

Call for Papers

## **Narratives of Ageing and Old Age in the Fantastic Mode**

Special Issue of the Journal *Frontiers of Narrative Studies*:

<https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/FNS/html>

Literature in non-realist modes such as the fantastic offers rich explorations of the anxieties and desires related to the experience of life in time. In their ambiguous relationship to the real, fantastic modes of literature open up epistemological and aesthetic alternatives for thinking about ageing across the lifecourse. In addition, in its dystopian and gothic variations, the fantastic also engages with fears about old age and ageing, directing the speculative question 'what if' into both the past and the future. Thus, the fantastic mode provides an entry point for analyses of age representation which may open up new conceptualisations, on the one hand, and, on the other, serve to critique existing social and cultural stereotypes of old age.

Narrative has long held an important place in scholarship on ageing, seen particularly in narrative gerontology, which recognises the centrality of biographical and narrative-driven dimensions of human life and experience. More specifically, literary gerontology has established age as a category of literary representation that supplements and intersects with identity categories such as gender, class, race and illness. In view of the recent proliferation of this field of knowledge construction, it is timely to focus on specific literary modes or genres to see how these are affected by and contribute to discourses of age and ageing.

Time is a basic element of narrative that provides a story with a beginning and ending, but this chronological aspect of narrative also aligns it to the ways in which we understand ageing and the lifecourse as a linear progression across time. Both the lifecourse and its literary representation, however, are rarely orderly or linear. Literature in general, and fantasy in particular, has always been more interested in departures from chronology. In the context of fantastic narratives, we are interested in exploring the ways in which they narrativise alternative conceptions of time and ageing.

In this special issue, therefore, we address the question how fantastic genres address conceptions of age, ageing and the lifecourse. We employ genre loosely in the form of speculative modes of the fantastic that enable readings of alternative worlds and times. This allows us to consider texts which may be variously categorised as fantasy, gothic, science fiction and dystopia, recognising what such modes have in common rather than what might separate them. We invite contributions analysing different genres of the fantastic such as vampire fiction, ghost stories, science fiction, utopian/dystopian fiction and fantasy. We invite case studies that investigate key fantastic tropes in thinking about ageing and time such as longevity, immortality and rejuvenescence. We invite contributions that explore 'fantastic' age representations from different periods across literary history, recognising that fantasy changes along with the changing nature of reality. We particularly welcome articles that address texts from the Global South.

Contributions are invited which address some of the following questions:

- How do literary visions of alternative worlds and times intersect with, reinforce, but also critique what it means to live a human life in time?
- What might it mean to age in a posthuman context?
- How does the fantastic shape epistemological and ontological possibilities of life in time?
- How do age narratives shape fantastic genres?

- What cultural fears do figures of the fantastic like the vampire, zombie or the witch address and how are these related to longevity/eternal life?
- How is ageing represented in its relationship to death, dying and the end of life in fantastic modes?
- What are the functions of the life course, of childhood/youth and old age in particular, in the fantasy genre?
- What is the relationship between fantastic narratives, 'queer' time and ageing?
- How are embodied experiences of age, gender and race constructed and defamiliarised in fantasy and science fiction?
- How do age and ageing intersect with wider cultural and scientific narratives of demographic and climate change? What does this tell us about contemporary discourses of ageing and 'lateness'?

Please send abstracts by **31 August 2021** to

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Complete Articles on the accepted proposals are due by **1 February 2022**.