does not subscribe to apocalyptical views. Wray, for example, states that 'the likelihood that … developed nations taken as a whole can face a *real crisis* is highly improbable, for the simple reason that demographic changes are too small relative to the growth of output that will be achieved even with low productivity increases' (p. 53). Nevertheless, most of the contributors still incline to the view that the need to cope with an ageing population requires action in the near term to forestall more difficult choices in the long term.

The commentaries that follow each chapter are valuable, although they vary in their approach. Some simply extend the arguments made in the chapter itself but others provide a critique. For example, Tuljapurker's chapter presents a projection of Social Security balances over the very long term, and Burdick comments, 'forecasting 300 quarters ahead is darn near impossible' (p. 267) and that while making forecasts might be necessary, they need to be accompanied by an assessment of the inevitable uncertainties. The editor provides a useful overview of the contents in the introduction. He also identifies particular areas for further research that are highlighted by the contributions, including the extent of the progressivity of pension provision from a lifetime perspective; retirement behaviour including the interaction between the formation of social norms and the institutional environment; the reasons for and the impact of declining health-care coverage and 'soaring' costs; and the impact of changes in household structure and the relationship between women and paid work. Most of the chapters are written as contributions to academic economics. They vary in their accessibility to the non-specialist reader and will, perhaps, be of greatest use to readers who are already familiar with current debates in this area of study. What is also useful to have, in a book that is as wide-ranging and as dense as this one, is both an author and a subject index.

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Ruth E. Ray, *Endnotes: An Intimate Look at the End of Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, 208 pp., pbk £14.50, ISBN 13: 978 0 231 14461 2.

This book is an account of an extraordinary relationship between Ruth Ray, a 42-year-old academic, and Paul Mason, an 82-year-old resident of a nursing home. It began as follows:

> 'Come over here', Paul said, motioning to the small space between the chair and the bed. I moved the bed tray aside and inched myself into the space. Paul reached his arm up to me, and I leaned forward to meet him. One, two, three little kisses. Paul's lips were trembling. 'Well, I'll be damned', Paul said. 'I don't think I'm supposed to sit on your bed', I said, surveying the room for a chair. 'It's probably against regulations or something, but there's no place else to sit' (p. 38).

Ruth Ray decided to see where her feelings might lead. She visited Bedford Continuing Care to research creative writing's therapeutic efficacy for older

people stressed by relocation. She is filled with ideals of radical gerontology and feminist ethics. He is busy resisting the lethargy of care-home routine and the debilitation of Parkinson's disease. Ray's research conclusions prove disappointing, finding no statistical difference between residents who participated in writing groups and those who did not, but a far more interesting experiment began to unfold. The gripping nature of Ruth and Paul's relationship reflects its taboo. For an academic reader, this is partly because Ruth seems to have blurred the boundaries, becoming fascinated by a frail, adoring old man who gives her the ultimate insider look at a community of intense professional interest to her. But the physical detail of their affair is more unsettling. She is frank about his incontinence, his shakes and memory loss, eye-patch and frequent inability to shave, dress or even walk. She also captures their mutual joy. Paul got lucky; she got a tender, flirtatious, funny man, who swept away the bad memories of her previous boyfriend. The book's title is misleading, for the narrative far from being 'notes' is a gorgeously written love story, topsy-turvily showing a strong, smart woman finding her man (and he is neither rich nor foolish) locked up and waiting.

Though this is a deeply personal book, which Ray says she took 10 years to write, it is not an autobiography but a 'narrative for social change' and is fully informed by the work of gerontologists such as Robert L. Kane, Margaret Morganroth Gullette and Margaret Cruikshank, as well as narrative theorists such as Thomas Cole and Jerome Bruner. The chapter titles give a sense of how she uses her story to get at the issues, from the theoretical frames of 'Passionate scholarship' and 'Ethics of care' to residents' struggles in 'Home', 'Making ourselves understood', 'Those little ordinary things', 'Diaper is a dirty word', and 'Empty rooms'. In 'Care conference', for example, she explores the classic problem of carers' versus dependants' rights through a restaurant scene where Paul suddenly announces to his son and daughter-in-law that he wants to leave the home to live with his 'one-of-a-kind woman'. Ray reconstructs the conversation alongside her rather panicked inner thoughts, even as she understands exactly why Paul would rather live 'a normal life in a real home', or eat spare ribs instead of 'heavy, wet mounds' of food.

Alongside telling us how their relationship grew to its natural, loving end, Ray enumerates some very practical suggestions for improving the care of older people. These include allowing the residents of homes to personalise their environments, to enjoy more privacy (as for love-making), to control their diet, be protected from theft, have their sexuality recognised and also, more complicatedly, express their gender identity, especially where men are in a minority. Ray cites *The Pioneer Network*, a grassroots organisation in the nursing home reform movement, as a reference for where we should be going. *Endnotes* will undoubtedly make it onto many academic syllabi in age studies, but it should also gain a wider audience as literary life writing. In the tradition of May Sarton's diaries, June Arnold's *Sister Gin*, Carolyn Heilbrun's *The Last Gift of Time*, and Jane Juska's *A Round-Heeled Woman*, it is a riveting reminder of what happens when a feminist refigures the politics of sex, age and death.

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