

Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing, by Lynne Segal. Introd. Elaine Showalter. Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2013. Pp. xi + 320. \$26.95 (hardcover and electronic). Pp. xi + 352. \$19.95 (paperback).

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“Miss Beaver was in truth a dull little woman. She was a *memento mori*, or rather *memento senescere*, to Dorothy” (Orwell 259). In George Orwell’s *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935), the otherwise timid young protagonist summons her confidence to express a now-familiar axiom of age studies: the perils of aging are especially legible to women and most callously marked upon women’s bodies. Yet the momentary sting of this *memento senescere* (“remember you will age”) quickly subsides. Rather than rejecting her reflection, “Dorothy grew to be very fond of Miss Beaver, and those occasional hours that they spent together in the bed-sitting room, doing the *Daily Telegraph* crossword over a nice hot cup of tea, were like oases in her life” (259). Orwell’s sense of the deeply equivocal nature of aging—its perils and concurrent pleasures—infuses this subtle scene of female domesticity with a sense of the social justice that would become the signature of his fictional and journalistic writing. His Latin coinage also offers a useful critical distinction. Where the iconography of *memento mori* was historically motivated by life’s brutish brevity, “remember you will age” seems better fit to the twenty-first century’s unprecedented longevity revolution. Speaking both out of and against societal ageism’s deluge, *memento senescere* calls for multiform tactics of resistance and resilience, a reminder of the persistence of being that authors from Miguel de Cervantes to Grace Paley have so elegantly evoked: until death, all is life.

A similar constellation of issues motivates Lynne Segal’s *Out of Time: The Pleasures and the Perils of Ageing*. Like Orwell, Segal combines politically minded critique with social activism and a literary sensibility, especially as these concerns converge around late-twentieth century feminism (her past publications include *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* [1987]; *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* [1990];

and *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure* [1994]). As Anniversary Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies at Birkbeck College (UK), Segal builds on this extensive intellectual and experiential foundation in *Out of Time*, a valuable, expansive, occasionally perplexing exploration of the psychosocial challenges of growing older. *Out of Time* is age studies' first crossover hit, earning reviews in major media venues (*The Economist*, *The Guardian*, *Times Literary Supplement*) while signaling its academic intentions via extensive endnotes and a spirited introduction by American feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter. For readers of this journal, the book's major successes are 1) its sustained investigation of the "mental life" of aging from a queer studies perspective, and 2) Segal's candid reflections on her own age-based relationships to second- and third-wave feminism (Segal 18). While *Out of Time's* engagement with age studies is, at times, odd or even unclear, its shortcomings are valuable for the way they should prompt clarification of this field's *raison d'être*.

"[I]t is not so much the ageing body . . . that is my main concern," Segal asserts in *Out of Time's* opening pages, "but rather the complexities of mental life within ageing bodies. I am most interested in the less familiar cultural narratives that we might draw upon to provide more nuanced thoughts on ageing" (18). *Out of Time* assembles a range of "different witnesses" drawn from psychoanalysis, literature, political writings, journalism, interviews, and memoir both to generate and to reflect this sense of psychological texture, "neither to lament nor to celebrate old age, but simply to affirm it as a significant part of life" (5-6). Segal, like Orwell's Dorothy Hare, views the pleasures and perils of *memento senescere* as fundamentally distinct from those of its neatly terminal counterpart.

Chapter One takes the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir as its guiding voice, a fascinating figure whose profound ambivalence toward aging becomes an avatar for the invisibility of older feminists during the 1970s women's liberation movement. Segal uses de Beauvoir's writings to reflect on her own age-blindness as a young activist (she now cringes at the "bitter gravity" of earnest slogans like "Stay young and beautiful if you want to be

loved!” [12]), adding her autobiography to the ongoing critical discussion of feminism’s erasure of older women’s voices, lives, and symbolic presence.¹ To account for this disconcerting silence, Segal engages psychoanalysis to unspool the “affect-laden symbolic apparatus of fantasies, metaphor, condensation, accompanying our encounters with . . . dementing oldies, both male and—far more savagely—female” (19). Although Segal breaks some new ground here, in its discussion of Freud, Lacan, and the uncanny, *Out of Time* is curiously silent on major studies by age studies researchers like Kathleen Woodward (*Aging and Its Discontents*) or Amelia DeFalco (*Uncanny Subjects*) that have already done much to elucidate the psychoanalytics of aging for men and women alike.

Shifting from the individual to a massified scale, Chapter Two is an astute analysis of the very public antagonism that frames twenty-first century generational cohorts (indicated, for example, by the rampant scapegoating of “Boomers” and “Millennials”). Working closely with a diverse range of sources drawn mostly from the UK context, Segal offers a powerful refutation of this politically expedient and socially destructive “climate of rhetorical chastisement” (53)—phenomenon, she argues, firmly rooted in the austerity fetishization of modern-day Thatcherism. “[C]ultural incitement of resentment of the young toward the old,” Segal writes, is an opportunistic and largely media-driven diversion from the real issue, namely, “the socially destructive effects of the deregulation of corporate finance and its impact on the policies of nation states” (46). The chapter’s second half is a rousing call for generational solidarity based on Segal’s insight that “[i]t is the growing inequality *within*, not *between*, the different age cohorts that underpins the current economic and social crisis, especially in the USA” (58). Perhaps as a consequence of Segal’s own enduring commitments to activism, this chapter constitutes *Out of Time*’s clearest and most convincing analysis of the macrodynamics of deeply ageist social pathologies.

¹ For example, see Woodward’s essay “Inventing Generational Models: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Literature” or Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan’s (eds.) *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*.

Chapters Three and Four turn from the political stage toward modes of literary representation to argue that prevailing discourses of heterosexual desire, especially the “dominant vision of phallic sexuality” (89), have served to flatten the sexual potentialities of aging. In step with other critiques of “geriatric male virility” (see Josie Dolan, Simon Critchley and Jameson Webster), Segal cautions against equating youthcentric qualities like sexual conquest and desirability with selfhood. Neither rapacious male braggarts (see the writings of Philip Roth, John Updike, Martin Amis) nor female elective celibates (Germaine Greer, Virginia Ironside, Irma Kurtz) present real or satisfying alternative sexualities in older age. In contrast to figures like de Beauvoir and Doris Lessing (both of whom were gravely wounded by their perceived loss of beauty in older age), lesbian writers like Joan Nestle, Amber Hollibaugh, June Arnold, and Adrienne Rich “turn around the pernicious effects of the picture of old women as sexless and undesirable” by locating passion and love in acts, emblems, and domestic arrangements that loosen the entanglement of youth, beauty, and genital desire (124). As in Dorothy and Miss Beaver’s intimate moments of quiet refuge, for these authors, the sensuous texture of living amidst vulnerability unfolds out of aging’s convergent perils and pleasures.

Chapters Five and Six broaden Segal’s call for alternative narratives of aging that steer clear both of the “cultural segregation” (134) of old and young, and the vigorous denial of aging through pharmaceutical, surgical, and other interventions of hypercapitalism (what life extension proponents like Catherine Mayer have called “amortality”) (177). “In its repudiation of actual ageing, striving for agelessness is thus in one sense a rejection of life and collectivity. It is not just that such relentless buoyancy allows no space for neediness and dependence; it is also quintessentially shallow, self-centered, and elitist in its refusal to engage with the suffering and helplessness of others” (179). Toggling between literary and “real-world” precedents, Segal asks readers to consider how new approaches to home-spaces—especially those assembled through friendship or other “alternative forms of intimacy” (240)—might enhance wellbeing throughout the lifecourse and in older age

especially. Such “queer domesticities” (242), which include singledom, cohabitation, and other “families of choice” (246), naturally overlap with the conditions of older age, making the relative absence of older people’s lives from queer politics and activism as conspicuous as it once was in feminism. In these chapters Segal significantly expands emergent interests in age studies as a queer and queering enterprise (see Cynthia Port, Chris Gilleard) by asserting that embracing, rather than repudiating, dependency in older age can enhance inclusivity across the lifecourse in public and more private spheres. *Out of Time* concludes with a rousing appeal to the shared charge of anti-ageism activists, academics, and laypersons alike: “we can at least begin by querying the cultural obsession with notions of ‘independence’ in favour of acknowledging the value of our life-long mutual interdependence. This is the human condition” (268).

Out of Time is a significant contribution to the age studies canon. Yet its weaknesses feel especially jarring because they often run against the principles of inclusion that characterize both this work and Segal’s own radically progressive ethos. *Out of Time*’s declared commitment to “‘equivocation,’ admitting yet embracing what will often be the increasing challenges and sorrows of our longer lives” (230), does not explain why Segal’s perspective is frequently indistinguishable from that of the texts she discusses, especially—and crucially—with regard to the abundant perils of aging. The hostility of phrases like “agony aunt” or repeated references to the “horror” of growing older (at least fifteen instances, sometimes twice on a page) become an exhausting projection, one that undercuts *Out of Time*’s tactic of equivocation by shoring up conventional narratives of ageism against its ideologically thriving ruins. Under what conditions would it be possible to view aging itself as a force of resistance, rather than as a condition to be resisted? Nor does Segal’s weirdly provisional characterization of “a field calling itself ‘Age Studies’” (see pp. 64–66) really capture the ways in which the objectives of AS—now in its fourth decade—go well beyond the composition of “rallying rhetoric” (66). In this sense, *Out of Time* should serve as a kind of *memento senescere* for age studies, marking a new point in the lifecourse of this field: a

milestone work that has commanded the attention of a broad global audience, and one that demands the persistently critical articulation of age studies issues old and new.

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