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Rocio Fernández-Ballesteros (ed.), *GeroPsychology: European Perspectives for an Aging World*, Hogrefe and Huber, Gottingen, Germany, 2007, 264 pp., hbk €29.95, ISBN 13: 978 0 88937 340 2.

Psychology has a growing role in 21st-century society, but how is it placed to contribute to one of the major issues of the new century – the consequences of demographic ageing? The book under review is the result of the work of a task force set up by the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations to analyse the situation concerning research and teaching in 'Geropsychology'. The members came from various European countries, a large proportion from Germany, but significantly none from the United Kingdom. The book is the result of this team's work. Besides a survey of the teaching and research in different countries, it includes review articles on European contributions to theory and research in various areas, from person–environment relations to the study of wisdom.

The main conclusions of the survey are that research on the whole covers only a few topics. Cognitive impairment is well represented but there is comparatively little work being conducted on issues of health promotion and prevention of illness and disability. The need for much more research and training in Eastern Europe is highlighted because in this part of Europe the demographic challenge is likely to be the greatest, with older people left alone, particularly in the countryside, with poor pensions and inadequate health-care services. Besides health psychology, key areas identified for psychological input include the provision of life-long learning opportunities and of new and alternative work/activity roles in later life. When considered in more general terms, psychologists are accused of lagging behind in their contribution to the new culture of ageing that the 21st century requires. Psychology in Europe stands doubly accused because it is the continent that is in the vanguard of ageing and should therefore be setting an example. The review identifies very few chairs in the psychology of ageing or specialised postgraduate programmes in European universities.

Some countries can be excluded from this criticism. The preponderance of German contributions to this book reflects the commitment of German psychology to a truly lifespan developmental psychology, sadly still lacking in nearly all British psychology departments. The book is in fact dedicated to the memory of Paul B. Baltes, late director of the Max Planck Institute of Human Development in Berlin, who succeeded in creating a major European centre of research in this field, and who consistently argued for cultural change in attitudes towards ageing. His contributions and those of his wife, Margret Baltes, and other members of the Berlin School to theory development (especially the 'selection, optimisation and compensation' model of adaptation to ageing) are reflected throughout the volume. It is also good to see that their views can be challenged as well as lauded, for example the overly pessimistic view on the 'fourth age' conveyed by research reports on the old-old in the Berlin Ageing Study.

The volume provides a useful review of the state of the art in various fields of research in the psychology of ageing, giving an indication in each of the distinctive contribution of European research. Europe does have some special assets, for example the existence in the Nordic countries of large twin registers which allow

for the possibility to undertake quantitative genetic gerontological research. The book showcases a number of important research initiatives such as the Norwegian Life Course, Ageing and Generation Study, and ENABLE-AGE, which examines person and home environment data in five European countries. If I have a general criticism of the presented research, it is that there is still overmuch emphasis on generalised changes with age, in areas such as cognition and emotion, and insufficient attention to differential ageing. There needs to be more focus on the factors that promote optimal ageing. One major criticism of the book is that it inexcusably lacks an index both of subjects and authors.

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William L. Randall and A. Elizabeth McKim, *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, 352 pp., hbk £21.99, ISBN 13: 978 0 19 530687 3.

Starting with affirmative postmodernism and the necessity of an ironic stance, this book is not recommended for the faint-hearted. It repays reading nonetheless, for a number of reasons. The main one is that it explores the commonplace activity of reading which, after all, is what we still spend much time over. Metaphors associated with reading abound in gerontology and social science, with stories, characters and chapters used to convey ways of 'reading' the world. Literary allusions may be playful as much as ironic, I think, and a certain lightness of touch by the authors helps break down some rather indigestible tracks. Novels and their novelty are mentioned, so too the pervasiveness of soap operas and their eventual endings.

Despite the ubiquity of reading in many cultures, the authors argue that there are differences between a literary and a lived text, you can only go so far with a sheaf of metaphors. Chapter 2 of the book discusses the 'autobiographical self', concluding that life may have the qualities of a novel. It is easy to get a little lost down 'metaphor lane', with discussions of a character or the reader ... but a strong feature of this book is its self-editing. Just as discussion begins to drift, we are back with a summary, setting us back on the authors' path. There are areas where the conversational style of this book prompts rights of reply. Can it really still be so that gerontology remains so imbalanced, with a narrow focus on the problems of later life? Recent issues of this journal do not seem to confirm this, although policy and political discourses in the developed world seem to be re-discovering the 'demographic time bomb'.

This is all part of certain narratives, of course. The theme of narrative is central to the discussion of several chapters. First, personal experience by way of autobiography is explored (Part One). This is followed by discussion of narrative development in Part Two. Similarly, the exploration of poetics is central to Part One; and their application to Part Two. This focus on application in later life is because the authors hold that during this time the self is both 'under attack' and that a calm period of 'sorting out' the meaning of life is not generally attainable,