

*Age and Ageing in Contemporary Speculative and Science Fiction*, edited by Sarah Falcus and Maricel Oró-Piqueras. London: Bloomsbury, 2023. Pp. 233. Hardback 85£. Ebook 76.50£.

*Reviewed by Ingvil Hellstrand, University of Stavanger (ingvil.f.hellstrand@uis.no)*

During the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in academic interest in speculative and science fiction as avenues for processing and negotiating key socio-technical, cultural, ethical, and (bio)political questions of our unstable times. In this light, the edited volume *Age and Ageing in Contemporary Speculative and Science Fiction* is a welcome exploration of age, aging, and ageism as cultural imaginaries that can tell us something about past, present, and future.

In their introduction, the editors Sara Falcus and Maricel Oró-Piqueras convincingly argue that this volume contributes to “opening up the conversation around other-world fiction and what it is to live a human life in time” (4). While the introduction is mostly concerned with connecting speculative and science fiction to questions of age and temporality, it is up to the eleven subsequent chapters to frame such questions within contemporary debates and challenges related to futurity and progress, generation, illness, and death.

This is indeed a clever design, as each chapter reads as a stand-alone investigation of the overall topic. As such, the volume provides a useful overview of the various perspectives and entry-points to ongoing scholarship concerning age and aging in speculative fiction, showcasing how “SF and speculative fiction offer fertile ground to explore conceptions related to age in increasingly ageing societies” (4). On the other hand, given the rising interest in speculative and science fiction as analytical strategies, more emphasis on *why* speculative thinking offers such a useful framework for addressing age and aging might serve to connect this speculative mode to our current age. In their discussion of science fiction as a relevant and fruitful mode or genre, the editors acknowledge that “genres are not stable categories” (3) and need to be related to textual, social, and cultural contexts. In light of this, more substantial contextualization of aging and its relation to ongoing debates concerning the

Anthropocene, or of the advances in biotechnology and ethical dilemmas they entail, would have strengthened the volume as a whole.

That said, the first three chapters serve as solid introductions to what is at stake for cultural imaginaries and collective understandings about age, aging, and ageism. Teresa Botelho's chapter traces the genealogy of immortality as a trope in speculative fiction, followed by Peter Goggin and Ulla Kriebner, who, in their chapter called "Ageing and Youthing" demonstrate how constructions of age and youth permeate science-fiction television. Framed around the recent Star Trek spin-off series *Picard* (2020), Goggin and Kriebner highlight certain inconsistencies about the way we approach aging, showing us how particular challenges to ageist stereotypes paradoxically end up perpetuating them. In their own chapter, editors Falcus and Oró-Piqueras illustrate how the age-old quest to halting and/or cure old age resurfaces in contemporary science fiction stories.

While "the real world" challenges seem to be the focus of these first few introductory chapters, Aline Ferreira's chapter leans more towards problems that pose a cause for concern now but that we anticipate will assume greater proportions as we move towards the future. Seeking to tease out the question of "who is entitled to grow old in the age of biocapitalism" (87), Ferreira offers an engaging analysis of the troublesome construction of discardable bodies in several works of fiction, but also pays close attention to how these are configured by today's techno-biopolitical regime. Aleksandra Pogónska-Baranowska follows up with a chapter that situates science-fiction imaginaries about age and aging vis-à-vis the current politically and demographically motivated resource crisis in the health care sector. Stella Achilleos' chapter brings the Foucauldian notion of biopower to bear on her analysis of geronticide as a powerful trope in the history of science fiction. In his chapter "Whatever Comes after the Human," Sean Seger critically explores transhumanist thinking and connects it to troublesome progress narratives.

The last four chapters of the volume present us with specific case studies: Michael D.S. Hooper analyzes the uncanny dimension of dementia in the play *Marjorie Prime*, whereas Ezter Ureczky discusses the socio-technical basis of

aging “cures” through a close reading of *Black Mirror* episode “San Junipero.” Ureczky poses the important question of what makes for a meaningful ending in a time where VR and online living are becoming more widespread. Both Susan Watkins (chapter ten) and Roberta Maierhofer (chapter eleven) turn to feminist science fiction in their engagement, respectively, with Margaret Atwood’s short story “Torching the Dusties” (2014) and Ursula LeGuin’s “The Space Crone” (1976). Their analyses showcase the interconnections between a speculative mode of writing and an ethico-political drive to change the world.

Questions of time and existence are equally important for speculative fiction and aging studies. As such, *Age and Ageing in Contemporary Speculative and Science Fiction* is a timely (pun intended) publication that asks us to consider what is at stake for age and aging in the contemporary moment. Drawing upon speculative and science fiction, this volume connects theoretical, ethical, and political aspects related to growing older in a society where the biological body is no longer left to its own devices but may instead be regulated, fixed and, potentially, enhanced. In particular, the middle section of the volume engages thoroughly with the impact and importance of speculative imaginaries for the embodied realities of our time. In this, the collection brings together exciting analyses and examples that together invite the reader to grapple with the notion of age and aging as “the experience of human life in time” (1).