

Book review

Out of Time

The pleasures and perils of ageing

Category: Book Reviews / Non-fiction

Author: Lynne Segal

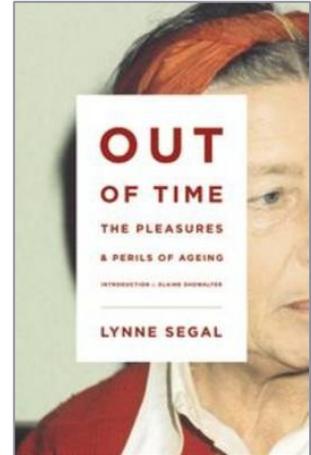
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Publisher: Verso Books, UK

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Audience: Supporting Myself

Summary: Lynne Segal dissects the process of ageing, particularly for women, with formidable intellect, imagination and wit



I guess someone has to raise those niggling between-the-cracks questions about ageing, and who better really than Australian-born, UK-based feminist, writer and activist Lynne Segal? A baby boomer herself, she dissects the process of ageing, particularly for women, with formidable intellect, imagination and wit.

Segal's aim is to discover "cultural narratives that we might draw upon to provide more nuanced thoughts on ageing" than those currently offered to us.

Drawing heavily on the psychological, political and personal writings of many famous writers on ageing, plus her own "looking into the mirror" experiences, Segal theorises that attitudes towards women that subordinated and negated them 40-odd years ago, when she first joined the Women's Movement, have now been transferred to the elderly – at least in Western society.

Dim-witted arguments and selfish politics

She describes as "dim-witted" arguments that the "selfish" politics of the baby boomers have been to blame for the economic situation in the UK – arguments that are beginning to surface here in New Zealand as our population ages. She also reminds us that positive ageing strategies can serve the interests of neo liberal governments, and champions the ideal of interdependence over independence.

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Segal is perhaps at her most interesting when writing about sex and desire in later life. She doesn't quite buy the idea that unpartnered heterosexual older women who say they feel more liberated "post sex" are telling the whole truth. Somewhat ironically, given her focus on how the ageing female body is constructed as ugly and undesirable, Segal has personally solved the older heterosexual women's dilemma by finding herself a younger, female partner.

It's a slightly unsettling book in that it raises more questions than it answers, and while there are some affirmations of ageing, readers may be forgiven for thinking that she comes out – at this stage of her life at least – a little more focused on the side of the perils.

Reviewed by Auckland writer, psychologist and baby boomer Katherine Findlay

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