

The Research Programme Literary Studies presents a talk by
Professor Ben Hutchinson, University of Kent

In the Middle of Life's Way: Literature and the Art of Ageing

November 20, 10.15-12.00 at Room 1586-114 (Forskerhuset)

In the beginning was the word. In the middle, however, was silence.

Such, in essence, is the contemporary view of the three main stages of life. Births and beginnings have always had their narratives, their 'grammars of creation': to the genesis the glory, to the *incipit* the divine spark of glamour. Endings, too, have their pathos, the sudden urgency of mortality: late-style, lateness, and late-life creativity have become recurring concerns of an ageing population. What, though, of the pivotal period in the middle, the great stretch of time that constitutes the defining period of life in terms of professional achievement, personal satisfaction, and social prestige? What of middle age?

This talk will reflect on how we have understood middle age in the past, how we understand it in the present, and how we might make it as productive as possible in the future. What does it mean to start slipping from the 'prime of life' towards a long, slow decline? How does it feel to become conscious of starting the second half of one's existence? And how do we even define a period that has no clear beginning and no obvious end? I cannot promise definitive answers, but I can promise provocative questions.

Ben Hutchinson is Professor of European Literature at the University of Kent. He has published five monographs, including, most recently, *Comparative Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2018) and *Lateness and Modern European Literature* (OUP, 2016). Currently, he is busy slipping inexorably into middle age.

The event is free and open for all. No registration needed.

