction in later life, demonstrating the importance of sociolinguistic approaches to debates about ageing. Kathleen Woodward (1991), Anne M. Wyatt-Brown (1990) and Margaret Morganroth Gullette (1988, 1997) brought together gerontology and literature, making clear the value of literature in reflecting on ageing in Western societies. Since then, the humanities have made significant contributions to research on ageing and old age; as Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin (2015: 2) state, some of the most important scholarly voices in what is commonly termed cultural gerontology come from the humanities. English studies played a central part in shaping the research agenda of what we, following Stephen Katz (2014) and Leni Marshall (2015: 2), will be referring to as 'ageing studies'.<sup>1</sup> Ageing studies is a broad field that overlaps with and draws from critical gerontology, cultural gerontology and social gerontology. But, as Katz argues, 'the advantage of age studies is that it is not necessarily a form of gerontology, and it can be liberated from some of gerontology's disciplinary and scientific commitments' (2014: n.p.). Ageing studies shares with English studies an inherent interdisciplinarity and areas such as literary studies, linguistics, theatre and film studies are all well represented within the field.

In particular, commenting on ageing studies' interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary nature, Aagje Swinnen and Cynthia Port (2012) argue that social science and humanities researchers have much to learn from one another. From social scientists, humanities scholars might enlarge their awareness of the experiential impact and potential of their research; and from humanities scholars, social scientists might take a more critical approach to the multiplicities of lived realities and the complexities of narrative and texts (Swinnen and Port, 2012: 10-11). This enthusiasm for inter- and multi-disciplinary research has, however, not always been translated into practice. As William R. Randall (2013: 166) points out, gerontology has not in fact traditionally welcomed contributions from the humanities:

Until quite recently, however, psychologists of aging have paid scant attention to the narrative complexity of later life ... In theory, gerontology is committed to looking at aging from the perspective of the humanities as much as that of the sciences. At least, this was the vision of its founders ... In reality, as colleagues in literary gerontology, critical gerontology and qualitative gerontology will attest, contributions from the humanities are often seen as 'soft' and 'unscientific' (Cole, 1992, p. 241) and thus subjected to unduly brisk critique when submitted to mainstream gerontological journals.

Swinnen and Port also recognise obstacles to interdisciplinary research in gerontology, arguing that research in ageing in the social sciences and humanities 'seem[s] to be developing along two different circuits' (2012: 10). Nevertheless, a strong interdisciplinary focus has emerged in the last fifteen years within ageing studies itself and within traditional organisations in the field (Swinnen, Port and Lipscomb, 2017). In recent years, both the Gerontological Society of America and the British Society of Gerontology have given space to humanities-related research on ageing and old age. New organisations like the European Network in Aging Studies (ENAS, 2011) and the North American Network in Aging Studies (NANAS, 2013) work actively to bring inter- and cross-disciplinary exchanges on ageing studies centre-stage. Cross-disciplinarity is also present in the scope statement of the peer-reviewed journal *Age, Culture and Humanities* (launched in 2014). Other journals, such as the *Journal of Aging Studies*, *The Gerontologist* and the *International Journal of Aging and Later Life*, regularly publish humanities-based work on ageing. Those working on ageing in English studies now have the benefit of an active research community, a growing body of scholarship and, more broadly, a climate in which interdisciplinary work, especially that which can demonstrate wider social impact, has been made more welcome.

Ageing studies has tended to be grounded in political as well as aesthetic engagement. From its inception, the field has challenged damaging, limiting narratives of ageing and old age. Gullette's work on cultural, including literary, narratives of ageing in the West is underpinned by her argument that the dominant narratives are those of increased limitation and restriction (1997, 2004). What she terms the 'decline narrative' is one in which ageing is figured as a loss of capacity, ability and agency. For Gullette, '[d]ecline is a metaphor as hard to contain as dye' (2004: 11) and its influence begins in childhood (13). In *Ageing and Its Discontents* (1991), Woodward connects these negative connotations attached to, or stories told about, the ageing body with the fear of death itself. She considers that 'to completely rewrite the ideology of the aging body in the West, we would have to rewrite the meaning of death' (1991: 20). For Norbert Elias, the fear of death brings with it a gradual separation from those in old age. In his *The Loneliness of the Dying* (1985), Elias argues that the more advanced a society, the more death is made invisible due to a false sense of security and predictability. This means that those who reach old age progressively occupy marginal positions. Elias argues that death and, by extension, old age and the ageing process, need to be part of our everyday speech and life; in other words, to be present in discussions, but also feature in cultural, political, scientific and artistic narratives. Many, though certainly not all, scholars in age studies follow feminist and postcolonial critics in their insistence on ideological commitment, in this case a commitment to changing views about ageing and the lifecourse. From a literary perspective, Zoe Brennan (2005) argues that stereotypical conceptions of the ageing process have a strong cultural basis and that these ideas are then translated into literary creation. Following Haim Hazan's (1994) and Margaret Cruickshank's (2002) characterisation of the old as 'Other', Brennan states that '[t]he marked imaginative poverty of representations of the old reflects their social status as Other' (2005: 1). Leni

Marshall similarly studies literary works set in a variety of periods and places in order to show how 'one's age is affected by biology, culturally produced, dependent on context and open to deconstruction and construction' (2015: 23). For these authors, as for many others, research in ageing is founded on a commitment to question the cultural patterns that have equated old age with loss of agency and, eventually, social invisibility.

Ageing studies is certainly spurred on by – even whilst sceptical about – the wider sense of social urgency resulting from demographic change. Globally, the United Nations reports a 3% per year growth worldwide in the number of people aged 60 and above. Though currently Europe is the region most affected by the changing age structure of the population, the UN predicts that by 2050 all regions except Africa will 'have nearly a quarter or more of their populations at ages 60 and above' (United Nations, 2017: 11). Recent figures from the UK Office for National Statistics support the UN report, indicating that 18% of the population is now aged 65 and above and 2.4% aged 85 and over. The UK old-age dependency ratio (OADR) – the number of people aged 65 and over against the number of people aged 16-64 – has been growing since 1996 and is projected to continue to increase. The dominant public and political response to such changes has been a narrative of economic and cultural crisis, where older people are imagined as a frail and economically inactive population dependent on an already squeezed and increasingly reduced population of younger workers. This narrative of crisis is well described by Kathleen Woodward's notion of 'statistical panic', where statistical data emphasises a sense of 'omnipresent risk' (2009: 14). In this contemporary context, ageing studies provides an important perspective from which to interrogate the dominance of national and global narratives of age as burden.

### **Narrative and age**

English and ageing studies are both preoccupied with life lived across time. In ageing studies, this idea is encapsulated in the 'lifecourse' perspective, an approach that recognises that ageing is lifelong and that stages of life cannot be considered in isolation. Conceiving ageing as a movement through time figures it as a narrative. As Gullette states in *Agewise*, 'Whatever happens in the body, and even if nothing happens in the body, aging is a narrative. Each of us tells her own story' (2010: 5). This perspective is central to narrative gerontology, a field that recognises the importance of 'the biographical or narrative dimensions' of human life 'if we want to seek a balanced and more optimistic perspective on what aging is about' (Kenyon, 2011: xiii). William L. Randall and Gary Kenyon (1999; 2004) highlight the importance of narrative in making sense of our life trajectories and in discerning how the stories of our individual lives fit into 'cultures, subcultures, or family patterns' to either conform to such patterns or to expand 'the possibilities and limits set by the historical time period in which we live' (2004: 342). Narrative imbues life with meaning and this meaning can change and expand as one grows older: 'In essence, making stories is how we make meaning ... it is central to how we learn, how we interact with others, how we experience our gender and culture, and ... how we grow old' (2004: 334). As Hannah Zeilig (2011) points out, this approach has much in common with literary studies, which also seeks to consider the place of stories in making sense of lives lived. Zeilig acknowledges the danger of conflating the gerontological use of the 'stories' of lives and the literary analysis of story in texts, but argues about critical gerontology, narrative gerontology and literary studies of ageing that:

These approaches demand critical interpretations about the ways we have of 'knowing' and are less concerned with seeking definitive explanations or certitudes. They constitute a fundamental part of the endeavour to open up new debates and redefine the meaning of ageing, the desire to embrace rather than elide the complexities of later life.

**Commented [S1]:** Should this be Kenyon, Bohlmeijer and Randall, 2011: xiii) to match the entry in the reference list?

(Zeilig, 2011: 8)

Central, then, to the experience of ageing in gerontology and to English studies, narrative thus offers a way of capturing the complexity and the ambiguities of ageing across the lifecourse, and of rethinking what ageing itself might mean.

Literary analysis of how fictional narratives of ageing contribute to, or challenge, stories of decline has, therefore, long interested those working in both fields. In her early research on midlife stories of ageing, Gullette (1988) sought to identify a 'progress narrative', in which development and change are central. Barbara Frey Waxman took a similar approach to analysis of the representation of old age. She coined the term *Reifungsroman* to refer to those fictional narratives that 'challenge the stereotype that old people are frail, dim-witted and vegetating in nursing homes' (1990: 5). However, in *Aged by Culture* (2004) Gullette broadens her definition of the term progress narrative to argue that it is to be used 'for stories in which the implicit meanings of aging run from survival, resilience, recovery, and development, all the way up to collective resistance to decline forces' (2004: 16-7). Interest in the link between genre, narrative, and stories of age has continued to develop within literary ageing studies. More historically-specific and contextual studies of ageing in literature have emerged, such as Heike Hartung's *Ageing, Gender and Illness in Anglophone Literature* (2015). By analysing the *Bildungsroman* in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and narratives of dementia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Hartung (1) considers how 'changes of the definition of life have ... affected the way in which ageing and old age are experienced and narrated'. In her analysis of narratives of dementia in particular, Hartung problematises the decline/progress model inherited from Gullette, arguing that this cannot account for 'the limits of narrativity' that challenge narratives of cognitive impairment (13).

Scholars working at the intersection of ageing, literature and culture have also considered the impact of the ageing of authors and artists on creative practice. The twenty-first century has seen a resurgence of interest in 'late style' (Said, 2006), the idea that creative practice changes in late life. Style may be affected negatively by the biological decline of the body and the closeness of death, or positively, enriched by the experiences accumulated over the lifecourse. Gordon McMullan and Samuel Smiles argue that before the mid nineteenth century it was assumed that 'creativity peaked in maturity and declined thereafter' (2016: 3), a clear narrative of diminishing aesthetic value. This narrative was then supplanted by the idea that late work – the last works of an artist/writer – are distinct from what went before. McMullan and Smiles also challenge this position (2016: 3-4). As Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon put it, '[a]ssumptions about "the extraordinary flowering of artistic genius in old age" are ... as potentially ageist as those about generalized creative decline and dissolution with advancing age' (2016: 54).

Renewed interest in the specific idea of late style may be recent, but ageing and creativity has been a focus for ageing studies since the end of twentieth century. Amir Cohen-Shalev (1989), who has researched creativity and old age for the last thirty years, supports the idea that, generally speaking, works of artists in old age have been overlooked or dismissed as works that do not offer new insights into the artist's oeuvre. For Cohen-Shalev, the relationship between biological ageing and creative production is as complex as any other experience in life. Thus he states that 'evidence of artists whose work suffered considerably as a result of illness and fatigue' lives side by side with the continuing production of those artists whose creativity did not diminish 'regardless of physiological breakdown' (1989: 24). In their study of gender, age and creativity, Anne Wyatt-Brown and Janice Rossen (1993:4) claim that creativity 'provides an important source of self-discovery and self-creation' in later life. This approach was the point of departure for Núria Casado-Gual, Emma Domínguez-Rué

and Brian Worsfold's (2016) volume of articles that draws on the relationship between late style and the creative production of a number of female writers across the English-speaking world. They conclude that 'literary creativity can offer very rich insights into the experience of growing older' (2016: 11) and can promote healthy (understood very broadly) ageing. As a case in point, in her recent memoir, Penelope Lively (2013: 52) acknowledges the fact that '[c]ertain desires and drives have gone. But what remains is response. I am as alive to the world as I have ever been – alive to everything I see and hear and feel.' In her late eighties and with an arthritic back that deprives her of gardening and walking, Lively finds fulfilment in reading and writing, since engaging with fiction means connecting with oneself and one's surroundings in order 'to extend experience, to get beyond your own' (179). The power of narrative in old age as a way of connecting to oneself and to the world is well expressed in Robert MacFarlane's review of Julian Barnes's collection of short stories, *The Lemon Table* (2004), a collection focussed around the topics of old age and death. For MacFarlane (2004: 20), 'speech in these stories is a way of deferring death for the characters, who are working unconsciously to the same logic as Scheherazade; so long as they can keep talking, they won't have to start dying'. In other words, as Randall and Kenyon's research had concluded, creativity through narrative and, we may add, through art, contributes to cohesion and meaning within one's lifelong identity (1999; 2004; 2013).

Despite the celebration of optimistic narratives, then, scholars recognise the complexities and ambiguities inherent in stories of ageing where decline and progress may indeed be intertwined and inseparable. A sense of these complexities can be obtained from debates over what constitutes 'successful ageing'. Although intuitively the expression may suggest the opposite of decline, Chris Gilleard has argued, alongside sociologists such as Katz and Barbara Marshall (2003), Toni Calasanti and Neal King (2007) and Katz and Calasanti (2015), that '[s]uccessful old age is old age without old age' (Gilleard, 2007: 82). Within a liberal capitalist system, successful ageing not only implies individual responsibility for taking care of oneself and one's needs, but also for making use of all the consumerist products, techniques and experiences available to keep the signs of ageing at bay. This narrative of successful ageing is, as Cruickshank (2003: 2) makes clear, a narrow one: 'when success is proposed as an aging model a competitive or business standard measures a complex human process and a white, male, middle-class professional outlook is taken for granted'. In the process, differences such as social and cultural background, class, gender and individual health conditions, all of which clearly have an effect on the ageing process, are left aside. These critiques of the idea of successful ageing have led other scholars to propose more nuanced models of ageing 'well'. Jiayin Liang and Baozhen Luo advocate the term 'harmonious ageing' (2012), while Linn Sandberg suggests the phrase 'affirmative old age' (2013). These terms aim to break with the binary of success/failure and stress instead the complexity of the ageing process and of old age, which bring both 'opportunities and challenges' (Lian and Luo, 2012: 333).

In English studies, debate about narratives of ageing well has been informed and extended by the study of popular culture. In their introduction to *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism*, a collection focussing on TV, film, fiction and memoir, Imelda Whelehan and Joel Gwynne (2014: 5) describe the conflicting ways in which popular culture represents ageing: 'fixing ageing as beyond the pale (particularly in visual cultures) and yet showing the exceptional ageing person as worthy of our audience engagement or sympathy'. And many of the essays consider how popular narratives represent ageing (successfully or not) in ways that obscure the lived experiences of many older people. In the field of linguistics, analysis of media representations of age and ageing has contributed to a debate about ageing, the body and consumerism. Justine Coupland (2009), for example, explores the commercialised discourses of ageing found in popular TV shows, websites and magazines.

Her sociolinguistic analysis concludes that female ageing is represented as something for which the individual is personally responsible and as a process that can be managed, and potentially halted or even reversed, through regimes of bodily control. Coupland argues that such texts produce 'the ageing body as a problem and as a necessary focus for remedial work', based upon 'a consumerist ideology of change' (2009: 973). In sum, both linguistic and literary analyses of contemporary popular discourses of ageing provide case studies that explore the sort of ambiguities and paradoxes that critical gerontology has identified at the heart of our concern with successful ageing or ageing well.

As the work of Coupland and Whelehan, and Gwynne also reminds us, gender is a key concern within ageing studies. Yet, despite Simone de Beauvoir's *Old Age* being published in 1970 and Susan Sontag identifying the 'double jeopardy' of ageing and gender in 1972, it has taken some time for feminist studies to recognise the significance of ageing (see Marshall, 2006). It was not until the 1980s that Barbara Macdonald (1983) and Baba Copper (1988) advocated a feminist approach to the ageing of women. Scholars within English studies went on to provide important contributions to this debate about gender and ageing. Texts such as Kathleen Woodward's and Joel Schwartz's *Memory and Desire: Aging – Literature – Psychoanalysis* (1986) and Barbara Frey Waxman's *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature* (1990) have been followed by a large volume of feminist scholarship that brings together English and ageing studies. Lynne Segal's *The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing* (2013) echoes Beauvoir's *Old Age* in its combination of the personal and the political, but Segal is far less mournful than Beauvoir. She refers to a wide range of writers and activists to support her challenge to the gendered decline narrative of old age, which is central to the work of many scholars in popular culture, too, as Coupland's analysis of media discourses makes clear. Research emerging from the Centre for Women, Ageing and Media (established 2010), based at the University of Gloucestershire, explores the contradictory messages about middle and old age found in a variety of media. Josie Dolan and Estella Tincknell (2012, viii) demonstrate that, despite the increase in the presence of women past their fifties in the media and popular culture in recent years, 'when older women are featured it is invariably in the context of a discourse of "successful aging" that requires women to invest considerable personal and economic resources in achieving a socially approved identity'. Melissa Ames' and Sarah Burcon's *How Pop Culture Shapes the Stages of a Woman's Life* (2016) shows not only the contradictory nature of messages addressed to women as they move from early adulthood to old age, but also the extent to which these still circulate around the preservation of beauty, youth and sexual desirability. The increasing visibility of older men and women in popular culture and media has clearly complicated discourses around ageing and old age and scholars working at the intersection of ageing studies, gender and narrative continue to interrogate the gendering of age.

If, as many scholars suggest, successful ageing may have pernicious, albeit unintended, impacts on all older people, then its effects may be felt more acutely by those for whom physical and/or cognitive changes make ageing successfully a clear impossibility. As Higgs and Gilleard argue, narratives of successful ageing reinforce the binary between the 'third age' and the 'fourth age'. The 'third age' is associated with activity, good health and productivity (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015: 10-11), leaving the 'fourth age' as its negative counterpart. The 'fourth age' is linked to illness and dependence and is imagined as a 'black hole', a place of 'unknowability' and lack of agency and social power (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015: 16). This model of ageing has also created problems for those seeking to bring together ageing studies and disability studies. According to Erin Gentry-Lamb (2015), despite shared interests, the two have not had an easy relationship. She notes that successful ageing is premised on the denial of illness and disability and the celebration of health and activity. In

the same way, 'successful disability' tends to deny ageing: Gentry-Lamb explains that 'the prominent social model of disability ... is rarely explicitly extended to those disabled by age-related bodily changes, and perhaps not even to persons with disabilities who grow old' (Gentry-Lamb 2015: n.p.). This leads her to conclude that 'while old age and disability may have many points of crossover, our desire to claim greater positivity about either category often leads us to reinforce the distinctions between them' (2015: n.p.). Gentry-Lamb goes on to argue that this is now beginning to change, citing Sally Chivers' *The Silvering Screen* (2011) as an example. To this we could add the work of scholars such as Lucy Burke and Ulla Kriebnernegg. Burke's research into narratives of dementia unites English studies and disability studies with broader work in the medical humanities (2016; 2014a; 2014b). Kriebnernegg and Chivers' work on 'Ageing, Disability, and Long-Term Residential Care' (2017) considers various kinds of stories told about institutional care for older adults. Chivers' research extends to her collaboration with architect Annmarie Adams (2015). Chivers and Adams analyse Sarah Polley's *Away from Her* in terms of its depiction of the architecture of long-term care homes. The interdisciplinary work of scholars such as Chivers, Burke and Kriebnernegg suggests that the divide Gentry-Lamb sees between ageing studies and disability studies may in the future be overcome, and that English studies can play a central part in this.

Humanities-based research on ageing, illness and disability also provides important examples of real-world impact. Language use in older people has been a focus of research since the early 1990s (see Coupland, Coupland and Giles, 1991) and, more recently, sociolinguists and psycholinguists have considered how people with dementia use language (Hamilton, 2008; see also Davis and Maclagan's paper in this issue). This research offers the hope of improved communication between those with dementia and their families/carers. Dementia, language and storytelling have also been the basis for theatre research with older people, complementing the more theoretical work that has considered how modern and contemporary drama 'stage age' (Basting, 1998; Marshall and Lipscomb, 2010; Lipscomb, 2016). Amongst the practice-based research that looks at creativity, theatre and ageing (see McCormick, 2017) are projects such as Anne Basting's pioneering *Timeslips*, which uses storytelling and creativity in elder care. This project is one of many that explore the use of arts-based practice with people with dementia (see Zeilig, Killick and Fox, 2014) and is an influential instance of the way that humanities-based work may have effects beyond academia.

### **Introducing 'Approaches to Old Age'**

The articles collected in 'Approaches to Old Age' explore the meanings of ageing and old age within specific social, historical and aesthetic contexts. The principal intersections and developments between ageing studies and English studies outlined above are represented in the articles which compose the volume. These are dominated by studies of narrative fiction, reflecting the importance given in our account to the role of narrative as a way of thinking about ageing and experience, but also include a contribution from sociolinguistics on the stories told by people with dementia, demonstrating the significance of language use in the ways in which ageing and illness are understood.

Elizabeth Barry and Anita Wohlmann explore conflicting ideas about age and ageing in their readings of literary texts that represent middle and old age. Barry's essay analyses the relationship between two seemingly opposed models of experience in old age: experience as something accumulated over time; and ageing as an unmediated, and hence inaccessible and untheorisable, experience. Drawing on Jean Paul Sartre's and Simone de Beauvoir's works, Barry explores these issues through an analysis of J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* and a selection of Alice Munro's short stories. In turn, Wohlmann focuses on ageing in the short

stories of American writer Rebecca Harding Davis and, like Barry, Wohlmann is concerned with the ways in which age and experience are understood and valued. Wohlmann's article situates Davis's work in the context of scientific and literary 'naturalism' and 'sentimentalism' in order to show how these stories reflect changing and sometimes contradictory ideas about ageing in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Ulla Kriebnernegg similarly turns to the short story, analysing ageing and spatial segregation in Margaret Atwood's apocalyptic 'Torching the Dusties'. This essay extends Kriebnernegg's research (Chivers and Kriebnernegg, 2017) into ageing, disability and institutional care. Kriebnernegg explores how Atwood uses her characteristic irony to interrogate the increasingly recurrent discourse of the old as a threat to scarce natural resources, a discourse that may result in the sort of spatial segregation Atwood imagines in her short story. Isabel Santaulària's essay on Terry Pratchett's 'Witches' novels contributes to the growing body of research into contemporary popular culture and ageing that we have described in this introduction. Santaulària argues that Pratchett subverts traditional depictions of the old witch; in doing so, she suggests, he undermines stereotypical ideas about ageing femininity. At the same time, according to Santaulària, Pratchett articulates an ethics of individual and social responsibility. The final paper of the volume returns to care, but this time from a linguistic perspective. Boyd H. Davis and Margaret Maclagan's qualitative study of storytelling narratives in dementia is an example of the work on language use and dementia discussed in this introduction. They argue that analysing the recurrence of types of narrative, as well as their significance within the informant's discourse as a whole, will help us to develop ways for carers to engage more meaningfully in conversations with people with dementia.

In these ways, this issue of EJES aims to extend the productive conversation between English studies and ageing studies outlined in this introduction. In particular, as we have made clear, we are concerned with the role of literary and also 'real life' narrative. As a result of this focus, this introduction's brief overview of a dynamic and growing area of research does not pretend to be comprehensive. We have not dealt, for example, with work in film (for example, Cohen-Shalev, 2009; Gravagne, 2013) and have passed swiftly over the growing body of work that historicises literary narratives of ageing (for example, Mangum, 2000, 2013). Although we have included in this issue an example of participant-based research, in the introduction we have given only a short account of this expanding area. We have addressed the scholarship on gender and ageing, but have not considered some of the challenges of intersectional identities, including the ways in which ethnicity and race are explored in relation to ageing. Nonetheless, our focus on narrative in literary and linguistic studies (both in this introduction and in the volume as a whole) gives, we hope, a sufficient idea of how the humanities and, more specifically, English studies, can contribute to widening our understanding of the experience of ageing and old age. With a rapidly ageing population worldwide, the need for more imaginative and wide-ranging responses to ageing throughout the lifecourse is undoubtedly pressing. The way language is used, within social, cultural and literary contexts, influences the possibilities we imagine as we live towards old age.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Katz names the area 'age/aging studies'. We follow him in recognising the overlap between these two terms and in this introduction we use 'ageing studies' throughout for clarity.