

Abstract

**Aasta Marie Bjorvand Bjørkøy**

### **Ageing and dignity in Old Age narratives**

The contemporary welfare state embraces economic values of speed, efficiency, growth and (re)productivity. When older persons are kept out of traditional functions, a prospect of a good, autonomous and dignified life is weakened. The process of ageing is characterized by an accumulation of losses – of work, health, partner and dignity. We may argue that the accumulation of different types of losses counteracts our possibilities to age with honour. Uniform treatment of the elderly (those over 65) is neither worthy nor fair since older persons are not a homogeneous group. Thus, how can we make old age as worthwhile as possible? In this lecture, I will describe how it feels to grow old according to selected contemporary Norwegian literary works, including the short stories “Ingenting hendt” (2000) by Bjarte Breiteig and “til” (2002) by Johan Harstad and the novel *Svartstilla* (2018) by Susanne Skogstad. These literary works articulate certain anxieties associated with how it is to live without having control over your own life, being vulnerable and in the power of others. The literary works will be presented with emphasis on: What are the consequences of being (or feeling) superfluous and living precariously? And how is this challenge dealt with?

### **Bibliography**

Aasta Marie Bjorvand Bjørkøy is professor in Nordic Literature and Head of Research at the Department of Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo. Her current research focuses on book history, textual criticism, short stories and old age narratives. Among her most recent publications are *Litterære kretsløp. Bidrag til en bokhistorie fra Maurits Hansen til Gunvor Hofmo* (2017, with Ståle Dingstad), *Literature and Honour* (2017, Universitetsforlaget, with Thorstein Norheim) and *Samtidslitterære alderdommer* (2020, Universitetsforlaget).