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AGING BY THE BOOK:  
TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MIDLIFE IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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ABSTRACT

Aging By The Book:

Textual Constructions of Midlife in Victorian Britain

by

Kay Helen Heath

In the last decade, literary studies has been dominated by an examination of race, class, and gender as major categories of subjectivity. Recently, however, this almost holy trinity has been challenged and complicated by new considerations--the concept of "nation" in post-colonial studies and "place" in environmental literature. This dissertation argues for the usefulness of another aspect of being, age, as a determiner of identity that does significant cultural work. The project focuses specifically on midlife in nineteenth-century Britain. In contrast to twentieth-century midlife which some theorists argue is dominated by ideologies of decline, Victorian middle age operates as a protean construction that maintains an unresolved competition between gain and loss. I examine ways in which these two conceptions of midlife vie for cultural authority as they are heavily complicated by gender.

In the introduction, I discuss age as a construct largely determined by cultural forces but also subject to certain biological constraints, and I provide a brief history of midlife as well as outlining the major characteristics of middle age in the Victorian era. In chapter one, I identify disputes in beauty and conduct books surrounding the performance of youth versus age in regard to midlife markers such as baldness, gray hair, wrinkles, weight gain, and use of cosmetics. Chapter two explores fictive age anxiety, showing that though women are most at risk for aging, portrayals of middle-age angst
occur in marriage plots for both men and women. In chapter three, I consider Victorian brides who are middle aged by comparing Frances Trollope’s Widow Barnaby with widows in three of Anthony Trollope’s Palliser novels. I show notions of decline giving way to increasingly progress-oriented narratives for midlife women. Chapter four examines discourse surrounding “the change of life” for both men and women.

The dissertation employs archival materials from beauty and conduct books, as well as medical and longevity texts. Many novels are included that feature midlife, including texts by Frances Trollope, Anthony Trollope, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Grant Allen, and Margaret Oliphant.
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Introduction

Midlife and Its Constructions

In the last decade, literary studies have been dominated by an examination of race, class, and gender as major categories of subjectivity. Recently, however, this almost holy trinity has been challenged and expanded by new considerations—for example, the concept of "nation" in post-colonial studies and "place" in environmental literature. In this dissertation, I will demonstrate the usefulness of another aspect of being, age, as a determiner of identity which does significant cultural work. In the latter part of the twentieth century, psychologists, sociologists, and historians began to examine age as a category of identity, but literary theorists have been slow to consider it. I hope to bridge that gap by focusing on a specific era of life, middle age, as a category of subjectivity under revision in nineteenth-century British culture and texts.

Although age is a biological phenomenon, it is also a socially-determined construct, a critical signifier. Age is universal, a fact of existence for all living beings, but one understood differently by each culture and era, and the construction of age has a direct bearing upon how life is experienced. Age scripts instruct us how to act, indicating appropriate and inappropriate behavior as well as opportunities that are available or unavailable to members of an age cohort. Culture forecasts and prescribes how lived experience should and often will be ordered—both biologically and behaviorally—through life course expectations. As Margaret Morganroth Gulllette points out, "whatever happens in the body, humans beings are aged by culture first all," placed by age ideology into categories that prescribe paradigms and possibilities for agency and identity (Declining 3).
Consider how important a "fact" age is in present western culture. A person’s chronological age is used to determine major rites of passage (when one begins and ends schooling, when one can drive, vote or drink alcohol, when one should retire from a career--all markers of certain epochs of maturity), and to locate one in various kinds of record keeping (on a birth certificate or driver’s license). As individuals, we use age as a defining quality of those we encounter, routinely inquiring how old children are, mentally calculating the age of adults, and grouping people according to age expectations.

Though age is such a complex and significant category of identity, it has often been ignored in the social sciences and humanities. Only recently has age begun to be added to the lists of qualities that constitute subjectivity such as race, class, gender, religion, and nationality.¹ To exclude age is not only to ignore, but to deny, its pervasive influence in the way culture constructs subjectivity.

Midlife is an especially interesting vantage point from which to view age as a construct because of its status in between youth and old age. Midlife partakes of preceding and following eras, because the midlife individual is neither young nor old, yet in some ways both young and old. Yet, even within the terrain of age studies itself, midlife has been neglected more than any other period in the life course. Psychologists Margie E. Lachman and Jacquelyn Boone James pointed out that "there are handbooks and journals devoted specifically to other parts of the life course (infancy, childhood,.

¹ Benson notes with approbation that recently "[p]sychologists, economists, sociologists, gerontologists, geographers and historians have all begun to recognise that age (along with gender, race, region, religion and class) could--and often did--constitute a crucial determinant of economic, social and cultural life" (1).
adolescence, old age), but none for midlife” (1). As Margaret Lock insightfully points out, midlife has been “the last portion of the life span to be ‘discovered’” (45).

Benson notes that only a few scholarly books have been written about midlife, and they have certain limitations. Not only are they now a bit outdated, but they deal only with the U.S. and “were written by (and for) psychiatrists, social workers and health-care professionals” (4). A current example of how midlife has been under-represented within Victorian studies is the recent collection of essays, *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, published in 1999. Though age is addressed in a section entitled “Passages of Life,” five chapters deal with childhood, adolescence, growing old, death, and sexuality, and the omission of midlife is glaringly obvious in the wide gap between adolescence and old age. With the exception of Margaret Morganroth Gullette’s 1990 essay “The Puzzling Case of the Deceased Wife’s Sister: Nineteenth-Century England Deals with a Second-Change Plot,” no work whatsoever has been published on nineteenth-century concepts of midlife.

The Victorian era is especially important to the development of midlife figurations because it serves as a bridge between two distinct conceptions of what it means to be middle-aged. Before the nineteenth century, ideas of midlife were dominated by Aristotle’s concept of middle age as the *akme* or prime of life. In the twentieth century, when the term “midlife” itself was born, middle age was no longer considered to be the prime; instead the peak of life was shifted to an earlier age and the advent of middle age was seen as a decline. We can look at the nineteenth century as the

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2 A historian, Benson finds the lack of midlife literature in the humanities surprising, especially in his own discipline, because, as he points out, “most historians, and those about whom history is written, are middle-aged” (2). Shweder pinpoints the last decade of the twentieth century as the period in which “there
link between these two ideologies—middle age as the peak of life and a gain or as decline and loss. In the nineteenth century, earlier ideas were dislodged, reconsidered, and refigured, with both progress and decline narratives in play and competing for authority. I present nineteenth-century midlife as a shifting, protean construction that maintains an unresolved competition between discourses of loss and gain. After first discussing some of the ground rules for age theory—a definition of age as a construct, the tension between biology and culture in age theory, and the difficulties inherent in establishing parameters for midlife, I will provide an overview of pre-nineteenth century concepts of age and contrast them with twentieth-century ideas. Then I will explore the intricacies of midlife in the nineteenth century, sketching a uniquely Victorian picture of middle age.

Though age intersects with and complicates all other categories of subjectivity, I will be focusing on two aspects of identity that are of special relevance to midlife in Victorian Britain. Gender is crucial because of the disparate stakes for men and women as they grow older. I will show that women enter midlife sooner than men and are more at risk for fictive and actual marriageability, but I also discuss the unique problems of men as they age into the middle years. Class is also of prime importance in considering age. For the most part, the texts I deal with—both fiction and nonfiction—assume a middle class audience. I look at ways that age and class are inscribed on the body and psyche by social constructions in the novels, conduct books, and medical texts that constitute my primary source material.

In this dissertation I use both fiction and non-fiction as sources. Though novels should not be confused with writings that purport to be factually based, I privilege

has been a rapidly growing interest in the cultural construction of mature adulthood” (viii). See also Gullette, Declining 219.
fictional texts as valuable sources of information about nineteenth-century concepts of middle age. Fictional texts are problematic bearers of cultural freight. We cannot naively assume that because an idea appears in fiction it is necessarily operative in the culture that produces the fictive world. The relationship between the novel and the “real world” is much debated and complex. Perhaps the single “fact” of which we can be certain is that when an idea appears in a fictional text, it becomes a possible thought—first in the author’s brain and then on the printed page—and therefore available in the culture. Literature can be seen as evidence of historical phenomena, but some theorists argue that novels are not only reflective of the culture in and through which they are produced but actually transform reality and affect culture by their presence within it. In Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel, Nancy Armstrong argues that texts both reflect current concepts of identity and simultaneously produce them—that “modern culture depends on a form of power that works through language—and particularly the printed word—to constitute subjectivity” (25). I consider representations of middle age in the nineteenth-century novel to operate in both ways—as a reflection of how Victorians viewed midlife but also as a contributor of new ideas that augmented midlife redefinition.

This project springs from my desire to believe—as a woman in her forties writing a dissertation and recasting her professional life by becoming an academic—that aging is not a biologically predetermined program that leads to inevitable decline and a scripted life path. I want to believe instead that we have some control and can make choices, that age is as much (or more) a performance than an edict. It is a dearly held notion of mine
that when we become conscious of the performative aspect of age, we are then more empowered to make choices about how we age.

I view the nineteenth century as uniquely formative in regard to many of the issues and forces that still impel our lives. Of course, this is in many ways an arbitrary point in history from which to begin to look at middle age. Nineteenth-century ways and meanings have their genesis in what came before them—the birth of the women's movement, nascent psychological theory, anxieties brought about by the Industrial Revolution and resultant urbanization and mechanization, as well as those following developments in science, questions about divine authority and the urge to make meaning from within rather than having it imposed from outward—these aspects of nineteenth-century British culture have been the groundwork for conundrums with which we still struggle, including how we think about age. By investigating nineteenth-century British views of middle age—as evinced in writings from literary, medical, and conduct texts—I explore the extent to which age was constructed and how those who lived and shaped midlife were influenced and controlled by it. We are subjected to a great variety of representations of midlife in twentieth- and early twenty-first-century texts—writings in psychology, medicine, sociology, the self-help genre, advertisements from community planning to investments, as well as fiction—which is obviously an incomplete list. It is my hope that this inquiry into past depictions of midlife will be valuable not only to Victorian studies, but will enlighten us as to our current constructions of midlife.

Defining Age and Midlife

We tend to view age uncritically as an unvarying and inevitable process, a stable element of being that is a biologically determined and uniform progression occurring in
virtually the same way in all places at all times. Only recently has age's malleability began to be recognized (Lock 47). As Featherstone and Hepworth argue, we must look beyond concepts of age as something "reducible to biological processes of physical decline which take place in some vacuum sealed off from social life" (308). Only when we deconstruct what seems "natural" to us about aging do we become aware of the ways in which our perceptions are fashioned by cultural cues.

We are taught the meanings attached to age through a myriad of representations offered by culture, from sources formal and informal, official and unofficial (Shweder xii). However, chronological age has not always been an important signifier in western culture. Until the mid-sixteenth century few people knew their age and individual ages were not recorded or considered relevant. Phillipe Ariès has demonstrated that family status was a major determining factor of identity in pre-modern Europe, and surname, often offered with place name, was the pertinent fact used to differentiate individuals (157). Currently, one's class at birth is less fixed, but other factors such as profession and age are much more potent determiners of identity.

We must be aware of ways in which age definitions differ significantly from culture to culture. For example, a grandmother's wrinkle in China is interpreted by her granddaughters as a marker of increased status, while in the west, the same wrinkle is read as a sign of lost youth and a proof of decay (Featherstone and Hepworth 306). Some cultures envision age in terms of chronological years while others assign meaning to age according to a progression through social roles. As Shweder describes it, "[w]ithin such cultural worlds one reckons and manages one's life not by reference to age per se (e.g., there may be no annual public recognition of the day of birth of mature adults) and not by
reference to biological aging (back pains, menopause) per se, but rather by reference to family position and associated social responsibilities" (xi). Transition from one life stage to another is understood in terms of change in family and community status, including alterations in the lives of one’s children. Some cultures do not even have a stage of life understood to be middle age.\(^3\)

Age ideologies also differ from century to century. While Ariès argues for the creation of childhood in western culture from the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries (33-43), G. Stanley Hall is purported to have “discovered” adolescence in the late-nineteenth century (Hareven 122). In the early-twentieth century, both childhood and adolescence came under increased scrutiny by the psychological and sociological communities, and at mid-century the focus shifted to the elderly. In the last several decades, midlife has become an increasingly interesting topic to theorists and researchers.

While meanings assigned to age are culturally determined, in any study of age we must also acknowledge the physical body. As Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick put it, we can never escape from the fact that “[h]uman beings are embodied persons with a finite life-span” (1). Certain bodily changes are associated with midlife, but there is a great variety in how and when they are experienced by individuals. Some theorists have attempted to use menopause as a hallmark of midlife for women, but it has proved an unreliable index (Levinson 24).\(^4\) Though menopause is usually a midlife event for women, it can occur across a wide range of ages and does not necessarily constitute a standard for measuring middle age. A biological definition does not suffice to describe middle age for

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\(^3\) See Shweder for several essays on cultures in which midlife is either constructed quite differently from western formulations or is entirely absent.
\(^4\) Also see Lachman (2-3) and Benson (6) for the difficulty of defining the onset and cessation of midlife.
either gender. After all, we are constantly producing technology that enables us to elude or circumvent some advances of age. And, should we ever discover a method to reverse chemically the biological effects of time, the issue of age will be transformed at a fundamental level. Midlife is not as essentially involved with the body as with how we understand the experiences of the first half of life and what conclusions we draw about how we must or should live the second. As Featherstone and Wernick put it, “the aging body is never just a body subjected to the imperatives of cellular and organic decline, for as it moves through life it is continuously being inscribed and reinscribed with cultural meanings” (2-3).

Kathleen Woodward discusses a spectrum of choices for age theory that range between biological essentialism and social constructivism, concluding that “[w]ith regard to the aging body, we are unable to adopt a position of pure social constructivism. We cannot detach the body in decline from the meanings we attach to old age” (Aging 18-9). In contrast, Margaret Morganroth Gullette favors a social constructivist view, but with certain limitations. She writes, “I would like to be at a point equivalent to that argued by Judith Butler in Gender Trouble, interrogating aging as a ‘natural process’ altogether, but I think that the most age studies can do now is to urge a radical social constructionism that pushes ‘the natural’ out of context after context” (Declining 245-6). I attempt to strike a balance between physical facts of aging, keeping in mind that these vary between cultures, epochs, and individuals, and socially constructed meanings applied to age.

Middle age is an especially difficult part of the life span to define because it has no easily discernable starting or ending point. Physiology determines the onset of some life stages, such as puberty at the beginning of adolescence (which itself can vary from
culture to culture), but no common biological markers signal midlife onset. Social indicators may serve to mark a new stage, such as retirement denoting old age, but midlife has no definitive social passage at its inception or conclusion. Midlife has been defined most commonly by chronology, but even this method has its limitations because definitions vary across time and cultures.\(^5\) Factors such as gender and class produce differences in definition. For example, Benson found that men and the middle working class are seen as entering midlife later than women and the working class (7). Women and men may tend to define middle age differently, and each group may have one paradigm for itself and another for the other gender. The age of the definer can also have an influence—in a study conducted by Lachman, persons in their twenties reported that midlife occurs between ages thirty and fifty-five, while those in their sixties and seventies perceived middle age to be later, in the forties to seventies (3).

If middle age is defined as the chronological middle of the life span, then changes in life expectancy should produce alterations in the onset and cessation of midlife. Lachman believes that midlife is not a recognized stage in cultures with shorter life spans and an early onset of certain key life events, and there is some evidence that midlife has shifted to later ages in cultures where life expectancy has risen so that what was once considered old age may now be considered midlife (2). Benson finds this to be true in his study of the history of midlife. For example, between 1901 and 1930, life expectancy in Britain rose almost thirty percent, and middle age was believed to begin at thirty-five. In

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\(^5\) In a comparison of numerical estimates of middle age from a variety of twentieth-century British sources, Benson found an academic study (1984) specifies thirty to fifty-five, a *Lancet* article (1914) says thirty-five to fifty, one *British Medical Journal* article (1964) cites forty to fifty-five while another (1915) cites forty to sixty, a government report (1954) claims forty-five to sixty-four, and an additional *British Medical Journal* article (1915) posits forty-nine to sixty-three (7). Due to this complexity, age theorist Richard Shweder defines midlife chronology in a wide range that includes all the foregoing, calling ages
1950, an article in the periodical John Bull stated, "While it is true that people are living longer, it also certain that they retain their youth much longer. A woman at forty is not middle-aged now as she was in Victorian times" (Benson 11). Benson argues that by the middle of the twentieth century, the general consensus in Great Britain was that midlife began at age forty and lasted until sixty, a shift of a decade from the 1851/71 census that defined midlife as between thirty and fifty (9). As technology enables us to increase longevity, middle age could, at least theoretically, be pushed back further and further.

As Margaret Morganroth Gullette points out, the answer to when midlife begins does not reside in a particular age or date: "[t]he middle years begin when the culture gets you to say they do" (Declining 159). The social and psychological aspects of age often far outweigh considerations of biology and chronology. Midlife can be defined in terms of key events in family and community status such as one's children growing up and leaving home, parents dying, or grandchildren being born. Woodward points out the unreliability of such indicators, however, because familial rites of passage are chronologically inconsistent and individually variable (Aging 186). Children of older persons may be young adults when their parents die. Older parents may still be raising teenagers well past middle age.

In the twentieth century, emphasis was placed on psychological factors that define midlife aging. C. G. Jung, Erik Erikson, and Elliott Jaques discuss the middle of life as a stage with unique developmental challenges. They point toward the psychological impact in midlife of growing out of old roles that come to seem insufficient, resulting in a desire to incorporate new ways of thinking and experiencing life. New avenues of
personal development obtain relevance in the struggle to make sense of shifting perceptions brought about by the knowledge that life is now half over. Obviously, in themselves, chronological, biological, sociological, or psychological bases for defining midlife are insufficient (Levinson 322). Only a mix of these aspects of aging placed within a cultural context can begin to capture the broad spectrum of meanings attached to middle age. Several age theorists present midlife as a new formulation in western culture. For example, Shweder argues that “[u]ntil recently the European-American way of thinking about mature adulthood as midlife or middle age, a powerful cultural ‘fiction’ in its own right, has been the exception rather than the rule on a worldwide scale” (x).

Though the absence of a midlife stage in non-western cultures does reveal the culturally constructed nature of this life stage, I have found ample evidence of its importance in the nineteenth century. In this dissertation, I explore chronological, sociological, and psychological aspects of age as they are represented in fiction and nonfiction. By denaturalizing middle age and calling attention to it as a culturally-produced construction represented in a wide spectrum of nineteenth-century fictional and non-fictional texts, I have found a complex system of midlife signification operating in the Victorian world.

Current Conceptions of Midlife

Because current formulations of midlife operate as the basis from which I consider historical and literary depictions of midlife in this dissertation, it is imperative that I consider the recent impact of decline ideology on how we view middle age. Age theorists argue that each life stage should be considered important in its own right as having unique gains and losses, with no period standing out from the others as either
progress or decline, and social scientists often adopt this view in an attempt to maintain neutrality and objectivity.\textsuperscript{6} Despite this admirable attempt at objectivity, the fact remains that, at least in western culture, and increasingly in others, the highpoint of life has been shifted backward to earlier ages, and societies have become highly youth oriented. In 1982, British sociologists Mike Hepworth and Mike Featherstone wrote that they had found “abundant evidence of a new image of middle age” characterized by an unfavorable comparison between the aging midlife body and “idealized standards of perpetual youth, fitness, and beauty” (Surviving, unnumbered page in Forward). They note that the desire to retain youthfulness has become such an assumed norm that “any tendency to accept the visible signs of ageing . . . runs the danger of being interpreted as an outer reflection of an unworthy self, signs of low self-esteem and even moral weakness” (Surviving 6).

Historian John Benson agrees that the meaning of midlife changed in the twentieth century due to three major developments: “middle age became defined increasingly often in chronological terms; became associated unambiguously with decay and collapse, but came to be regarded as largely, if not completely avoidable given the appropriate remedial action” (8). While middle age had previously been experienced differently according to gender and class, in the twentieth century these variations converged, with an overall emphasis on physical and emotional decline. Benson describes the general conception of the middle aged as those “prone to corpulence, creaking joints, greying hair, failing eyesight, marital difficulties and depressive illness”

\textsuperscript{6} Sociologists Nancy D. Davis, Ellen Cole, and Esther D. Rothblum posit such a steady state theory in the preface to Faces of Women and Aging: “Looking at aging from the point of view of the individual, we believe that middle and old age are merely stages of growth and development and not just seasons of loss and decline as the end approaches. Each life stage has its joys and sorrows; and old age, the
(16). But, according to the social constructivism of new midlife ideology, if you age “badly,” you are getting what you deserve because youthfulness can be retained if you “use appropriate medical and cosmetic aids, eat sparingly, exercise sensibly, and think positively” (20). Benson characterizes the revised version of midlife in the latter twentieth century as “the idea that the middle aged could be sane, sound and seasoned [giving] way to the thought that they might be slim, sensuous, and sexy” (25). He notes that this pervasive belief in preventable midlife decline gained prominence at a time when the overall health and well-being of the middle aged increased and concludes that middle age was “demonised, homogenised and individualised” in the twentieth century (28).

Gullette, a literary and cultural critic, argues for an even more radical change in middle age in the early part of the twentieth century. Gullette writes that midlife is “a new age category” (Declining 3) that was “invented” early in the twentieth century, between 1900 and 1935 (Declining 243). The new midlife became further developed by an “explosion of discourse” in the 1970s and is characterized by a belief in midlife decline and a simultaneous worshipping of youthfulness (Declining 3, 39). Featherstone, Hepworth, and Gullette all note that while women have long been urged to retain youthfulness, the new midlife also includes men in age anxiety. By the 1920s and 30s midlife had became a source of trauma for both males and females, especially in regard to the “troubling, unwanted” body of middle age (“Midlife Discourse” 27). Gullette urges that the pervasive “decline system” of midlife be resisted by its exposure and repudiation (Declining 5). It is not enough merely to counter decline with progress narratives; age

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last stage, has the joy of increasing self-knowledge and personal authenticity as the reward for the painful struggle of emotional growth in the face of the losses of aging” (xi).
theorists must also draw attention to age ideology and advocate personal choice about whether to accept or resist the current master narrative of decline (Declining 217, 244).

Current western culture constructs midlife in ways that differ due to gender. Some theorists point out that women are more at risk than men in the current youth-oriented view of midlife because they are more stigmatized by aging. Benson argues that women, much more than men, must overcome “unpleasant and unwarranted assumptions about physical resilience and emotional stability” (52). While this stigma is produced and sanctioned by culture, it is also self-induced as women are psychologically influenced by the media-constructed “sin” of female aging (Wolfe 73).

In her study of identity and self-esteem issues for middle-aged women, Sarah F. Pearlman reports that early midlife may bring improvements in women’s lives as they come to a new sense of self-awareness and confidence in early midlife. But, she continues, “late mid-life astonishment” may overwhelm women in their fifties and sixties who may be traumatized by physical signs that indicate the onset of old age. Because our culture has traditionally over-emphasized physical attractiveness in women, “the more a woman has relied upon her youthful looks, based her identity on her physical/sexual attractiveness, and rooted her sense of self and self-esteem in her appearance, the greater her vulnerability to changes in her physical self—and the greater the loss and assault upon self-esteem (5). Women may even feel guilt and a sense of failure that they have somehow insufficiently resisted age. Chrsler and Ghiz argue that it is “difficult to feel comfortable about aging in a culture where older women are rarely seen, and those who are seen are celebrated primarily for their ‘youthful’ good looks” (37). Benson also concludes that women are more at risk than men in midlife because a “combination of social stigmatisation, psychological
adjustment and physical decline... undermined the health of middle-aged women, and so widened the gap between them and their male contemporaries” in the twentieth century (53). Pearlman believes women can escape the age trap by traversing a series of phases: “denial; recognition; comparison to oneself as younger (and to younger women); increasing tolerance; and finally re-conceptualization of identity, and reconciliation and acceptance of the reality of aging—and oneself as older” (Pearlman 10).

Theorists discuss a progression across the twentieth century in males being drawn into the mindset that midlife aging is a sin. Gullette argues that “[u]ntil recently, midlife men have not thought of themselves as a gendered and aged category,” but now they are becoming subject to the rhetoric of midlife decline (Declining 150). Benson notes that over the course of the century, “midlife crisis was felt increasingly to crush both men and women, involving the middle aged of both sexes in anxiety” (13), and he lists midlife problems by gender. Women are beset with physical problems of midlife aging associated with menopause and have a higher risk than men for osteoporosis, gall stones, breast cancer, and urinary incontinence, but midlife males are subject to prostate problems and impotence, and are more likely to suffer glaucoma, ulcers, bronchitis, lung cancer and coronary diseases than women (53). Middle-aged women are more prone than middle-aged men and younger women to depression. But, while midlife females more often commit suicide than younger women, they have lower suicide rates than midlife males. Middle-aged men have better overall health than middle-aged women, while midlife females tend to live longer than midlife males (56).

As the preceding indicates, twentieth-century theorists stress decline as the hallmark of middle age for both genders. I contend, however, that along with this
emphasis on middle age as loss, a focus on individual empowerment has developed that conceptualizes midlife as a new beginning in which individuals can gain power. Hepworth and Featherstone argue for a redefinition of middle age in the 1920s and 30s as "a period of heightened expectations" (Surviving 67) and "a time of opportunity for ‘taking stock’ and self-development" ("Images of Ageing" 328). They quote Dr. Arnold Lorand’s 1922 edition of Old Age Deferred as making the definitive statement of the time: “we need no longer grow old at forty or fifty” (Surviving 67). In 1989 Oldham argued that “there has been a growing recognition that internal change and emergent possibilities are characteristic of many individuals in the middle decades of life” (2). While decline theory may be the most dominant midlife paradigm, progress ideology gained strength in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Psychologists have been major contributors to a paradigm of middle age that counteracts notions of midlife as decline. Elliott Jacques first formulated the now-familiar concept of "midlife crisis" in 1965. In a survey of the lives of past artistic "geniuses," Jaques found that in the middle and late thirties, the "creative career" took a turn, sometimes slowing or ceasing, or, in a previously noncreative life, suddenly coming to birth. Jaques identifies two outstanding features of this crisis—“the emergence of a tragic and philosophical content [in the work] which then moves on to serenity in the creativity of mature adulthood” (504), and an awareness of personal death that transforms the end of life from an abstraction to an inevitable reality, causing reassessment and growth (506).

Another important psychological theorist of midlife is Carl Jung, who claims:
we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life’s morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie . . .

Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning . . . must pay for it with damage to his soul . . . . (17-18)

Jung taught that the first task of midlife is to accomplish individuation, or the process of becoming uniquely individual with a more conscious identity that enables better utilization of inner resources. While individuation had been seen as an important aspect of childhood and adolescent development, Jung argued that it continues into adulthood, reappearing especially around forty as the second half of life commences. The first half of life is necessarily rather one-sided as a person establishes basic adult roles, but after they have been achieved, aspects of the self that have been ignored, repressed, or denied can reappear and come to fullest expression. The second task of middle age is for the more highly evolved self to look beyond the earlier pursuits of youth, developing the ability to live in harmony with humanity and nature and achieving transcendence. Jung believed that this process was not realized in every life, however. He saw the middle-aged passage as vulnerable, an opportunity for growth that could become a crucial turning point, but one that could only be successfully achieved by giving up old life goals and allowing new ones to grow (17).7

The concept of the middle years as a time of new beginnings is also due, in part, to a rise in life expectancy that increasingly enables us to live what would have been literally two lives in the past. In Europe, North America, Japan, and Australasia, we now have the oldest populations that have ever lived, a phenomenon Peter Laslett terms “the
secular shift.” Our populations are older in two senses—not only are more elderly people alive today than at any previous time, but individual lifetimes are lasting much longer, due to a major increase in life expectancy over the last one hundred years (Laslett 3). From as far back as the 1500s, when populations can first be extrapolated from existing data, until the 1880s, the average life expectancy in Great Britain was generally a number in the high thirties to low forties, with variations produced by such factors as famine and plague. Since the 1880s, however, major changes in technology, health care, and sanitation have extended life expectancy until it has almost doubled. While the average life expectancy in Great Britain in 1891 was 43.9 years, in 1991 it had increased to 75.4 years (Laslett 69).

This unprecedented change has many repercussions for the ways we think about age, but particularly for middle and old age. As Laslett describes it:

All our ageing expressions have become inaccurate, and many of them obsolete. They provide us with the misleading images of children, adults, those in the prime of life, a phrase to be noted because we are going to shift the prime of life a long way towards the later years, as well as those in middle age, late middle life and those already in retirement. For the age constitution of our society has been transformed, quite suddenly and in without our realizing what has happened. (2)

Though people have always lived into their eighties and even nineties, they were an exception that formed a small segment of the population, but now the elderly form a large age cohort in western societies. Projections suggest that by the year 2020, the rise in life expectancy will level out at some year in the eighties for both sexes (69). The secular

7 See also Lachman 6, Levinson, Seasons 33; Bond 27.
shift has created a new expectation about individual life span, and those who are middle-aged at forty can see themselves as truly at the midpoint in a long progression of years that now includes time for second or third marriages, families, and careers. Despite these more positive conceptions of midlife that gathered strength over the twentieth century, and Laslett’s contention that the prime of life will begin to be figured as later in life, middle age is still largely figured in western culture as decline.

Woodward notes that we commonly adjust the definition of “old” to exclude ourselves: “Youth is a point which in our psychic economy is not fixed. Youth—‘being young’—is a moveable marker... ‘old age’ is pushed ahead. People often will label ‘old’ only those who are older than they are” (Aging 6). Western culture in the twentieth and early-twenty-first century is dominated by a youth orientation that figures an early peak in the life course.

The ideas that currently circulate around the concept of midlife—gender differences, decline, crisis, new beginnings—inspire my inquiry into how the nineteenth century envisioned this life stage. I do not argue here for an evolutionary development of midlife ideology—that present-day concepts are an improvement or a more enlightened weltanschauung. I acknowledge current formulations as the platform from which I write, the concepts that shape my thoughts on how age functions in both the present and the past, but I attempt to view Victorian formulations of age as working in similar ways to those in the present day—as a field of changing and competing ideologies within a cultural matrix.
Pre-Nineteenth-Century Age Ideology

British concepts of midlife before the nineteenth century were influenced by the classical Aristotelian idea of three stages of the life cycle: growth, stasis, and decline. Aristotle's theory of a middle stage of life as the akme or prime may be the earliest formulation of midlife. He believed that the body is at its peak at thirty to thirty-five, but the true apex occurs at age forty-nine, when, he argues, the mind is most fully developed. This is an idea adopted from Solon, who posited that the prime of speech and thought occurs in the seventh cycle of seven years (Dove 28).  

Among medieval scholars various stages of life of life were proposed, with biologists favoring three, physiologists four, astrologers seven, and religious and historical writers six. The medieval life course is presented in diagrams of a wheel, a tree, or steps (Troyansky 41). In the Renaissance, iconographers increasingly favored the steps of life, which became "the standard bourgeois image of a lifetime" from 1500 to about 1850 (Cole 19). The medieval wheel of life had a religious orientation, presenting Christ as the hub connecting all stages, but the steps of life, which were configured in an arch, emphasized the progress of life as a rise and fall with the middle years as the apex, reiterating Aristotle's principle of akme (Cole 14-6). The cyclical orientation stressed the possibility of death at any moment as the years circle around a deity who touches each stage of life's passage, while the rising and falling staircase emphasized a linear progression privileging the middle of life as a peak.

In the Renaissance, scholars placed the beginning of old age around the fortieth or fiftieth year, depending upon a person's occupation, so the midlife apex would have occurred in the thirties and forties (Troyansky 46-8). Iconographic depictions began to
associate the stages of life less with biological features of aging and more with social functions—for example, though some lawyers may have been young, the law was presented as an older man’s trade. These pictures became quite common. Their depiction of life as a series of clear-cut steps advanced the idea that aging occurred in predictable stages that corresponded to social functions, physical activities, and appearance (Ariès 24).

Depictions of the steps of life in the seventeenth century began to feature couples, evincing a new preoccupation with domesticity. Gender roles were stressed—men were to maintain finances and order; women were to oversee the family’s health and the children. Life stages were definitively set forth and the motif instructed the viewer that by taking each step in turn, he or she was in the right order. The process of aging was seen as part of a divine arrangement understood through the steps of life iconography. Woman-only steps-of-life depictions appeared that set out an ideal female life cycle of responsibility for maintaining beauty and deportment and directing the civilizing process (Cole 28).

During the eighteenth century, visual and verbal representations of age began to lose an emphasis on religious and moral themes and became invested in science. Earlier memento mori themes with their caution to “remember death” and attend to the spirit became less and less prevalent until they were finally absent. Aging began to be seen as a scientific problem with technical solutions (Cole xxiv, 5). The new stress on empirical observation lead to prescriptive literature on age. Life expectancy became an issue with mathematicians. Medical treatises began to address specific maladies related to certain age groups, and doctors dissected cadavers to obtain more information about aging.

8 See also Cole 6.
Philosophical texts became less interested in "the good death" and more concerned with how to age well (Troyansky 51-2). Parish priests began for the first time to keep accurate records of births and death (Ariès 16). Chronological age took on a new importance as statistics measured the empirical data of individual lives. As Cole states it, "[i]n an increasingly rationalized, urban, industrial society, chronological age came to function as a uniform criterion for sequencing the multiple roles and responsibilities that individuals assumed over a lifetime" (3).

In response to the growing preoccupation with health and longevity, an orientation toward youthfulness began to emerge (Featherstone and Hepworth 322). Philippe Ariès has shown that childhood emerged as a distinctive phase during the eighteenth century, evinced in the production of voluminous number of texts on child-rearing and family advice. Instead of focusing on lineage and kinship groups, literature and art began to concentrate on the child-centered urban nuclear family (Ariès 40-43, Hareven 122).

While childhood became more prominent, old age was also taking on new meanings. Some historians argue that the modernization of western Europe lowered the status of the elderly. Formerly aged adults held power through wealth and their accumulation of years, and they were granted a position of respect for their wisdom and experience. Industrialization caused the elderly to lose their status as young workers and rising capitalists assumed prominence. As a result, what had been veneration was replaced with contempt and then turned to pity (Coleman, Bond, and Peace 11-2; Featherstone and Hepworth 318). But, other historians point to a new sentimentality in depictions of the elderly in France and Germany in the late eighteenth century, arguing
that older people were depicted for the first time as worthy in their own right and not just as allegorical figures (Troyansky 52).

Despite the new elevation of childhood and some denigration of old age, the life course in western societies until the eighteenth century was still envisioned in terms of the steps of life which figured middle age as an Aristotelian prime. A decided shift occurred from this classical and long-held view of midlife in the eighteenth century as \textit{akme} to the twentieth century's characterization of the apex of life as youthfulness. The notion that middle age is a simple and stable prime was questioned in the nineteenth century as complex negotiations of gain and loss age ideology challenged each other for authority over the century.

\textbf{Aging, Midlife, and the Nineteenth Century}

In the nineteenth-century, the life course that had been conceptualized in terms of a religious pilgrimage became a secularized journey accommodated to Victorian sensibilities that privileged the uniform regularities of science. Secularized versions of the steps of life highlighting gender in depictions of "the ages of woman" and "the ages of man" became common in the U.S. and Europe. This iconography reached mass audiences, appearing on items for everyday use such as calendars, almanacs, board games, stove tiles, beer mugs, and book illustrations (Cole 113). The life course was depicted by writers, artists, and preachers as a uniform system based on science with a moral rather than religious significance.

Victorians often held to the Aristotelian division of life into three parts. In his longevity text, \textit{Aids to Long Life} (1885), Nathaniel Davies describes life’s stages as
“growth,” “maturity” (or “nutrition”), and decay (1,3). This formulation also appears in fiction: in Charles Dickens’s *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), Arthur Clennam speaks of people as being either “young, old, or middle-aged” (and, at forty, fears that he is “growing old”) (641). But the nineteenth century was not content to leave middle age in a vaguely-defined state. The Victorian preoccupation with science is evident in the accumulation of data to quantify and thereby define life stages. Middle age was discussed as chronologically determined and attempts were made to set it to a predictable span in an established number of years.

In the nineteenth century, the British began to compile statistics at an unprecedented rate. The first census occurred in 1801 and was followed by increasing amounts of information that documented two great changes in the British people. A population surge across the century increased the census count from eleven million in 1801 to thirty-seven million in 1901, an unprecedented rise of 300 percent (Soloway 617). Along with this increase in overall numbers came the steady growth of life expectancy. As Table 1 indicates, the average life span increased from the mid-thirties to the upper forties and lower fifties, dependent upon gender. The increasing refinements of statistics are evident in the addition of separate numbers for men and women in the 1880s, a development which reveals that women attained longer lives than men.

These figures, however, give a somewhat false picture of how long an adult in Victorian England expected to live. Though the average life expectancy may have been in the upper forties by the end of the century, this figure must be corrected for the

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9 Longevity texts are those which focus in whole or part on how to lengthen life and include such titles as P. H. Chevasses’s *Man’s Strength and Woman’s Beauty or The Royal Road to Life, Love, and Longevity* (1880), Charles W. De Lacy Evans’s *Can We Prolong Life?* (1879), John Gardner’s *Longevity: The Means of Prolonging Life After Middle Age* (1875), and Bernard Van Oven’s *On the
Table 1
Expectation of Life At Birth in England, 1801-1901
Males and Females

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Female</th>
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<td>1806</td>
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<td>1811</td>
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<td>1816</td>
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<td>1821</td>
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<td>1826</td>
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<td>1851</td>
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<td>1871</td>
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high incidence of infant and child mortality. Most people who survived into adulthood lived at least into their fifties. For example, in English ducal families from 1800 to 1879, women who lived until age twenty had an average life expectancy of 66.2 years, and from 1880 to 1901 around 74.3 years (Wilbush, “Climacteric” 2). Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that for both males and females death rates were extremely high from birth to age four and although rates climbed in midlife, they did not reach the same levels again until sometime in the sixth decade, well past what I define as nineteenth-century midlife.

_Decline of Life in Health and Disease, Being an Attempt to Investigate the Causes of Longevity; and the Best Means of Attaining a Healthful Old Age_ (1853).
Determining exactly when midlife was considered to occur in nineteenth-century Britain is a complicated process. Some Victorian writers attempted to describe middle

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SOURCE: adapted from Mitchell 40-1.

age as the exact numerical center of life. For example, "an Old Physician" writes in an 1830 medical treatise that at 38 half of life as been lived (257). In *The Functions and Disorder of the Reproductive Organs*, William Acton states that forty is the age demarcating the divide between youth and old age: "[a] man or a woman above twenty and below forty is called young; so those of the age of forty and above are called old" (22). By pointing to thirty-eight and forty as the midpoint of life, the "Old Physician" and Acton indicate that they expect the normal life span to be about seventy-six to eighty
years, well above the census figures for average life span in the years in which they were writing. This disparity between words and figures suggests that adults had an expectation of life far exceeding the statistical figures skewed by high child mortality rates.

The more usual way to define middle age in the nineteenth-century, however, was as a span of years instead of an exact midpoint. The compilers of the 1871 census defined middle age as the period of life between ages thirty and fifty for both men and women (Benson 9). Though this seems a clear and definitive statement of Victorian middle age, if we take into account fictional representations of midlife the matter is much more complicated by gender than the census keepers indicate. While statisticians discussed midlife as a set period for both genders, literary evidence shows that women were aged into midlife earlier than men, due specifically to the marriage market which relegated single women into the category of spinsterhood at age 30. Early in the century, Jane Austen indicates that ages fifteen to thirty marked the boundaries of female marriageability. In *Persuasion* (1818) Frederick Wentworth comments, “Yes, here I am . . . ready to make a foolish match. Anybody between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking” (86). Elizabeth, the eldest Elliot daughter, feels “her approach to the years of danger” at age 29 (38) because she is reaching the point of unmarriageability and spinsterhood. She had, after all, been on the “market” for almost fifteen years. Because of this gendered split in Victorian definitions of midlife evinced in fictive discussions of marriage and age, I define midlife marriages as those occurring for women in their 30s, 40s, and early 50s, and those for men in their 40s through 50s.

That spinsterhood automatically pushed women into middle age is evident in Dinah Mulock Craik’s *Hannah* (1872) when the protagonist at age 30 is called both “an
old maid" (27) and a woman “on the verge of middle age” (16). At 31, Hannah thinks of herself as having reached “the satisfied enjoyment of middle age” (71). The thirties remain a pivotal decade to the end of the Victorian era: the opening sentence of F. F. Montresor’s *The Alien, A Story of Middle Age*, published in 1901, defines midlife in chronological terms for women as beginning in the thirties: “I call this ‘a story of Middle Age’ because Esther Mordaunt was well into the thirties when she became involved in it” (1).

Spinsterhood in Victorian novels presents very limited possibilities for women—socially and financially—to the point that singleness is cast as a tragedy. In Anthony Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now* (1875), spinsterhood is presented in terms of despair by Georgiana Longstaffe when she is around the age of thirty:

Marriage had ever been so clearly placed before her eyes as a condition of things to be achieved by her own efforts, that she could not endure the idea of remaining tranquil in her father’s house and waiting till some fitting suitor might find her out ... Twelve years had been passed by her since first she plunged into the stream,—the twelve years of her youth,—and she was as far as ever from the bank; nay, farther, if she believed her eyes. She too must strike out with rapid efforts, unless, indeed, she would abandon herself and let the waters close over her head. (724)

The metaphor of drowning demonstrates the drastic consequences for women who do not marry by age thirty, especially those above the working class who could not take on menial labor to support themselves. Women not fortunate enough to inherit family
money were dependent on their male relatives for support and lived as dependents, a burden to others.

While Victorian novels depict women as middle aged at or near 30, they present men at this age as still young. When Jane Eyre first meets Rochester she notes that he “was past youth, but had not reached middle age: perhaps he might be thirty-five” (114). Craik’s *Hannah* says that “men are young still at thirty” (21), and Lady Laura in Anthony Trollope’s *Phineas Finn* (1869) observes that a “woman at forty is quite old, whereas a man at forty is young” (1.74). In contrast to women, men remain marriageable in their forties. In *Phineas Finn*, the narrator specifically points out that Robert Kennedy at age forty is immensely marriageable: “Mr. Kennedy as an unmarried man, with an immense fortune, a magnificent place, a seat in Parliament, and was not perhaps above forty years of age. There could be no reason why he should not ask Lady Laura to be his wife...” (1.56). Kennedy is eligible not merely because of his fortune, but because he has all the requisites for good husband material—wealth, position, respectability—and his age is mentioned as consistent with his other qualities as matrimonially fitting. The narrator of Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now* goes so far as to describe Roger Carbury as young at age forty:

He was at present forty years old, and was perhaps as healthy a man as you could find in the whole county. Those around who had known him as he grew into manhood among them... still regarded him as a young man. They spoke of him at the county fairs as the young squire. When in his happiest moods he could be almost a boy. (106)
Though Hetta Carbury joking calls Roger “old,” she specifically states that he is marriageable: “You know I did not mean that he was too old to get married. Men a great deal older get married every day” (118).

Some Victorian novels depict men in their forties as still young, but they also identity the onset of midlife for men in the fourth decade. For example, Arthur Clennam, forty (55) at the beginning of Little Dorrit (1857), describes himself as “in middle life” (59) and as having “lived the half of a long term of life” (86). Middle age continues into the fifth decade for men: Mr. Broune in The Way We Live Now is called middle-aged at fifty (233), and Mr. Maule, Sr. in Phineas Redux (1874) is described as “hardly beyond middle life” in his mid-fifties (1.183-4). Outside his novels, Anthony Trollope implies that women in their fifties are past middle age. He says of his mother Fanny that “till long after middle life she never herself wrote for publication” (Autobiography 20). Frances Trollope was first published at age 50.

The intersection of age, gender, and marriageability complicate nineteenth-century definitions of midlife in several other ways. The disproportionately larger number of women to men in the nineteenth century, as indicated by Table 4, came to be seen as a crisis, and females who remained unmarried due to a dearth of potential spouses were termed “redundant women.” W. R. Greg reported in an 1861 issue of The National Register that there were 106 women for every 100 men between the ages of twenty and sixty, and out of 100 females above age twenty, 30 were spinsters. Table 5 shows that while there were 209,663 “excess” women between ages twenty and thirty at the height of marriageability, there were almost as many--201,786--in their thirties, forties, and fifties who would have been considered middle-aged spinsters and were much more at
risk than the former group for non-marriageability due to age. Marriageability at midlife was an issue of great importance, because it was, for the duration of the century, the primary means of support for most women. The furor over "redundant" women only put more pressure on unmarried middle-aged women to consider themselves misfits with limited futures.

Table 4
United Kingdom Population By Sex
(000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Females per 1,000 Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>4255</td>
<td>4638</td>
<td>1,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>4,874</td>
<td>5,291</td>
<td>1,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>5,850</td>
<td>6,150</td>
<td>1,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>6,771</td>
<td>7,126</td>
<td>1,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>7,778</td>
<td>8,137</td>
<td>1,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>8,781</td>
<td>9,146</td>
<td>1,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>9,776</td>
<td>10,290</td>
<td>1,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>11,059</td>
<td>11,653</td>
<td>1,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>12,640</td>
<td>13,335</td>
<td>1,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>14,060</td>
<td>14,942</td>
<td>1,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>15,729</td>
<td>16,799</td>
<td>1,068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Mitchell and Jones 3.

Several reasons have been identified for the substantial sex disparity in the population. Though males were born at a greater rate than females, they suffered a higher incidence of infant mortality, and as Table 5 shows, by age fifteen more females than males were living (Hammerton 28-9). The Victorians also ascribed the greater number of adult females to male emigration and recommended shipping the extra women to the colonies where their matrimonial prospects would be higher.

Marriage was not out of the question once a woman passed the fateful age of thirty, however. The age at which marriage occurred did rise for both males and females over the century, though it remained in the twenties. During the first half of the century,
Table 5  
Excess of Males and Females in England and Wales, 1861

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Male excess</th>
<th>Female excess</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>9,032</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>1,854</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>14,602</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>16,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>109,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>100,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>63,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>43,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>32,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>24,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>22,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>16,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>25,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>25,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>24,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>17,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>11,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>5,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>1,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95-99</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Hammerton 29.

first marriages for women were usually contracted at about twenty-two and in the latter half of the century at about twenty-five (Soloway 617). Men were usually two to three years older than women at first marriage, and the same increase in age at first nuptials occurred for them (Acton 21). But, as Tables 6 and 7 indicate, a large number of marriages in the nineteenth century were the second and subsequent unions of the widowed, and many, though not the majority, of these unions involved spouses in middle age. Divorce did not become available to the general population until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, and even then, the numbers of remarrying divorced remained low throughout the century. The Registrar General reports that from 1861 to 1876 over 4,000
Table 6
Annual Marriage Rate By Age in 1851 (per thousand)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Bachelors (males not previously married)</th>
<th>Spinsters (females not previously married)</th>
<th>Widowers (males previously married)</th>
<th>Widows (females previously married)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: adapted from Farr 79.

Table 7
Annual Marriage Rate By Age in 1870-72 (per thousand)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Bachelors (males not previously married)</th>
<th>Spinsters (females not previously married)</th>
<th>Widowers (males previously married)</th>
<th>Widows (females previously married)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: adapted from Farr 80.
couples were divorced, though only 696 marriages in those years involved a previously
divorced person and both people were previously divorced in only 13 cases. Horstman
suggests that “the vast majority of those who were divorced never remarried, whether due
to shame, memories, or death cannot be known,” but he also notes that the number of
remarrying divorced rose steadily throughout the century—only 10 divorced people
remarried in 1861, but 390 remarried in 1900 (156).

Tables 5 and 6 also show that midlife marriage was quite common—statistically
relevant numbers of marriages were contracted when women were in their thirties and
forties and men in their forties and fifties. Men especially remarried at a high rate, and
though the female remarriage rate lags significantly behind that for men, it is also
substantial. Therefore, in order to construct an accurate picture of the marriage market in
midlife, we must consider that often one or both of the parties to midlife marriages were
entering into a second or subsequent union, and the remarriage market was a distinct
possibility for the middle-aged seeking spouses.

Another issue of importance to those in midlife was the dramatic fall of fertility
rates which began in late Victorian Britain. From 1860 to 1940, the number of live births
fell from an average of six for each married woman in the population to an average of a
little over two (Szreter 1). The birth rate decline in the latter part of century was not due
to any lack of fertility in the population at large but caused by changes in behavior.
Though some new birth control devices, such as the rubber condom, Dutch cap, and
douche, became available late in the century, they were quite expensive and could not
have explained the drop in birth rate. The birth rate reduction is probably due to
increased desire for and confidence in using conventional birth control methods that had
long been known but not widely practiced: abstinence, coitus interruptus, and timing
coitus with infertile sections of the monthly cycle (though the latter process was
imperfectly understood in the nineteenth century) (Woods 323).

It is difficult to ascertain any exact patterns for age at maternity because records
of mother's age were not kept until the 1930s (Woods 321-2). The Annual Report of the
Registrar General did record number of births per 1,000 women between the ages of
fifteen and forty-four, indicating that these were considered the years of fertility (Mitchell
29). As discussed more fully in chapter four, the average age of menopause was
established to be around forty-five. Before the advent of birth control, women continued
to bear children until they no longer were physically able. When family size was not
limited, it was common for couples to have children in their home until the parents were
in old age.

As number of offspring began to be limited, the resultant decrease in family size
changed women's lives substantially. If women had only two or three children in the
years closely following the average age of first marriage (twenty-five after mid-century),
then their children would reach adulthood in the mother's late forties and early fifties.
And near the end of the century, as life expectancy increased, women at this age began to
expect to live many more years of life. The ability to have "empty nest" years is thus
made possible by the combination of birth control, which enabled women to restrict
motherhood to the earlier years of adulthood, and the increase in life expectancy. As a
result of these factors, the "the empty nest" syndrome began to appear as a feature of
midlife in the late nineteenth century. Benson points out that though the empty nest is
often depicted in twentieth-century thought as a time of loss, many couples report it to be
a source of relief. For women especially, the exodus of the last child can herald a new
time for education and self-development (110, 120), a concept that was embryonic late in
the Victorian period. In chapter four, I will discuss more fully how the loss of fertility is
linked with both loss and gain in midlife for nineteenth-century British women.

Determining when midlife gives way to old age is another complicated issue.
Though F. B. Smith argued in 1979 that "[r]elative old age began at about forty-five
rather than sixty-five in nineteenth-century Britain" (284), the evidence of current
research into retirement law as well as the words of medical and longevity text writers
show this to be an inadequate assessment of the end of middle age. Our current
definition of the beginning of old age is often based on the official age for retirement
benefits to begin—age 65. Before "pension age" or "retirement age" was established in
the twentieth century, old age definitions were much looser. Janet Roebuck argues that
before the nineteenth-century, agedness was based on function rather than chronology,
and poor law authorities considered the indigent elderly to be those who could no longer
support themselves and also looked old (417). The development of poor law benefits and
pensions during the nineteenth century necessitated establishing an official number for
the beginning of old age. Responses to the Poor Law investigators of 1834 indicate that
most local authorities considered people old if they were unable to support themselves
and were fifty or older, but commissioners set sixty as the age at which special
considerations were given to the inmates of workhouses (418-9). The Friendly Societies
Act of 1875 set fifty as the demarcating year for old age, but that number was amended
by the Royal Commission of 1895, which substituted sixty-five for fifty (420). Sixty-five
was chosen to be the official pension age by the Old Age Pensions Committee in 1898 (421).

Medical and longevity texts also grapple with the issue of old age onset. In *Longevity: The Means of Prolonging Life After Middle Age* (1875), John Gardner states that “sixty-three is an age at which the majority of persons may be termed old; and, as a rule, we may adopt this as the epoch of the commencing decline of life.” While allowing for individual difference, Gardener holds to sixty-three: “[e]xceptions of course, there are; but in a mixed company, few would fail to discern those who may fairly be pronounced old people, as distinguished from the middle-aged; and we venture to say, most of them would be found, on enquiry, to have reached or passed sixty-three” (13).

Biological or physical age was not considered always to be a fixed category, and individual aging could be seen as overcoming chronology. As Nathaniel Davies describes it,

> Some degenerate earlier than others, and as in the vegetable world the apple of one tree may be ripe, while that of another is green, so in the animal kingdom one man may be in the meridian of his powers of body and mind, when another, through the corroding influence of care or the misfortune of hereditary disease, may be hastening to his premature end.

(31)

In *Can We Prolong Life?* (1879), Charles DeLacy Evans argues for a wider range of difference between individuals in aging:

if “old age” (which is really the number of years a person has lived) is the cause of the ossification which accompanies it, then, if “like causes
produce like effects,” all of the same age should be found in the same state
of ossification, but investigation proves beyond all doubt that such is not
the case. How common it is to see individuals about fifty years old, as
aged and decrepit as others at seventy or eighty! (2)

By equating fifty with eighty, Evans holds to a highly individual measure of entry into old
age that shows how variable the end of midlife can be in the nineteenth century. For the
purposes of this dissertation, I take into consideration nineteenth-century pension policies,
medical texts, and novels and fix the end of midlife in the fifties for women and at sixty for
men.

The consideration of old age is especially important to a study of midlife, because
middle age is so deeply influenced by a culture’s attitude toward aging. The elderly lost
status in the eighteenth-century due to the new standards set for workers by the industrial
revolution. By the nineteenth century, some authorities, such as the American age theorist
G. Stanley Hall, represent old age more positively. Hall argues that old age was a further
stage of development in which the passions became more quiescent and life’s endeavors
came to fruition (Hareven 119). Overall, however, negative images of aging increased in
the nineteenth century. Susan Tamke, in her analysis of elderly people in Victorian
children’s literature, finds that the prevailing picture of age was of “quiescent, grateful,
passive old people” who had few options for personal development or for facing the
challenges of age in a positive manner (77). Featherstone and Hepworth find a shift in the
imagery of aging in Great Britain and the United States that began in the middle of the
nineteenth century. They argue that new definitions for aging emerged with schemes for
categorizing the elderly for administrative purposes, and a new stigma came to be attached
to the aging process (322-3). Hareven finds that in America (which Featherstone and Hepworth argue closely parallels Great Britain in age theory), while age literature promoted methods for longevity before the 1860s, thereafter texts became more preoccupied with discussing symptoms of senescence (120).

As part of a regularized life course, the later years were linked with morality and dichotomized into good versus bad aging. Those who have been righteous and worked hard would have a long and healthy life culminating in a “green old age,” while those who have practiced the vices of intemperance, laziness, and promiscuity would suffer in old age and experience an early death (Cole xxxvi). An example from early in the century is Sir Thomas Bernard’s observation in 1818 that “age is not necessarily attended with infirmity of body or asperity of mind; and that when they do occur, it is the effect of unregulated appetites and passions, of a morbid constitution, or of natural sourness of temper” (4).

Some theorists believe that as the nineteenth century became more and more technologically oriented, the elderly came to be seen as more and more irrelevant. Old age came under increasing scientific scrutiny that resulted in a heightened consciousness of age. Both the interest in longevity early in the century and the later cataloguing of symptoms of aging reflect the Victorian investment in science. A scientizing of the life course continued over the century. Cole argues that Victorians prioritized “productivity, progress and health” in their understanding of the life course (114). From the middle of the century, doctors began to argue that “natural” aging could be accomplished by using the right approach to eating and work habits as well as sexual and childbearing practices. The concept of “aging gracefully” with an emphasis on health and youthfulness began to appear at this time as well. As I will discuss further in chapter one, Victorians began to
argue that signs of age should be circumvented by various health and beauty regimens. Aging became a process that should be delayed and showing signs of age became more and more socially unacceptable (Featherstone and Hepworth 327). This increasing negativity about age coupled with a growing tendency toward anti-aging intervention resulted in a new twentieth-century conceptualization of midlife.

Hepworth and Featherstone find the roots of the twentieth-century change to a youth-oriented culture in the last half of the nineteenth century. Medical advisors began to advocate “natural aging” for the upper class, urging that diet, work habits, childbearing, and sexual appetite, and overall way of life should be monitored in the middle years (Surviving 56). By early in the twentieth century, a “modern recipe” existed for a “slimmed-down, healthy and attractive middle age” that prescribed the correct use of diet, exercise, and even supportive underwear (Surviving 61). Previously long-held paradigms of middle age were uprooted and reconfigured in the nineteenth century. The struggle between ideologies of midlife as gain and those of decline vie for authority over the century and blend in various ways. The nineteenth century serves as a bridge between the eighteenth-century’s classical conception of middle age as the prime of life and the twentieth-century’s dual depiction of midlife as “going over the hill” into decline but also as a time in which it is necessary to cultivate youthfulness and possible to establish new beginnings.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter one, “Victorian Bodies at Midlife: Performing Youth, Performing Age,” engages various cultural narratives that focus on the middle-aged body caught between youth and old age. Using archival materials from my research in medical, beauty,
longevity, and conduct books, I identify competing discourses that interact in complicated ways as nineteenth-century bodies performed youth and age. I find a complex rhetoric of age engineering in nineteenth-century beauty and etiquette books that engage topics such as baldness, gray hair, wrinkles, weight gain, and use of cosmetics, as well as advertisements promoting products for regaining youthful appearance. Beauty books tout cures, advertise remedies, and contain recipes for all sorts of potions, generally arguing that it is one’s duty to appear as young and beautiful as possible, especially for women. These arguments contrast with the advice of more moralistic conduct books which prescribe clothing that clearly announces one as middle-aged and equate practices such as dyeing the hair and using cosmetics with lying. In a culture increasingly invested in scientific methods for retaining “healthy” youthfulness but also suspicious of performative acts that appear to make an individual something he or she is not, the simultaneous appearance of contending paradigms reflects the shifting construction of midlife aging.

In chapter two, “‘Going Off’: Age Anxiety in The Victorian Midlife Marriage Plot,” I explore consciousness about midlife aging in the nineteenth-century British novel. Using both historical and literary sources, I establish that while the parameters of Victorian middle age are overtly determined by chronology, they are also a product of cultural constructions involving gender, appearance, performativity, and self-image. Though women are most at risk for aging, these contrasting portrayals of middle age show that both men and women experience age anxiety when involved in midlife marriage plots, and women appear to be even more self-determining than men. I examine the overt midlife age system of Margaret Oliphant’s Miss Marjoribanks, compare plots of age anxiety involving midlife men and younger women, and explore mirror scenes of age
self-construction in women. I draw examples from wide array of novels including *The Widow Barnaby* by Frances Trollope, *Miss Mackenzie, Phineas Finn, Phineas Redux*, and *The Way We Live Now* by Anthony Trollope (a writer who often focuses on middle age), *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens, and *Middlemarch* by George Eliot.

In chapter three, "Marriageable at Midlife: The Remarrying Widows of Frances Trollope and Anthony Trollope," I locate middle-aged women on the marriage market in stories of remarrying widows. By examining historical material in the form of statistics and comparing Frances Trollope’s *The Widow Barnaby* with widows in three of Anthony Trollope’s Palliser novels, I show how women in both comedic and straight plots challenge restrictions placed on widows in the nineteenth century. I also argue for a case of unique literary influence between Frances Trollope and her son Anthony, in his appropriation of *The Widow Barnaby* to create Arabella Greenow in *Can You Forgive Her?* I then link Arabella’s narrative of valorized middle-aged affect to Madame Max Goesler’s plot in *Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux*, finding an increasingly liberated depiction of midlife women.

In chapter four, "Midlife Sexuality and The Change of Life in the Nineteenth Century," I concentrate on the discourse surrounding “the change of life” for both men and women, using materials from archival research in medical and longevity texts that discuss sexuality. Two patterns emerge: midlife women at menopause enter a perilous moment of declivity, the onset of withering which eventually ends in death, or midlife women after “the change” experience a new beginning in regard to mental and physical health, no longer burdened by the bodily and emotional weight of maternity. At the end of the century, this construction of fertility is read onto men as a male climacteric that
incorporates the notion of “harmonious waning” of sexual function in middle-aged men. By equating both male and female with age-induced decline of fertility, this new theory switches the focus of midlife sexuality from gender to age.

A Personal Note

In her challenge of deterministic midlife decline that produces “middle-ageism,” Margaret Morganroth Gullette calls for theoretically nuanced “critical age studies.” She urges cultural critics to “lead the way, shucking the pretense of maintaining an impossible neutrality and using their skills to provide histories, anthropologies, and political and economic analysis of midlife ideology, as well as rhetorics that confer reality on a demystified mid-adulthood in a demystified life course” (“Midlife Discourses” 34). I agree with Gullette--cultural critics must be aware of their own position as subjects in a certain place and time. My observations about and analysis of Victorian texts are by no means objective and removed from cultural constructions. My writing is instead produced from a particular perspective as, among other things, a middle-aged American female academic in the first year of the twenty-first century. In doing this study, therefore, I have attempted to take account of contemporary age ideology’s influence on my thinking, staying aware of the fact that the vocabulary and age paradigms of my era are the tools I use to investigate middle age in the nineteenth century.

Kathleen Woodward protests against a recent biographical phenomenon of academia, in which the cultural critic acknowledges a personal identification with the discourse about which she or he is writing: “In the recent practice of literary and cultural criticism of difference—gender, race, ethnicity, and postcolonial discourse—it has become almost axiomatic that one’s body should resemble the subject of one’s research”
Perhaps age has become so compelling in my work because, as a midlife woman, I do, in many ways, “resemble” the topic of this dissertation. However, my cultural distance from the Victorians makes a substantial difference in the ways we think about age. It is my hope that my early-twenty-first century perspective enables me to unearth suppositions and “truths” of another era, as I examine the culturally constructed nature of how the Victorians were aged in and out of midlife.
Chapter One

Victorian Bodies at Midlife:
Performing Youth, Performing Age

The desire of self-preservation, of protracting the short span of life, of retaining the full enjoyment of the bodily and mental faculties, and of maintaining the charms and attractive appearances of youth, are intimately interwoven with our constitution, are among the first principles of our nature, and generally remain even to the last hours of our existence.

*Beauty's Mirror*, 1830 (x-xi)

The preceding statement, published in London six years before Victoria took the throne, voices a common concern of Victorian medical and longevity texts—aging of the physical body. Victorians present physical aging as an inevitable process, described in terms such as “decline,” “deterioration,” and “decay,” but, while degeneration is considered a natural process, the human propensity to resist aging is also presented as a natural and healthy human tendency. This impulse to defy age is clear in the strategies of resistance challenging the advance of aging at midlife in many Victorian texts.

Of special interest to my project is the above-stated conscious desire to retain “the charms and attractive appearances of youth”—presented not merely as an excusable vanity but a completely natural impulse. Victorians were uneasy with performativity that attempted to deceive yet held dear the right to change themselves through performative acts. As Rebecca Stern puts it, though they “fought to maintain the naturalness of the human character, condemning ‘acts’ that made artificiality or self-conscious construction visible, they nonetheless insisted upon the possibilities of transcending class and birth through
distinctly performative ‘self-help’ strategies” (9). And, I would add, they also affirmed the potential of transcending age by these same means. Victorians wanted age boundaries that provided a solid, fixed version of the “true” self and the normalized life course, but they also wanted latitude for self-making by aging well and appearing to be young. By applying the resources of science and industry to the human body, they wanted to control age.

Victorian beauty, medical, and conduct books attempt to normalize aging while at the same time circumventing and modifying it through an interesting double discourse. First, they call for definite, fixed guidelines of age in how the body is presented through clothing—certain colors, fabrics, and styles are prescribed for those of certain classes and ages, and no “passing” for another age is sanctioned. Clothing acts as an age marker, advertising one’s time of life to others through conscripted and prescribed sartorial behaviors of age appropriateness. In contrast, however, one is allowed and even advised to practice what I call “age engineering”—efforts to prevent, slow, reverse, or cover signs of age on the body beneath the clothes. Advisors on general health advocate methods of diet and activity to retain youthfulness. Other texts concentrate on specific bodily sites, especially the hair and face, as markers that indicate the onset of aging. These texts advocate prevention and erasure of age’s signs through a three-part process: (1) determining their etiology by understanding the underlying physical structures of the body and how they age; (2) formulating both internal and external treatments of these structures; and finally, (3) when all else fails, covering up the signs of age with various products and techniques. Preventing age on the body is presented as healthy and appropriate, and sometimes even set forth as a duty. “Passing” as a younger body is advised and praised, as long as the outward covering of that body signals chronological age. The Victorian fear of performance as sham
is evident here—a person must act out his or her age via clothing, but the body would seem to confess the truth about age and so appears to be merely honest when it professes to display a genuine youthfulness. Therefore, when a Victorian could coerce his or her body to appear younger than bodies of similar chronological age, he or she was not considered to violate the social code of age appropriateness. The most vexed discourse of age engineering in Victorian conduct and beauty books concerns the use of hair dyes and cosmetics. Here the conflict between performance and genuineness reaches its height, and writers debate about whether covering the signs of aging on the face is deceitful or an allowable performance of youthful beauty and health.

These theories and practices intertwine gain and loss ideologies of age. Age engineering gives the consumer/practitioner agency to control and manipulate age by preventing, treating, and masking it, and can be an empowerment freeing the middle-aged to choose consciously how to perform age instead of accepting a scripted and limited future oriented around decline. But, age engineering also can promote the idea that age is to be avoided at all costs. Admonitions to look younger then become a defensive posture calling for age to deny itself, setting in motion a ceaseless pursuit of youthfulness. So, by attempting to control age—a gain narrative—Victorians also reified the philosophy that it must be avoided at all costs—a loss narrative. This double discourse of gain and loss, one with which we still contend, fueled the birth and gradual development of a beauty business that accelerated across the nineteenth century and mushroomed into the cosmetics and beauty industries of the twentieth century.²

¹ See Appendix A for a description of the texts and authors used as sources for this chapter.
² For more on the growth of the beauty business in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Britain and America, see Whitlock and Pleiss.
In this chapter, I examine the intricate and contradictory discourse of Victorian practices for the aging midlife body. I show how the Victorians' suspicion of and engagement with performativity allows them both to prescribe and to defy age for the midlife body by simultaneously formulating age appropriate dress and advising strategies of age engineering.

I will also consider how gender and class interact with the engineering and bodily performance of age. Though conduct books give age advice for both male and female bodies, women are subject to many more directives than men. As I will discuss, arguments that it is one's duty to maintain an attractive and youthful appearance are aimed much more frequently at women, and clothing advice and beauty nostrums focused on age are written predominately for females. In addition to gender, class is also a vital factor in bodily performance of age. For example, clothing indicates not only age but social standing, primarily through the fabrics and accessories used. Many conduct books, in their warnings against dressing beyond one's station, show how important it was to Victorians to signal clearly both age and class through outward appearance. In contrast to announcing age and class with clothing, makeup is used to mask age, though the class associations of this practice have varied from century to century. In early modern England, the upper classes of both genders used face enamel, while in Victorian England the use of "paint" could signal that a woman was not truly a lady. Yet, Victorian advertisers claimed associations with foreign royalty to enhance the sale value of their products. Bodily performance of age is a social construction complexly inflected by gender and class.
Dressing For Midlife

Victorian conduct texts offer clothing prescriptions that stress age appropriate behavior for both men and women and serve as markers of one's age status. "The Lounger In Society" (1881)³ explains the basic principle: "There is a study of dress for the aged, as well as for the young. Inattention is no less indecorous in one than in the other; we may distinguish the taste appropriate to each, by the reflection that youth is made to be loved—age to be respected" (172). When one reached middle age, the fact was to be announced by a change in dress.⁴

Merrifield (1854) gives the rules for women that grade fabric and accessories for youth, midlife, and old age:

The style of dress should be adapted to the age of the wearer. As a general rule we should say that in youth the dress should be simple and elegant, the ornaments being flowers. In middle-age the dress may be of rich materials and more splendid in its character; jewels are the appropriate ornaments. In the decline of life the materials of which the dress is composed may be equally rich, but with less vivacious colours . . . and the character of the whole costume should be quiet, simple, and dignified.

(92-3)

Though advice for women is more abundant, men are also given guidelines which are almost identical to those for women. The Science of Dress (1857) addresses "The Dress of Gentlemen" in almost exactly the same words: "As a general rule, in youth the dress

³ In this chapter, I will forego the usual practice of presenting the date for each text only after its first appearance. Instead, since so many texts are used in this chapter--some referenced repeatedly and others infrequently--I will repeat the date of each wherever it is used, hoping to provide some clarification of chronological issues for the reader.
should be simple and elegant. In middle age, the dress should be of richer materials, and more splendid in character. In the decline of life, the material may be rich, but the colours should be simple, quiet, and dignified” (31). Cheadle repeats this similarity between male and female dress in 1872, saying that what she has recommended in regard to “suitability” for women applies equally to gentlemen (87). Because midlife ushers one into the era where respectability takes precedence over romance, texts advise the practice of decorum in clothing styles as well as in color and fabric that specifically mark one as middle-aged. Midlife dressing is also associated with prosperity or “richness,” hinting at the economic level these texts expect one to have obtained by this point in the life course.

Clothing prescriptions for both men and women are modified by class considerations. Beauty books are generally written for a middle class audience, and the realities of financial limitations on one’s wardrobe are discussed at length. For example, Lola Montez writes a lady must “adapt the costliness of her dress to her pecuniary position in life” because it is “bad taste to affect expenditures beyond her known means or income.” She adds, “There is a fitness and inexpressible charm in the sight of a woman who adapts her neat and modest attire to the circumstances of her life” (67-8). Here again, we find the fear of a person appearing to be what he or she is not. To affect an age or a social class other than one’s own is considered a breach of sincerity tantamount to an outright lie. Montez underscores the fitness of dressing within one’s class by evoking the evils of the United States: “I know that in America all artificial distinctions of classes are happily laid aside, but the necessities which attach to pecuniary disabilities are not, and never can be, overcome. Though it may be the right of every

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4 In addition to the sources cited below, see also How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Etiquette and Guide to Correct Personal Habits, page 33.
woman to dress as expensively as she can afford, yet is it good taste, is it consistent with her own self respect...?" (67). To observe class distinctions in dress is to preserve one's Britishness, an argument that is at least as old as the sumptuary laws of early modern England. Class and age considerations must both be respected in order for the proprieties to be satisfied.

The specificity of advice as to color, fabric, and accessories indicates how seriously conduct book writers regard age appropriateness in dress. Both Walker (1837) and Howard (1839) state that "gay colours" are for youth and "sober and temperate colours" are for age (287, 4). Walker (1837) instructs that when women get older they should wear satin, velvet, and China crepes, and, "[i]f a lady is of a certain age, she must not only leave off the head-dress en cheveux and the flowers, but also scarfs, fichu-pelerines, every thing that opens the figure, however good otherwise her shape may be" (382). Lady Constance Howard (1885) stipulates that at age fifty women should wear "velvets, moire, satin, rich brocades, with lace and diamonds, when they possess them" (164). Fabric serves not only as a marker of age appropriateness but is also used to moderate the effects of age. Dorothy Quigley (1898) recommends in italics that "Lace is an essential to the dress of a woman more than forty years of age," because "[r]ich lace has an exquisitely softening effect on the complexion" (116). These sumptuary practices situate midlife as a gain, the prime of life, in advocating it as the time for the most splendid clothing, such as velvets and diamonds. They also, however, figure age as decline, their concern about "opening the figure" and "softening" the complexion revealing their equation of age with unattractiveness.
In clothing prescriptions, middle age is presented as a fixed and rigid age
category, a predominating factor in individual identity, when conduct books warn about
the dangers of age-inappropriate clothing. Beauty texts have a special horror of women
attempting to dress too youthfully. Cheadle (1872) argues that “a costume in which a
young lady looks bewitching, makes an older one look absurd and ridiculous” (77) and
“the aping of juvenility multiplies the wrinkles of old age, and makes its decay more
conspicuous” (78). Etiquette, Social Ethics, and the Courtesies of Society (1854) warns
that “[n]o sensible woman will . . . in middle age . . . retain the manners or dress of
youth” (28) and represents both midlife and old age as periods of life when women are at
risk for losing respectability through how they dress:

Self-respect will . . . exercise a decided influence over the general conduct
and style of dress. No sensible woman will . . . in middle age . . . retain
the manners or dress of youth . . . What can be more unseemly than
ringlets on the brows of faded age, short sleeves and low dresses, and the
affections of youthful manners? Let the middle-aged and the old respect
themselves, and the young will look up to them with reverence. (28).

Lady Constance Howard (1885) envisions old age as a time of dignity only when it is
performed properly:

Nothing looks so bad as a lady dressed in a costume twenty years too
young for her; whereas no one looks so well as the lady who ‘grows old
gracefully,’ who dresses herself in the richest stuffs, simply made, has a
cap of rare old lace on her grey or white hair, and bears the burden of
years with the dignity and simplicity that every real lady possesses. (164)
As an age marker, clothing is an area in which no biological factors are involved—all is performance of class and age. From the vantage point of age-appropriate clothing mores, Victorians seem to consider midlife as scripted and age as an inevitability that must be announced and performed. In texts that concern the body beneath the clothes, however, we find an entirely different attitude. Interventions that challenge and defy age are not only possible and permissible but considered to be advisable and even a duty. Set constructs of age are challenged by possibilities of alternate performances concerning what it means to be in midlife.

The Advisability of Intervention

Victorian texts generally conceive of aging as an inevitable process, but they also claim that we can and should intervene by slowing or even reversing it to a certain extent—a theory endemic to the self-help genre from which these books are derived. For example, the author of Beauty's Mirror (1830) describes aging as inevitable but also controllable:

Age, and its attendant consequences, will, sooner or later, make sad havoc even with the fairest and healthiest frame. No sooner has the body attained its utmost perfection, than it begins to decline; indeed, no sooner are we born, than we begin to die . . . The causes of our dissolution are as necessary as its event is certain, and it is beyond our power to prevent this final fate. But, still, there are rules to be observed, and suggestions to be given, by which the approach of disease, decay, and death may be retarded. (x)
By moderating biological determinism with “rules” that “retard” aging, *Beauty’s Mirror* allows the midlife body some latitude for control and self determination. Nathaniel Davies (1885), member of the Royal College of Physicians, writes about the “great and never-changing law” that decrees life “will run its destined course through its stages of growth and maturity to its end in decay and death” (1), but he stipulates that “premature decay” can be prevented through following the right kinds of practices (3). Interpretations of physiological manifestations of aging reflect how culture taught Victorians to read age in consistent ways, but to the extent that beauty and medical advice represents aging as a process that can be controlled, it is also figuring age as constructed instead of a fixed and immutable entity.

But, though control of aging may be presented as possible by Victorians, they are deeply troubled by whether such intervention is advisable or even moral. The genre of the beauty book in particular is deeply invested in the argument that age can and should be circumvented by various techniques and practices although particular texts differ greatly in what they permit and what they disallow. The information in beauty books is presented throughout the century with an initial claim that it is one’s duty to appear as young as one possibly can—with motives ranging solely from health concerns to aesthetic arguments, some of which are based on gender. *The Book of Health and Beauty* (1837) defends age engineering from charges of vanity by arguing that “[t]he wish to enjoy perpetual youth, and consequently to avert the approaches of old age, is probably one of the most predominant and pardonable; and a rational desire to improve and beautify the surface of the body becomes, in consequence, no frivolous pursuit” (xii-xiii).
In this text, age engineering is transformed from a forgivable trespass to a reasonable and important activity, the word "rational" even associating it with good mental health.

The admonition to youth and beauty is also justified by its presentation as a service to others rather than an advantage to the self. Alex Ross (1861) writes that it is "the duty as well as the privilege of all persons to make their exterior as prepossessing as possible . . . We cannot doubt the obligation of this duty when we consider that to attempt to produce pleasing feelings in the minds of others is a principle all philanthropic individuals entertain" (3). In Beauty In The Human Face And Form (1894), James Riding makes a similar claim: "It is a duty every man and woman owes to his or her neighbour to look as well as possible; to be clean, neat, and good for the eyes to behold. Even as we fill our houses with beautiful pictures, so should we fill our streets with pretty children and fair men and women" (3). In these texts, beauty becomes a community service. The duty to be beautiful then serves as the basis for age engineering. Beauty's Mirror (1830) even equates it with both the prevention of disease and the will of God, arguing that "[a] wise and benevolent Providence has abundantly furnished his creatures with the means of warding off premature pain, disease, and decay; and it is unquestionably his will, that these means should be used" (3.121). The author of The Ladies' Hand-Book of the Toilet (1843) questions whether beauty preservation is a sin:

We know that all attention to personal appearance and costume has been denounced—by some who ought to have known better—as inconsistent with the precepts of our holy faith. But this is a gross mistake. The body is in itself, not only "wonderfully," but beautifully made, and we are bound to preserve that beauty . . . by all the skill and contrivance in our
power, taking care that all our efforts to this end, shall be in perfect
accordance with moral order and internal excellence. (vii-viii)

By invoking Psalm 139:14, “I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made”
and substituting “beautifully” for “wonderfully,” the author makes the pursuit of beauty a
scriptural occupation.

Justifications of age preservation are aimed at both genders. An example of a
solely male target audience is found in The Gentleman’s Manual of Modern Etiquette
(1864), written for men and addressing the need for “every one to render his appearance
prepossessing” (44). Most advice about the duty to preserve age, however, is aimed at
women. These texts often focus on women’s “nature” and position. The author of The
Etiquette of the Toilette Table (1859), writing as “an officer’s widow,” argues that the
desire to look well is “implanted by nature in every female bosom” and is a “virtuous
feeling” (68). Mrs. H.R. Haweis (1883) equates female beauty with marital power,
arguing that “The greatest mistake a wife can make is to neglect her appearance; it is a
direct surrender of a magic wand” (115). Anna Kingsford, M.D., (1886) believes that “it
is the duty of our sex to be beautiful,” and women’s education should serve to “add wise
discretion and scientific knowledge to the methods employed for the creation and
preservation of physical charms” (20). The author of Beauty and How to Keep It (1889),
who styles herself as “a professional beauty,” specifically targets midlife women,
arguing: “[n]o woman should think that, because she is past her first youth, she is no
longer attractive, on the contrary, she can be more so, and should endeavour by every
means in her power to make herself pleasant to look at” (7). She goes on to say that “no
woman has a right to be ugly, and ought to do everything in reason to make herself beautiful” (19).

Marie Bayard (1883) moderates this approach, writing that “[a]lthough it is the duty of every woman to devote a certain time to her toilet, I do not mean that it should engross so much of it as to interfere with the higher duties of life . . . by devoting a little time and care to one’s morning and evening toilet, the complexion and figure may be kept youthful, even in an advanced age” (20. vii-viii). By advocating the duty for beauty as only one of several priorities, superceded by the “higher duties,” Bayard can present it as a moral pursuit.

Beauty and conduct books are invested in a philosophy that necessarily advocates the efficacy of action—intervention is the very core of their content. They do vary, however, in the extent to which they are persuaded that beauty practices can affect the inroads of aging. Some perfumers, for example, make bold claims about the wonders of their products. Madame Rachel assures that her Magnetic Rock Dew Water of Sahara “can remove all personal defects” and that “her treatment confer[s] the appearance of youth and beauty” and “is also conducive to health” (21). In contrast, The Book of Health and Beauty (1837), a text offering toiletry recipes, is a bit more skeptical about the possibility of retaining youth. Though the preface argues that “the complete renovation of the physical constitution—the restoration of youth—might be hoped for as the triumph of the cosmetic art” (xvi), the book closes with this warning:

Too much, nevertheless, must not be expected from all that art can do to preserve or restore . . . it will be useless as it is ridiculous to attempt to turn a deaf ear to the silent and friendly monitor who before he robs us of
life, kindly robs us of all that life prizes and who may ever be seen near the toilette of the lady of rank and fashion, ceaselessly repeating in the words of Shakspeare [sic]—“let her paint an inch thick / To this complexion she must come at last.” (150)

The depiction of a skull which follows (see Figure 1) juxtaposes the text’s cosmetic recipes with a grisly reminder that decomposition is the eventual end of all flesh, placing attempts at age engineering within the context of a limited human mortality. The skull rests on top of a book, stressing that the advice of the conduct book itself is superceded by the ultimate finality of death.

Fig. 1. Illustration from The Book of Health and Beauty, or The Toilette of Rank and Fashion. London: Joseph Thomas, 1837. 150.

H. Ellen Browning (1898) presents the lifelong retention of youthfulness through healthy living as a matter of choice for women. She writes of a “species of beauty that every woman may possess and retain to the last day of her life—if she chooses, because it is the outcome of a perfect nervous organisation.” Browning promotes natural beauty through health, arguing: “A sound mind in a sound body is the great secret of perpetual
youth" (16). Through her healthfulness approach, Browning reduces aging to a choice in the control of women.

While arguments about the duty to retain youthfulness mandate a certain denial of aging that can be read as ageist, they also give individuals an option to perform age as something other than debility. Of course, arguments that beauty and age prevention are a special duty of women serve to incarcerate them in a golden cage of gender-based beauty obligations. One of the many problems with this paradigm is that women’s value accrues only through the physical rather than any other kind of human worth. Even Browning’s seemingly liberating presentation of youthfulness as in control of women through health reinforces gender stereotypes that degrade women’s worth, while at the same time encouraging self determination in regard to aging.

Retaining Youth Through Good Health

Browning’s is but one of many conduct books written by Victorians who attempt to achieve longevity and a youthful appearance through knowledge of the underlying causes of aging. Nineteenth-century conduct and medical texts attribute aging to two causes—the inevitable and biologically predetermined effects of time and the culturally constructed stresses and behaviors of modern civilization and health practices. Under a rhetoric of healthfulness, medical and conduct books argue that one can and should resist the advances of age from both causes at the most basic level by following a bodily regimen. These practices are not considered a performance of youth, but a technology that enables individuals actually to retain or regain youthfulness.

Early-century conduct books tend to have short sections devoted to general health advice that impedes aging, emphasizing a moderate diet, exercise and fresh air, with
sufficient sleep followed by early rising. *Beauty's Mirror* (1830) claims this prescription is an old paradigm, attributing it to "Old Parr," a famous centenarian reputed to have died in London in 1685 at the age of 152. He advised: "Keep your head cool by temperance, and your feet warm by exercise; rise early, and go soon to bed; and if you are inclined to be fat, keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, and be moderate in your sleep and diet" (123). *The Art of Beauty* (1825) gives similar advice, describing its "philosophical method of renewing the lost lustre and freshness of youth" as a "rigid an adherence . . . to the rules of training" which involve getting proper amounts of food, exercise, and sleep (178).

In the 1840s, along with this traditional advice a new concern with attitude toward aging begins to emerge. *The Ladies' Handbook of the Toilet* (1843) instructs that the only way to "preserve . . . bloom and freshness" is "the maintenance of good health, regular habits, an even and cheerful temper, a due attention to diet, with bathing . . . and, above all, early rising" (2). Though the regulation of sleep is cited as the major preserver of youthfulness, "temper" has become important. Though *The Elixir of Beauty* (1848) argues that "[f]resh air, pure simple food and exercise, mental and bodily" are important, enabling those of sixty to look and feel forty, it also claims that state of mind is the most significant factor in retaining youth: "Whenever you see in an old person a smooth unwrinkled forehead, a clear eye, and a pleasing cheerful expression, be sure her life has been passed in that comparative tranquility of mind, which depends less upon outward vicissitudes than internal peace of mind. A good conscience is the greatest preservative of beauty" (47). The inner workings of the mind begin to gain prominence over physical factors of aging in these texts.
In the 1880s, Nathaniel Davies’s book, *Aids To Long Life: A Medical, Dietetic, and General Guide in Middle and Old Age* (1885), presents an intricate argument about the importance of state of mind in retarding aging, figuring the male as the prototypical human. Though he lists the primary causes of disease and “premature decay” as “[d]eficient and impure air, insufficient and improper food and clothing, overwork, and intemperance in eating and drinking” (3), his major concern is with mental states. He believes that people have come to live with much more “temperate and moderate habits of life” physically, a development that has lessened diseases caused by “excessive eating and drinking [that] generally develop between the ages of fifty and sixty.” He is greatly concerned, however, with the current-day “exhaustive and enforced intellectual development” which is “productive of premature decrepitude and death” (7). He advocates avoiding too much study and emphasis on mental achievements because it is an “accepted axiom, that the earlier the development, the earlier the decay” (8). In addition, emotional stress is dangerous because nothing “kills the body quicker than worry and corroding anxieties” (48). Davies concludes that health and “length of life” depend on two conditions—keeping the mind calm and the body healthy—and only by “controlling the animal passions and holding the intellectual faculties in subjection” (49) can people live longer and retain youthfulness.

Beauty books increased in number during the 1880s and the emphasis on the role of the mind in preserving youth continued. “A Professional Beauty” writes in 1889 in regard to women that “[t]o keep a youthful appearance you must keep a tranquil mind, be exempt from all emotions and violent excitements. Try to keep a contented mind, take things easily, all this combined with good health is the real secret of beauty” (61).
Although the writer also recommends avoiding late hours and getting plenty of fresh air and exercise (62), the text soon returns to the importance of the mind—boredom must be avoided and happiness cultivated, as long as it is moderate: “Happiness is a great beautifier, it gives colour to the cheek and a sparkle to the eye. To preserve our beauty therefore, you must love, cry and laugh moderately, as all those things wrinkle the face horribly” (62-3).

In 1900, Professor Boyd Laynard continues to stress the importance of attitude by putting the mind in control of the body:

Keeping the mind young and fresh, the heart light and merry, and living above the little worries of life, is the great secret of the retention of youth.

. . . I have found that those persons who look younger than their actual age are always young in mind and disposition; whilst those who look older than their years are invariably prematurely old in their thoughts and ways. The inference, therefore, is that if we would preserve an outwardly youthful appearance, we must conserve an inward youthfulness. The body is a counterpart of the mind: as the inner man is, so does the outward man appear. Growing old rests much with ourselves. Many people grow prematurely old because they discard youthful employments and pursuits, and settle down to elderly ways; just as some individuals become invalids, when by a little effort they might shake off their physical lethargy and raise themselves up to health and vigour. (42)

According to Laynard’s philosophy, aging can be directed by mental, emotional, and behavioral conditions. The relationship between the body and mind is dominated by
mental processes—the body’s aging does not have control, but the mind does. Laynard’s stress on emotional moderation is also evident in his list of “things that shorten life” which includes not only negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, grief, hatred, and jealousy, but also amativeness and excessive joy as agents of aging. Not all positive emotions are seen as agents of age, however. Moderation is the key. “Things that prolong life” are temperate: an easy conscience, an even temper, a contented mind, cheerfulness, hope, joy, and laughter. Wedlock and chastity are also on the list, which puts marriage in a context of erotic moderation (84). The early-century emphasis on regular health regimens involving diet, exercise, fresh air, and early rising is replaced by century’s end with a belief in the power of the mind to control aging, an aspect of age engineering that I will later discuss in more detail in regard to skin and hair.

Retaining Youth by Weight Control

Though overall physical and psychological health were considered important, Victorians placed special emphasis on excess weight as a cause of aging. Aids To Long Life (1885) lists obesity in the index as one of “the common diseases of advanced life.” Books of the 80s and 90s address the issue of “stoutness” as endemic to midlife aging for both men and women and urged weight control as the method for promoting health and youthfulness in middle age. Simpson, in his study of “manhood and maturity,” registers “a general tendency” for men “to become a little heavier in midlife,” but counsels that too much weight gain is a sign that “something is wrong” (125). Bayard (1883) directs a more denigrating caution at women: “Of course you cannot expect to be as slim at forty as you were at fourteen; but there is no need, either, to become a tub” (58).
These writers present the ideal weight in terms of moderation, a slight increase considered a reasonable and healthy part of middle and old age. Van Oven (1853) quotes an unidentified French authority, M. Quetelet, who maintains that men should reach their maximum weight at forty and women at fifty (13). *The Art of Beauty* (1899) sets a standard for women’s weight that rejects both corpulence and thinness: “Who does not heartily pity one of her sex who labours under the discomfort and disadvantage of superfluous stoutness? A healthy, firm plumpness and fulness of contour is admired, especially in middle life . . . a matronly fullness in matrons” (32). If the female figure is too thin in adulthood, however, “it is natural enough that the woman should sigh for more ample proportions, and seek to use every legitimate means to ensure them” (39). In 1900, Boyd Laynard finds benefit in midlife weight gain for women, citing ages forty to sixty as “the age of return,” a period when women attain a plumpness that effaces wrinkles and brings youthful beauty (8). *The Art of Beauty* regularizes female body proportions by providing the following table of recommended height and weight proportions (39), a reflection of the Victorian preoccupation with statistics and quantification:

A woman . . . should weigh about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lbs.</th>
<th>ft.</th>
<th>in.</th>
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<tr>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>113</td>
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<td>119</td>
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<td>128</td>
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<td>148</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>156</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>160</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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5 This chart has been modified to reflect weight in pounds instead of in “stones” and pounds.
Beauty and longevity texts present weight gain at midlife as a result of an increase in appetite combined with a decrease in physical activity. Simpson (1888) says that at midlife "[a] man is blessed, as he considers, with a good appetite," but "he takes insufficient exercise to keep down his weight, and the very increase of weight disinclines him still more to any unwonted exertion" (132). Bayard (1883) presents a slippery-slope argument of inevitability that midlife women become "stout" as middle-aged "laziness" sets in: "[w]e feel no longer a longing to run after butterflies, or play at lawn-tennis, or take long walks, and we prefer driving in a carriage to either walking or riding. Thus we get fat and lazy; the fatter we grow the more lazy we grow" (58). Thompson (1886) stresses an anatomical component, stating that after the first half of life (which he equates with the late forties and age fifty) we become corpulent because "unemployed material" is "regulated" in the form of stored fat, a development dependent upon one's constitutional power for storing fat. This is caused by lessening of exercise and by a lesser "power to eliminate" that accrues with age (26, 35).

Mitchell (1892) finds that the causes of middle-aged weight gain for women are heredity, overeating, disease, lack of exercise, and physiological changes brought about in middle age by the climacteric (227-8) and notes that midlife women with children seem to be especially prone to obesity (236). She also equates the condition with behavioral practices for both genders: "I venture to say that a large majority of the cases of obesity in middle life, both in men and women, are due to over-indulgence at the table, laziness, and animal rather than intellectual pleasures" (238). Mitchell posits midlife obesity as a result of physical changes at around age forty, referring to "a certain, gradual,
ever-deepening degree of physiological sluggishness [that] takes possession of the system as human beings approach the fourth decade" (239).

Texts concerned with midlife weight gain generally offer the same remedy—eating and sleeping less while exercising more. *The Art of Beauty* (1899) stresses that “[t]o cure stoutness a strict regimen is necessary, which must be carried out conscientiously to effect a perfect cure.” The regimen for women includes avoiding sweets and fats, rising early, sleeping on a hard bed, and exercising by walking or performing “some brisk indoor exercise, such as dumb-bells or calisthenics, or ten minutes of light Indian clubs . . . before stays are put on” (32-3). A similar prescription is recommended by Bayard (1883): “there are only three things to do to rid yourself of obesity: . . . eat and drink as little as possible . . . sleep little . . . take as much exercise as possible” (58). Simpson recommends that middle-aged and elderly men exercise by walking, riding or cycling, but with moderation:

It is to be remembered that though the muscular power may be almost as great as ever, the quickness of movement that distinguishes youth will have gone, so that the middle-aged or elderly must be content with moderation, and not try to cheat himself into the belief that he enjoys perpetual youth. (132)

Midlife is presented as a period during which the “active and violent” physical energy of youth must gradually be replaced by a more staid pace that will predominate in old age (132). One’s weight as well as diet and physical activity must be, then, subject to rules, but they must be moderate, as should be one’s expectations of physical vigor.
Though most beauty and longevity texts recommend health measures to correct midlife obesity, what appear to be miracle cures are sometimes proposed under the rubric of science. *The Art of Beauty* (1889) promotes "Amiral" soap as an obesity solution that involves "no change of diet," "no drugs," "no discomfort," and "no danger" (see Figure 2). The text instructs when "applied like any other soap" it "possesses the

"Amiral" Soap,

For the REDUCTION of CORPULIENCE and BEAUTIFYING the FIGURE by EXTERNAL APPLICATION ONLY.

NO CHANGE OF DIET. NO DRUGS. NO DISCOMFORT. NO DANGER.


"To the Directors of the "Amiral" SOAP SYNDICATE.


"I hereby certify that I have analysed several samples of 'Amiral' Soap, and that they contain no trace of arsenic, mercury, copper, or other substance which would be dangerous to the health or injurious to the skin.

"(Sgd.) James Edmunds.

21, Dover Street, Piccadilly, London.

"June 3, 1888."

The Lancet, July 29, 1888, writes: "'Amiral' Soap is suggested as an external cure for corpulence and obesity. The idea is distinctly novel, and is based apparently upon the solvent action upon fat of the active constituents of animal gall. The rationale of the treatment, therefore, is that when the soap is applied locally it is absorbed by the pores of the skin with the result. It is stated, of dispersing the adipose tissues, ... We note that references are given of actual trials having been made with this result. It is stated that from two to four tablets of soap reduce the waist measurement of persons from three to five inches within one month. We found the composition of the soap to be well adapted for application to the skin. We could trace no injurious substance, and it was quite neutral. It is a light green soap with pleasant aromatic smell.

An eminent West End Physician writes:"

"London, June 23, 1888.

"I have made an extended trial of 'Amiral' Soap with several of my patients, and most certainly say in every case with success. One case under my own daily observation, a reduction of 13 inches was caused in the measurement of a limb after five weeks' use (this was done for experimental purposes). In many other cases I have been informed that a reduction varying from two to five inches has been found to result after five or six weeks' use of the soap. As far as my experience goes, no ill effects follow the use of 'Amiral' Soap. One patient who suffers from eczema did complain of some skin irritation, but this quickly subsided."

Madam Bible Cole writes:"

"The Chimes, 13, Cathcart Road, Redcliffe Gardens, S.W.

"October 1, 1888.

"Gentlemen—I have used your delightful 'Amiral' Soap daily for the past three months, and consider its effect in reducing superfluous adipose tissue is simply magical.

"Yours very truly,

"(Sgd.) Bible Cole."

"'Amiral' SOAP obtainable at all Chemists and Stores at 5/- the Box of Two Tablets.

The Treatment of obesity by a New Method, containing all Medical, Private Testimonials, and Press Opinions, to be had on application to—

THE "AMIRAL" SOAP SYNDICATE, Ltd.

28, Basinghall Street, LONDON, E.C.

Or West End Depot, 96, BROOK STREET, BOND STREET.

valuable property of gradually but steadily decreasing superfluous flesh wherever existing” (37). Warning against “nostrums” and other cures not recommended by a competent authority, the text, authored by an unnamed individual claiming to be “a toilet specialist,” represents itself as authoritative. The advertisement bolsters this claim by various testimonials. An M.D. and “medical officer of health and public analyst for St. James’s” vouches for the soap containing no metal or other harmful substances. A quotation from The Lancet, a medical journal, explains that the soap “disperses the adipose tissue,” and an eminent West End physician gives physical measurements proving the reduction of corpulence in his patients. Finally, a Madam Belle Cole claims to have experienced “magical” results with the soap. For those who dislike the rigid discipline of diet and exercise recommended by most longevity and beauty texts, the application of a topical solution presents an ostensibly easier alternative, even though the results, despite the advertisement’s claims, must have been consistently poor. Both easy solutions and the more difficult ones proposed by diet and exercise advocates, however, are testimony to the importance of weight control in the Victorian construction of the midlife body.

The Etiology of Aging Skin and Hair

Victorian conduct, medical, and beauty texts subject the most publicly accessible sites of aging--facial skin and hair--to a concentrated effort of age engineering. Their attempts to eradicate wrinkles, gray hair, and balding are not pursued under the rubric of health, but are overt efforts to perform midlife youthfulness in response to the onslaughts of age. Explanations of why and how age encroaches are often presented in scientific-sounding language that situates the body in narratives of cause and effect based on the
three-part process of etiology, prevention/treatment, and concealment aimed at controlling age through understanding its genesis. My interest in these etiological arguments is not in whether they are accurate theories by today’s standards (merely our current construction, subject itself to refutation and revision), but in Victorians’ belief in their ability to understand and control aging. The physical, psychological, environmental, and behavioral origins advanced reveal their conception of age as a force to be stalked and conquered, controllable through understanding.

Wrinkles served in Victorian culture as a sure sign of aging at midlife, but one that could be monitored and changed. Beauty and How To Keep It (1889) describes the first wrinkle as a time of crisis for women: “Wrinkles. What an ugly word! And to think that they must come, sooner or later; but let us try to make it as late as possible. The least vain, the most reasonable of women, cannot but be unhappy when she sees the first wrinkle on her face” (25). Beauty and medical texts present wrinkling as both an inevitable process and one that can be circumvented, at least for a time. For example, Beauty Culture (1893) establishes a chronology of wrinkles:

When the skin becomes flabby, loose and wrinkled before middle age, it may usually be improved and toned up, so that it continues firm, smooth and regular, until about the fiftieth year of age. Those who have wrinkles at the age of twenty-five or thirty, should know that they can be removed beyond dispute, and everyone so afflicted should consider it a duty to make use of the means at command to this end. (18)

Though female beauty is a duty before the fateful age of fifty, the writer of Beauty Culture sets late- or post-midlife as the point past which prevention is no longer possible.
The etiology of wrinkles is discussed in scientific-sounding language that attributes their origin to causes at the subcutaneous level. Earlier in the century, they are often viewed as the result of lack of blood to the epidermis. In 1825, the author of *The Art of Beauty* describes how the “fine hair-like blood vessels . . . become obstructed and imperforate, and . . . the skin, not being supplied with its nourishment of fresh blood, shrinks, withers, and becomes . . . wrinkled” (175). Similarly, *Beauty’s Mirror* speaks of wrinkles as the result of the “obstruction” or “obliteration” of blood vessels (55). Mr. Moore writes in *Popular Physiology* (1866) that wrinkles in the skin are caused by “drying up of the capillary of finer vessels by which the Skin is nourished” (55). In fact, Moore attributes the basis of all aging to blood problems, “the loss of iron and steel—of the ferruginous element in the blood” which causes the blood to “fail,” and “when the blood fails, everything else fails with it” (76). The basis for Moore’s argument about the blood lies, no doubt, in his function as a retailer of products that act as blood restoratives.

Later in the century, wrinkles are attributed to loosening and separation of skin layers. In 1886, Anna Kingsford, M.D., uses the terms of natural science to describe how the “pulp of the fruit under the skin shrinks and contracts as the juices dry up, consequently the skin, which was once tight and smooth, now being too large for the contents, puckers and lies in folds” (36). Boyd Laynard uses more dermatologically-oriented terms to give the “physiological explanation from which wrinkles arise” in 1900: “as age advances the fat immediately under the skin becomes absorbed, and consequently the cuticle loosens, and wrinkles are thus formed” (21).

Beauty books abound with detailed and scientific explanations of why the hair changes with age. Mr. Moore (1866) of the Royal College of Surgeons emphasizes the
vexed nature of the Victorian debate about the scientific explanations of hair, indicating the high interest of this topic for Victorians:

There are few subjects on which a more complete contrariety of opinions and theories exists than upon the anatomy and physiology of the hair. Even the questions whether the hair itself is organic or inorganic, whether an independent and separate entity or only a prolongation of the skin, have not as yet been quite settled by those philosophers whose favourite occupation is that of mooting ingenious, if not always very useful speculations. (59)

The causes of gray hair and balding are presented with scientific-sounding explanations. Chronological parameters are set—Davies (1885) places the onset of gray hair in early midlife, often beginning at around age thirty. Thompson (1894) says that males begin to bald “soon after thirty” and by forty-five “few men have a completely covered cranium” (110). Moore’s explanation of gray hair is based on the theory that hairs are really hollow tubes filled with colored oil. As he explains it:

Each separate hair really springs from a follicle or bulb planted in the true or inner skin, from which it shoots outward in the form of a sheath or hollow tube, the canal or cavity of which tube contains a liquid which determines the colour of the hair . . . And when, from the advancing years or other causes, the supply of this liquid to the cavity of the hair is stopped, the sheath dries up, and become white—its original colour. When . . . the bulb or root is destroyed, the hair drops off, and baldness takes place. (59)
This theory is advanced by many writers as scientific fact. *The Toilet* (1839) confidently affirms that the “hair is hollow” and adds in a footnote: “If the reader visits the Adelaide Gallery, she will see this fact verified by the exhibition of a human hair in the field of a very powerful Oxy-Hydrogen Microscope” (4). Though subsequent microscopes have not validated this “fact,” it either appeared to be undeniable to this author or was a fabrication used to advance his or her theories. In either case, the Oxy-Hydrogen Microscope provides an impressive-sounding appeal to the authority of science. Anna Kingsford, M.D. states in 1886 that the theory of hair tubes has been “scientifically demonstrated” (66), and she asserts that the oil tube fluid determines hair color by its mineral content: “[v]ery fair hair contains magnesia; chestnut and brown hair is rich in sulphur, with but a small amount of iron; in black and dark hair, iron predominates.” Because the iron pigment supplies usually “fail” before sulphur, dark hair becomes gray before light hair does, so that hair color is changed by age due to a realignment of minerals (66). Another variation of the theory concerns the mechanics of how tube fluid dries up. Mrs. A. Walker (1837) writes that because the hair receives nourishment from and is colored by skin, when “the skin contracts from age or cold, or is relaxed by heat or sickness, the hair either becomes grey from the coloured oil being prevented from rising in the tube, or falls off altogether” (92). The hollow tube theory is cited many times in conduct books published between the 1830s and the 1880s and seems to have been pervasive until late in the century.

In the 1880s and 90s, theories switch from arguments about the hair shaft’s structure to various subcutaneous and internal factors. “[W]ant of nourishment in the scalp” can cause gray hair (*Beauty and How To Keep It* 40, 1889) and “perspiratory
secretions [that] contain an excess of lime ... absorbed by ... and imparted to the hair” can cause dark hair to lighten and become faded and gray (*Beauty Culture* 23, 1893). Thompson (1894) posits an elaborate theory of hair growth, in which hair roots swell into a bulb “containing a minute bright spot” that promotes growth. Hairs are composed of “minute scales” around a fibrous pith where the color is located. Changes in hair color can be constitutional, caused by debilitation of the nervous system, or may be “due to a contraction of the skin nipping the hair at the junction of the root and stem ... preventing the color granules from ascending” (107-8). Davies (1885) also ascribes to the theory of hair bulbs, arguing that gray hair and balding are “[a]mong the first indications of failure of nervous and nutritive power” from “decay of the hair bulbs” (32).

According to environmental and behavioral theories, skin and hair are affected by one’s general health, as well as by psychological factors and various bodily practices. Overall physical condition is seen as the origin of hair problems, and healthy bodily systems are seen as imperative for keeping hair in good condition: “Whatever promotes the general health of the whole body, promotes the healthfulness, strength, and beauty of the hair. Hair is made from the blood—blood is made from food. Pure food makes pure blood, and pure blood builds up a pure and healthy body” (*The Clothes Question Considered* 19, 1878). Gray hair is attributed to illness and fevers, so keeping oneself in good physical condition is seen as essential to prevent its outbreak (Montez 79, 1858 and *Beauty Culture* 20, 1893). Other disease-related causes are “disorders affecting the circulation and nervous system” (Isobel 72, 1899), “disorder of the stomach” and “general debility” (Laynard 24, 1900).
Psychological factors are also mentioned as causing skin and hair problems. Emotional states such as care, anxiety, sorrow, low spirits, trouble, worry, and unkind words are purported to cause wrinkles (Beauty’s Mirror 55, 1830; Riding 19, 1894; Laynard 21, 1900). In regard to balding and graying, Moore (1866) claims, “Everything which influences the general condition of the mind and body influences the condition of the hair. Mental emotions have a powerful effect” (60). Davies (1885) finds that “depressing passions” and “corroding anxieties” are factors that “accelerate the death of the hair,” causing it to gray (36). Those who have “highly sensitive nerves, or are subjected much to mental worry” are especially at risk (Thompson 107, 1894). Heavy cares, mental troubles, anxieties, grief, and passions are all described as causing gray hair and baldness (Montez 79, 1858; Isobel 72, 1899; Laynard 24, 1900). Similar to arguments that wrinkles can be caused by “intense study” (Beauty’s Mirror 55, 1830) are those that gray hair results from “intense thought” (Davies 36, 1885) and baldness from “excessive application to study” (The Etiquette of the Toilet Table 37, 1859). Ada S. Ballin (1893) writes, “scholars and those who work their brains hard, lose their hair very early [because], having a constant over-supply of blood to the brain . . . the head becomes over-hot, and the hair falls off, in order to provide a sort of natural safety-valve by which the surplus of heat may be got rid of” (182). Evans (1879) agrees, arguing that hair loses its color due to constrictions in blood supply which are caused by “thought, hard study, or mental worry” (26-7).

Riding (1894) disagrees that too much thought and care produce wrinkles and finds a moral cause. Though he believes that women lose the youthful “bloom” on their faces due to “overwork, close confinement, trouble, worry, unkind words, and poverty”
wrinkles are also caused by “carelessness.” He argues: “The prevalent idea concerning these deep furrows is that they are caused by deep thought, trouble, and anxiety. This idea is erroneous . . . Those persons . . . who manifest these deep furrows in their foreheads, are of a careless and indifferent disposition, and are almost altogether oblivious of other people’s wants or sufferings.” He is so convinced of this, that he claims it can be proved—“put yourself into a careless, indifferent state of mind . . . and you will find these wrinkles or furrows will immediately be formed on the forehead” (19). Under this rubric, instead of being a function of stress, wrinkles are a moral problem, showing lack of character.

Personal practices are also held culpable for skin and hair problems. In *Female Beauty* (1837), Mrs. A. Walker attributes wrinkles to lack of skin elasticity but also sees them as the result of excessive leanness and “contortions of the face” such as grimacing and frowning (175). Lola Montez (1858) believes that curling irons damage the hair tubes: “[t]he unnatural heat destroys the animal nature of the hair, and is liable to produce a disease of its colouring fluid” (79). Baldness is considered to be a result of covering the head too tightly with tight, hot hats and heavy coiffures, because they are believed to put pressure on the blood vessels, causing the hair to fall out (King 79, 1883; *Beauty Culture* 20, 1893; Laynard 24, 1900). Ballin (1893) describes “heated particles” rising from the head, where hair “entangles” them to keep the body warm, but when this purpose is served by hats, the hair is no longer needed and baldness ensues.

Baldness is also seen by Ballin as a function of class and gender. She observes that the poor, whose heads are “generally uncovered in the open air,” seldom become bald. In contrast, looking from a theater balcony on the heads of the well-to-do, one will
notice that “the vast majority of their male occupants over thirty years of age have heads . . . innocent of hair.” Ballin attributes what she sees as upper-class baldness to the effects of working as a stockbroker or merchant in the city, where hats are required as a matter of etiquette (182-3). Laynard (1900) also points out the correlation between baldness and certain cultures: “Baldness has been called a disease of civilisation, it being never met with amongst aboriginal tribes. It is a curious fact that men suffer more from this complaint than women, which is doubtless owing to different occupations and environments” (24).

Personal practices such as “abuse of ardent liquors,” “immoderate use of tobacco,” “late hours,” and “irregular practices” can cause baldness (The Etiquette of the Toilet Table 37, Laynard 24). Gray hair can also be caused by “late hours, with an insufficient amount of sleep” (Isobel 72, 1899), and The Art of Beauty (1825) warns that such practices as “unscientific feasting, late hours, and immoderate drugging” can cause the skin to wrinkle.

Other environmental and cultural factors are also considered to cause gray hair, baldness, and wrinkles. Baldness is attributed to an excess of sun (The Etiquette of the Toilet Table 37, 1859). The modern hazard of “living in over-heated and gas-lighted rooms and offices” causes both wrinkles and baldness (Laynard 21, 24, 1900). Ruppert (1892) argues that the high incidence of male baldness is due to hair styles which are shorter than women’s. Frequent cutting causes hair to “bleed,” damaging it and resulting in baldness (13). Laynard (1900) writes that among current conditions, “[m]ental worry, etc., combined with a sedentary life, is, perhaps the chief agent in blanching the hair” (24). He postulates that gray hair is in some way exacerbated by Victorian culture
because, in his estimation, in past generations only the elderly were gray but in the
nineteenth century the middle-aged areas well.

**Prevention and Treatment**

Victorian medical and conduct texts base a range of interventions on their
complex etiology of aging. Certain products and practices are recommended for
prevention or removal of wrinkles, gray hair, and balding. In contrast to sumptuary
standards demanding that one announce age through certain fabrics, colors, and
accessories, treatments for skin and hair advocate that the body be engineered and
presented to be as youthful as possible. Actual health is not the issue here so much as a
healthy—and especially a youthful—appearance. The etiology of aging is the basis for
methods of preventing and treating age's signs in midlife.

*The Art of Beauty* (1825) explains in regard to facial skin, “To prevent the
formation of wrinkles, you must attend carefully to what we have shown you to be their
causes” (176). Mechanical and topical applications aim treatment at the sources of aging
on the exterior of the skin. For example, texts that advance a theory of wrinkling based
on the closing or loss of blood vessels advocate the use of friction, a “flesh brush,” or
tepid baths to “re-open” the blood vessels (*The Art of Beauty* 177, 1825) and to restore
and preserve “the undiminished action of the tubes of the skin (*Beauty's Mirror* 56,
1830). Massage is recommended to prevent wrinkles caused by shrinking of the “pulp of
the fruit under the skin” (*Kingsford* 36, 1886). When wrinkles “have arisen from the bad
habit of grimacing whilst talking or laughing, or from sorrow,” Walker (1837) argues that
“we may reasonable hope gradually to efface them, by avoiding contortions of the face,
or removing the cause of vexation” (175).
Fig. 3. Advertisement for a topical face product for removing wrinkles. Note the equation of whiteness and beauty. Christine, Marie. *Boudoir Gossip on Health and Appearance.* London: Marie Christine, 1892. 26.

Topical skin treatments are believed to work by going below the surface of the skin to address wrinkles at their source. Various results are expected from this type of treatment, some claiming to erase wrinkles and others only to slow their development. *The Ladies’ Handbook of the Toilet* (1843) gives a recipe for a wrinkle remover and lotion that it qualifies with the caveat: "Wrinkles are the certain precursors of advancing years, and cannot wholly be prevented, but the following may be found useful, in connexion with regular habits, and moderately early hours, in arresting their progress" (44). Others advocate topical treatments as "preservers" that maintain the skin in its current state. Thompson (1894), who argues that wrinkles are caused by lack of elasticity
of the skin, says they can be prevented by rubbing in glycerine, tannin, and rosewater (29). "Isobel" (1899) advocates an "Emulsion of Cucumbers" as "a charming milky lotion" that softens and preserves the skin (69).

Some texts claim to eradicate wrinkles topically by treating their physical cause even if prompted by psychological or emotional factors. *The Art of Beauty* (1825) and *Beauy’s Mirror* (1830) view wrinkles as arising from subcutaneous causes—the former attributes them to adhesions in skin layers (173) and the latter to "obliteration of blood vessels" because of anxiety, intense study, and dissipation (55), but both recommend an application of distilled water of green pine-apple (179, 56). Ada S. Ballin (1893) believes that wrinkles are caused by "wasting" of the skin which can be "obviated by rubbing in an emollient" such as lanoline or cold cream (33), the "rubbing in" suggesting that subcutaneous action will effect a treatment as the product sinks into the skin. Laynard (1900) advocates cold cream as the French system for "erasing wrinkles" and "defying the ravaging years of time" (21) caused by loss of fat under the skin, which the product will replace.

Several texts make quite bold claims for the power of topical treatments. *Beauty And How To Keep It* (1889) attributes wrinkles to behavioral and psychological causes—"late hours, serious illness, trouble and sorrow" and grimacing (25). A lotion of tannin, rose water, and glycerine is held automatically to reverse them: "the result is wonderful. If constantly used, wrinkles must disappear" (26). Bayard, Vane (1893) claims that wrinkles are caused by "looseness of the skin," but their wrinkle wash will assure that the face is "firm, elastic and smooth." It is, they claim, "in reality a magical restorer of youthful appearance" (30). Whatever the extent of cure offered, topical treatments are
presented as ways of effectively replenishing what age and circumstance have taken from beneath the skin.

The lengths to which Victorians were willing to go to achieve youthful skin is suggested by an odd and controversial topical method of skin preservation—the application of raw veal poultices to the face overnight. *Beauty And How To Keep It* (1889) cites the practice as a very effective anti-aging treatment: “I know that no cosmétique of any kind is equal to this, and that it certainly gives the skin a most soft and velvety appearance. An acquaintance of mine adopted this plan for many years with the result that at fifty years of age her skin is softer and fresher than most young girls” (8). The term “freshness” is key in several texts that describe this practice, the causal argument implying that the properties of the young calf’s meat, known for its tender and delicate quality, will be imparted to the living skin on which it is bound through some permeating action.6

Kingsford (1886), who recommends a mechanical method of massaging away wrinkles, dismisses topical treatments, arguing that wrinkles “cannot be cured or prevented by means of outward application,” because they are caused by the drying up of subcutaneous pulp or fat and “[n]o astringent, applied to the outside surface of the skin, can remove wrinkles so caused” (36). Texts that recommend external wrinkle treatment, however, favor topical treatments over mechanical, adhering to the belief that they permeate the skin and alleviate the cause of wrinkles at a subcutaneous level.

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6 Several authors note the problematic quality of this treatment. Though *Beauty And How To Keep It* claims this to be a most effective skin treatment, it notes that “it may not meet with the approbation of my readers . . . .” *The Art of Beauty* (1825) describes the practice rather skeptically, saying it is “said to prove effectual; but we have never known it tried” (179). *How To Preserve Good Looks* (1871) refers to the practice as more historical than practical: “Some time ago it was a not unfrequent custom in Paris for fashionable beauties to sleep with thin slices of raw beef bound round their faces, a practice which is said to keep the skin fresh and brilliant” (47).
The manifestations of age on the hair are seen by some texts as incurable and irreversible. *Female Beauty* (1837) claims that “no one, save quacks, impostors and charlatans, professes to have found any means of obviating” gray hair (258), and *The Book of Health and Beauty* (1837) states that when hair “has fallen off entirely, the secret of restoring it . . . remains . . . still a disideratum, notwithstanding the pompous puffs with which the public press teems from day to day” (94). Others argue that no treatment should be sought because gray hair is a gain: “the matron whose tresses have become sprinkled with silver, commits an offence against beauty of the most interesting order in removing or concealing them” (*Etiquette of the Toilette-Table* 36, 1859). Of course, most beauty books and many medical texts are premised on the theory that intervention is effective and advisable. Some recommend mechanical methods that circumvent aging hair by simply removing it—gray hair can be eradicated by plucking it out (*Sylvia’s Book of the Toilet* 48, 1881; *Kingsford* 74, 1886). A suggestion for baldness is to transplant hair to the head from other locations (*How To Preserve Good Looks* 54, 1871). Some advocate shaving the head to stimulate hair growth, but Montez warns against the practice, calling it a “vulgar notion” and a “fatal error which stands a fair chance of producing incurable baldness; as the hair is apt to be killed by being cut so near the roots” and adds a cautionary tale: “I knew a beautiful lady at Madrid who suffered in this way” (78).

Topical applications based on the etiology of aging abound for prevention and treatment of gray hair. Most of the treatments claim only to prevent or slow graying by acting on the hair tubes or bulbs. For example, Lola Montez (1858), an adherent of the hair tube theory, cites the example of an “old retired actress . . . who had a fine head of
hair, far better preserved than the rest of her charms” who felt that she had avoided gray
hair by using a mixture containing tonic of oxide of bismuth, spermaceti, and pure hog’s
lard (79). *Etiquette of the Toilet Table* (1859), which attributes graying to “anxiety,
disappointment, protracted grief, great mental exertion, fear, fright, and headache,”
advocates applying “marrow, bear’s-grease, and honey-water” to the head to prevent loss
of color (35-6). Bayard (1883) believes that gray hair is caused by a lack of iron and
counsels that it can be prevented in dark hair by washing in red wine and sulphate of iron
(39). *Sylvia’s Book of the Toilet* (1881) says that gray hair is caused by “want of tone in
the hair-producing organs” and though it sometimes cannot be prevented, “a carefully
prepared and pure oil” applied to the roots can “retard” graying (47).

Some texts advance treatments they claim will actually bring the original color
back to gray hair. Madame Rachel (1863) states that her Magnetic Dew Water of Sahara
from the Court of Morocco “appears to have the property of increasing the vital energies,
as it restores the colour of grey hair, apparently by renewing the circulation of its
capillary tubes, the cessation of which occasions greyness; and it gives the appearance of
youth to persons of considerable antiquity” (14). A similar claim is made at the end of
the century by Laynard (1901) who offers a recipe for “paraffin lotion” that can “effect a
cure” in most cases by “assisting the hair bulbs in secreting . . . pigment” (25).

Internal treatment is also seen to reverse the cause of hair problems. Because lack
of iron causes hair problems, Bayard (1883) argues that “[i]ron, taken inwardly . . .
prevents the hair becoming grey and even partially restores it to its original colour” (39).
Browning agrees, stating that “a course of iron taken internally” will sometimes restore
SCHUTTE'S

HAIR RESTORER.

Rarely has the medical profession thought it worth while to take any notice of the many Hair Restorers which from time to time are offered to the public, but never has any preparation so thoroughly found the approval of the profession as our Hair Restorer.

Shutte's Quinine Therapeutic Hair-wash.

The highest authority, the British Medical Journal, says: "The best application for falling hair, or for promoting growth of hair, is a Quinine Hair-wash made by Shutte & Co." It invigorates the hair, produces a strong growth, removes all dandriff, and keeps the hair from turning grey. May be had with oil for dry hair, or without oil for naturally greasy hair. Bottles 3s. 3d., post paid.

Fig. 4. Advertisement for a topical treatment for hair loss. Ballin, Ada S. *Health and Beauty in Dress from Infancy to Old Age.* London: n.p., [1893].

color to gray hair (111). An excess of heat caused by body temperature is seen as a source of hair trouble by Montez (1858), who believes that overheating can cause baldness and recommends avoiding nightcaps so heat may "pass freely off" the head (78). To prevent graying, she urges "frequent washings with pure, cold water" (79).

Topical applications for baldness are understood to permeate the scalp and work on subcutaneous causes of hair loss. Bayard, Vane & Co. (1893) believe that baldness is due to disease as well as "irritant causes" but can be reversed through applying their hair restorer to the scalp (20). *Etiquette of the Toilet-Table* (1859) attributes balding to excesses of study, sun, liquor, and tobacco and gives a recipe of olive oil, spirit of rosemary, and oil of nutmeg guaranteed to "restore the growth of hair" (104). Some grandiose claims are made for topical treatments for baldness. Montez (1858) claims "[i]t is well known that Baron Dypuytren obtained a world-wide fame for a pomade which actually overcame the evil of baldness in thousands of cases where it was applied" -a mixture of boxwood shavings, proof of spirit, spirits of rosemary, and spirits of nutmeg
Fig. 5. Advertisements for Alex Ross's hair restorers, dye, and "colour wash." Ross, Alex. *Hints on Dress and on the Arrangement of the Hair.* London: Ross and Company, [1861].

(76). The perfumer Alex Ross advertises that "lost hair can be recovered by using a Stimulant such as Cantharides Oil." This product has "now been before the Public a lengthened period, and has proved efficacious to an extraordinary degree" (n. pag.).

Psychological and emotional causes of aging hair and skin are treated by cultivating the right mindset in cases where causes are psychological and/or emotional. *The Ladies' Handbook of the Toilet* (1843) recommends that one possess "serenity of temper and an unruffled state of mind" to avoid wrinkles, because "[t]hose who are in the habit of yielding to the sallies of passion or, indeed, to violent excitement of any kind, will find it impossible to retain a good complexion" (5). Kingsford (1886) takes a similar approach, arguing that "[t]he mere presence of youth in the heart will often suffice to keep old age from the face, and to baffle the efforts of Time" (36). Browning (1898) believes "[t]he secret of keeping fresh and young is to be cheerful, and always to look on the bright side of things (30-1). With their advice about how to treat the causes of age on face and hair, beauty and medical texts purport to offer midlife individuals some ability to control how
they age. Again, whether these methods actually work is not my point here. That the aging body was considered amenable to age engineering, and that such intervention was considered desirable, reveals a Victorian belief in altering the physical manifestations of midlife aging through self-help strategies that result in a performance of youthfulness.

**Cover Ups: Concealing Signs of Age**

When prevention and treatment are not sufficient to thwart the markers of age on hair and face, some beauty books recommend that they be covered up. The most performative act of all in regard to age, the practice of concealing signs of age through the use of hair dyes and makeup, is revelatory of the Victorian anxiety about what is considered to be an artificial and constructed exterior. A controversy rages in the texts themselves about whether such practices are justifiable and benign or fraudulent and immoral. Some, like H. Ellen Browning (1898) argue that any attempt at covering the signs of age is dishonest: “Only a foolish woman will consent to alter the colour of her hair and smother her delicate skin in powder and paint. It is better to be a ‘naked truth’ than an ‘artful lie,’ more especially if we are striving to be women instead of dolls or slaves” (16). In contrast, Anna Kingsford (1886), a female doctor, says that though it is a “delicate question” for a medical woman to give advice about using makeup, she thinks that “a great deal of nonsense is talked about ‘paint’ and so forth” (41-2); there is no difference between using cosmetics and adorning ourselves with fabrics, metals, and jewels. As long as the makeup one uses is safe, “pallid faces, and skins which have lost the first flush of youth, are often greatly improved by a little judicious ‘getting up,’ and it is not the least of a woman’s duties to look fair and pleasant, and to adorn the world” (42). The use of cosmetics has a long history in British culture, waxing and waning as
fashionable and permissible. As the two examples above show, covering up signs of age in this way was still a vexed topic near the end of the century.

Gray hair is sometimes figured in Victorian texts as not only appropriate with age, but a midlife gain. For example, The Art of Beauty (1899) states that “as for grey hair or white, in old age it is always becoming and beautiful, and most young women who happen to have grey hair, look quite distinguished” (82). Others see gray as simultaneously a marker of age and decline, as well as improvement in looks. Kingsford (1886) claims that “gray or white hair in old age is always beautiful and becoming” because it “throws up the colours of the face amazingly, and makes even an ordinary complexion appear brilliant,” which is why people used to wear colored wigs in the eighteenth century (74). Merrifield (1854) believes that at age fifty, when “wearing the natural gray hair, the whole countenance acquires a general harmony which . . . compensates in some degree for the loss of the bloom of youth” (162). The majority of beauty books, however, with their detailed analyses of how the hair becomes gray and debates about how to prevent and cover it, assert that gray hair, as Female Beauty (1837) claims, is often seen by women as a “calamity” because it makes them appear older (258). Bayard (1883) coyly points out: “White hair is no doubt very beautiful, but however long we may live, none of us like to have it” (39).

The use of hair dyes is the subject of much debate, those who are adamantly anti-dyeing equating changing hair color with fraud. Wigs are a much less debated method of covering gray. Sylvia’s Book of the Toilet (1881) represents hair dyeing as “intentional deception,” but argues that the practice of wearing a wig is “not an offence against morality, as Puritanic persons would have us believe” (23). Merrifield (1854) believes
that to “conceal the change by dyeing our own grey hair... is not only bad taste, but it is a positive breach of sincerity” (3), and Sylvia’s Book of the Toilet (1881) states that “to dye the hair is to practise an intentional deception” (33). Both these authors see gray hair as a gain that ameliorates, to some extent, a loss of youth. Sylvia believes that “Nothing can be lovelier than soft grey locks clustering about the face, especially when the eyes, about which youth lingers latest, retain their freshness and sparkle” (40). Merrifield’s claims are a bit more negative: “by wearing the natural gray hair, the whole countenance acquires a general harmony which, when accompanied by an expression of intelligence and goodness, compensates in some degree for the loss of the bloom of youth” (162).

Sylvia and Merrifield, to different degrees and with differing amounts of enthusiasm, use gray hair both as a marker of loss and simultaneously as a gain, in their attempts to urge for “honesty” in displaying age.

Most of the arguments against hair dyes are not based on gray hair’s beauty, however, but on an appeal to retaining good health by avoiding the dangers of the metals and acids that are ubiquitous ingredients of dyes. Some products, such as “Simeon’s American Hair Restorer” advertised in Figure 6 claim to color the hair safely without the use of dye. Nichols (1878) warns that some women dye their hair under a false security, believing they are merely using harmless “hair washes,” but she provides a cautionary tale of a woman who becomes deaf and blind by using such products. Citing the dangers inherent in using metal-based dyes, she concludes, “If ladies like to have neuralgia, general weakness and misery, dimness of sight or blindness, imperfect hearing or deafness, better than honest grey hair, then let them take their choice” (19).

A curious feature of several of the conduct books is their protests against dyeing
followed by instructions on how to do it. This contradiction is justified by the complaint that since women insist on using dye, the text is forced to provide instructions for harmless dyes for their readers’ safety. This rhetorical move occurs in several beauty books, allowing the text simultaneously to condemn and purvey dyes. While operating behind a veneer of propriety and conservatism, the writers valorize themselves as conservators of public health, yet still profit from the books in which they offer advice and sell products, sometimes even the dyes themselves. The “Toilet Specialist” (1899) argues that “[t]o dye the hair is not only in bad taste artistically, but the practice is likely to utterly destroy its lustre, sheen, and softness besides causing it to become brittle. In addition, dyes often contain strong acids” (72). She goes on to explain that “the practice of dyeing and bleaching the hair is so prevalent, one is compelled to treat of these cosmetics, in the hope that a few comparatively harmless recipes may save some from the
misfortunes which so often arise from the use of dangerous and poisonous preparations” (82), and then she provides dye recipes.

Books that disapprove of dyes often recommend “safe” recipes that sound far from salubrious. Montez (1858) lists “poisonous mineral acids, nitrate and oxide of silver, caustic alkalies, lime, litharge, and arsenic” as among the dangerous ingredients used in hair dyes, and adds the warning that “[o]ne patent hair-dye was proved on analysis, to be a preparation of hydrophosphuret of ammonia, a most filthy ingredient, which, besides its villainous smell, would cause immediate suffocation if inhaled by the lungs” (85). She also claims that dyes add color to the hair by simply burning it, leaving behind a disease that makes the hair gray more swiftly. Montez then, however, gives a recipe for a dye that an “old physician and chemist at Lisbon gave a charming Parisian lady” that contains gallic and acetic acid as well as a metal, “tincture of sesqui chloride of iron” (85). Etiquette of the Toilet-Table (1859) cautions against the danger of “metallic agents” and gives several dye recipes containing ingredients such as silver and nitrate of silver, steel-filings, and lead ore, as well as nitric acid (34). Some who claim to have a safe dye actually seem to be delivering on the promise, however. Laynard (1900) warns that almost all hair dyes contain lead which can give their users lead poisoning and then recommends the use of walnut juice to stain hair a darker color (26).

Of course, perfumers’ books contain pro-dye arguments, because they offer such products for sale. Alex Ross (1861) claims that gray hair “is easily altered” by hair dyes, which are “easy of application” as well as “uninjurious in their effect.” In fact, he argues that “discovery” has shown that they are efficacious in “increasing the quantity of hair” because “by stimulating or mildly exciting the skin, the hair is greatly improved,
ASK YOUR PERFUMER OR CHEMIST FOR
LINEHAM'S FRAGRANT HAIR DRESSING BALSAM.
IS ONE OF THE FINEST PREPARATIONS IN THE WORLD
TO IMPART HEALTH TO THE SKIN AND LUXURIANCE TO THE HAIR.
IT DOES NOT FAVOUR AN ARTIFICIAL BUT IMPROVES THE NATURAL COLOUR AND
IS IMMENSELY SUPERIOR TO MANY OF THE HAIR RESTORERS.

Manufactured at 45 and 44, Castle Gate, Newark, and Sold Wholesale and Retail in Bottles,1s 6d., 2s, 4s 6d., and 5s. each. See Testimonials.

WHOLESALE AGENTS IN LONDON: Messrs. Barclay, Newbery, Young & Co., 84, 85, 86 & 87, New Bond St., and 317, 318, 319, & 320, Strand.

WARNING: No Party is authorised to use the name of Lineham or to make or sell or deal in any imitation of Lineham's Hair Dressing Balsam or any of their preparations. Any person so doing is guilty of a serious breach of patent rights, and will be prosecuted by the patentees.

CAUTION.—The proprietors of Lineham's Hair Dressing Balsam have no connection with any persons or parties who claim to sell any imitation of Lineham's Hair Dressing Balsam.

LEXURIANT AND BEAUTIFUL HAIR.

"Look on this picture."  "And on this."

LATREILLE'S EXCELSIOR LOTION.
Celebrated among all classes of society all over the world as the only real producer
WHISKERS AND MOUSTACHIOS,
AND CURE OF BALDNESS.

Price 2s. 6d. per bottle. Can be had of any chemist, through Barclay, Newbery, Edwardes, Debenham, Thompson, Horden & Co., or any other Wholesale Chemist, or direct from the proprietors, Latreille & Co., Watford, London, on remitting Post-office Order or Stamps.

CAUTION.—Be careful to ask for Latreille's ExceLSiOR Lotion, and refuse anything else that may be offered, as the enormous success, extending over twenty years, has led to many useless imitations, which can only disappoint. The title "EXCELSIOR LOTION" is aregistered Trade Mark, to copy which will incur criminal prosecution.

WHY DOES HAIR FALL OFF?

From many causes. Sometimes from local disturbing agencies, such as sickness; sometimes from neglect in cleansing; but more frequently from decay in the saps and tissues which supply each individual hair. In such case,

OLDRIDGE'S BALM OF COLUMBIA

Is an excellent corrective of the many insidious sources of decay which ruin nature's chief ornament.

It stimulates, strengthens, and increases the growth of Hair; softens and nourishes it when grown; and arrests its decline. Besides this, it acts on those pigments the constant supply of which is essential to the Hair retaining its colour.

The Hair of the Head and the Whiskers and Moustachios

Are alike benefited. For children it is invaluable, as it forms the basis of a magnificent Head of Hair, prevents Baldness in mature age, and obviates the use of dyes and poisonous restoratives.

ESTABLISHED UPWARDS OF SIXTY YEARS. (A sufficient guarantee of its efficacy).

Sold by all Perfumers and Chemists at 3s. 6d., 6s., and 11s. only. Wholesale and Retail by the Proprietors,

C. & A. OLDRIDGE,
22, WELLINGTON ST., STRAND, LONDON, W.C.

BALM OF COLUMBIA. ESTABLISHED UPWARDS OF SIXTY YEARS.
lengthened, and thickened” (10). Ross gives detailed instructions for the home use of
dyes, including preparation of the hair by washing it first with an egg yolk. Ross
adVERTISES his own dye, which he claims will return any shade of light or dark brown or
black hair to its original color, “being perfectly natural in appearance” (n. pag.). Bayard
and Vane (1893) warn that gray hair “is not natural except to the aged” and recommend
their “hair colour restorer” as a product that “will bring back dull and glossless hair to its
natural color.” Though they make no claim as to the safety of their product, they preface
its advertisement with a long list of questions for “patients” who desire their “treatment”
(23): “How long has the greyness or loss of colour existed? Is it general or confined to
spots? Is there dandruff or yellow spots? . . . Has there ever been any paralysis?” (24).
By situating their product in this pseudo-medical discourse, they imply it is both safe and
salubrious.

"GOLDEN BRONZE HAIR."

ÆRINE.

The latest triumph of Chromatic Chemistry, quickly imparts the much-
admired Golden Bronze Tint to Hair of any-colour, producing the Tint
Châtain Foncé, so that it may be truly said the hair under its influence
seems as if a ray of sunshine had permanently established itself among the
tresses. Price 5s. 6d., 10s. 6d., and 21s. Invented by W. WINTER,
Court Hair Dresser and Manufacturing Perfumer, 472 (late 205), OXFORD
STREET, LONDON, Depot for Golden Hair.

For Tinting Grey or Faded Hair ÆRINE is invaluable.

BALDNESS, GREYNESS, DEFICIENCY OF HAIR.

Mrs. WINTER, Author of "Trichologia," may be consulted personally or
by letter, addressed to 472, (late 205), OXFORD STREET, LONDON, W.

Extracts from "Trichologia" forwarded post free on application.

Fig. 9. Advertisements for Aerine hair dye and a consultant for gray hair and baldness. From Kingsford,
Anna. Health, Beauty, and The Toilet: Letters to Ladies from a Lady Doctor. London: Frederick Warne,
1886.
Why many Persons Permanently Submit to the
variations and unsightly appearance of
"For every defect of Nature, Art offers a remedy."

GREY HAIR
Rather than attempt to Restore it.
1st—Because the old fashioned and objectionable Hair Dyes dry up and spoil the Hair.
2nd—Because the majority of "Hair Restorers" bring the users into ridicule by producing only a sickly yellow tint or dirty greenish stain, instead of a proper colour.
The following Testimonials (of many hundreds received) declare the value of
LATREILLE'S HYPERION HAIR RESTORER
As positively restoring gray or white hair to the REALLY NATURAL colour, gloss, softness, luster and beauty of youth, it is perfectly accomplished the work and fulfils its promise, than in brilliant sunshine, or under glaring sunlight, the user can alike defy detection in ever having been grey, or used a remedy, while as a nourisher and strengthener of weak hair it has no equal.

Price 3d. 6d., sent in return for Stamps or Post Office Order, by the Proprietors,
LATREILLE & CO., Walthamstow, London, or may be had of Chemists;
But it is strongly advised that anything else, offered from interested motives, be absolutely refused, as Latreille's Hyperion NEVER DISAPPOINTS. All Chemists can readily procure through wholesalers, if they have it not themselves in stock.

Fig. 10. Advertisement for Latreille's hyperion hair restorer that promises to return the hair to its natural color. From Wooten, Edwin. Toilet Medicine: A Popular Scientific Manual. London: L. Upcott Gill, 1882.

Even more controversial than hair dyes to cover signs of age is the use of makeup. The *Book of Health and Beauty* (1837) draws a distinction between the terms "paints" and "cosmetics." The word "paint" generally specifies what we would call "make-up," in nineteenth-century terms meaning powder, face enamels (liquid and cream preparations that coat the skin with white), and rouges. "Cosmetics," in contrast, is used for a wider spectrum of products such as hair dyes, face washes, and lotions. *The Book of Health and Beauty* represents the use of paints as "corporeal hypocrisy" that merely "imitates" the desired qualities "in a manner more or less coarse" (xviii). Cosmetics, in contrast,
"assist Nature, and make amends for her defects." In fact, "they are to beauty what medicines are to health" (xvii-xviii).

Makeup has a long history in Great Britain. During the reign of Elizabeth I, the use of face paints (enamels and rouge) was common among the upper classes and royalty, and in the eighteenth century other classes began to employ them as well, due in part to advances in methods of transport (Angeloglou 48, 70). In the 1740s, fashionable men and women of the upper class considered a "powder closet" or dressing room essential as a place to apply this new product. By 1760, sale of makeup was a thriving business which lasted until the French Revolution, but between 1790 and 1840, it went in and out of favor from season to season (Angeloglou 79, 92). Early in the nineteenth century, makeup was marginally acceptable for use by ladies only--there is some evidence that Jane Austen herself used rouge, though her heroines rarely did (Angeloglou 92). During the Victorian era the use of paints was limited solely to women and seen as a sign of crudeness and immorality, but by the end of the century it was coming back into fashion.

Makeup is decried in Victorian arguments based on aesthetics, morals, and health concerns. From the point of view of pure beauty, several writers see makeup as producing ugliness and augmenting the advance of age. Moodie (1848) writes that cosmetics "always give the face a white, dirty, yellow, sickly hue" (81). Thompson (1894) believes the use powder or "paste" to hide wrinkles is "absurd" because "it will only render them more prominent afterwards" (30). Laynard (1900) discusses the ancient origins of cosmetics, and warns that "nearly all women who have been noted for their great beauty, and whose charms have lasted beyond the ordinary period, have never been known to use powder, or artificial bloom of any kind" (18). Howard (1885) voices the
common belief that makeup indicates both one's morality and class—using paints, powders, blacking the eyes, and pencilling the eyebrows, "should never, under any circumstances, be practised" because "[n]o real lady ever condescends to do such a thing; that is left to those who are of a different rank in life, and of a different stamp altogether" (164).

Makeup is often equated with falsehood. Merrifield (1854) believes that it is "adopted with a view to deceive; it is acting a lie to all intents and purposes, and it ought to be held in the same kind of destestation as falsehood with the tongue" (3). Riding (1894) sees makeup not only as ugly and a falsehood, but an addiction: "No cosmetics, paints, or powders, can make a pretty face; they but mask the ugliness and destroy the skin. They act on the face as opium does on the mind; and if once you begin to use them, you are compelled to keep up the trickery to the end" (5).

As well as the issue of morals, the discussion of health features prominently in the debate about cosmetics. They are considered harmful for two reasons—dirtying the face and introducing toxic materials to the body. Moodie (1848) speaks of "paints" as "very injurious to the health" because they are full of "poisonous substances" that are "taken into the system through the skin" and "clog pores" (81). Laynard (1900) warns that "eruptions on the face have been directly traceable to some of the toilet powders and cosmetics sold in shops" because of clogged pores (18). Many writers, though, advocate the use of cosmetics as a good means for obviating certain signs of age in the middle-aged woman if they are safe. A major distinction is drawn between products that contain dangerous minerals and those with harmless vegetable bases. The most pernicious cosmetic is face "enamel." Unlike today's makeup bases that are tinted to match all
AIDS TO BEAUTY

PATRONISED BY ROYALTY and many LEADING SOCIETY LADIES.

"Beauty Cream."
For neck, arms, and face; immediately beautifies, is imperceptible, eradicates freckles and blemishes, and prevents sunburn; is not a greasy, and is guaranteed to improve the skin. 6d per bottle, post free.

"Goldene."
A perfectly harmless preparation for lightening and brightening the hair. Does not contain a particle of Peroxide of Hydrogen. Price 10d per bottle. Send for full particulars.

"Beauty Powder."
Most fragrant, and made specially to be used with "BEAUTY CREAM." 1s per box.

"Rose-Bloom."
A most natural colouring; does not rub off. 1s per bottle, post free.

"Wrinkline."
For removing and preventing wrinkles, &c. 6d per bottle, post free.

Pocket Powder-Puff, 2s each.

A Special Box
Containing a bottle of "BEAUTY CREAM," 1s; Powder, Rose-Bloom, Lip-Salve, Powder-Puff, and Pencil, for 5s, post free. Your money will be returned if you are not satisfied.

"Anti-Corpo."
A preparation for reducing corpulence. 6d per box.

Extract from a letter: "DEAR MADAME,—I have received the box, and although I have only used your preparations a few times, I find the difference in my skin simply marvellous, and I shall recommend them to all my friends."

Another Extract: "Mrs. —— is charmed with the Beauty Cream, and never feels dressed without it."

Another lady writes: "Please send me another of your 5s Beauty Box. I have used your preparations for more than a year now, and my skin has improved wonderfully."

Mrs. J. writes: "I find my complexion much improved during the nine or ten months I have used your Specialties. Many people notice it."

ALL COMMUNICATIONS HELD STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Postage paid on all parcels for British Isles. For foreign countries extra postage must please be added to cost of preparations. Pamphlets and advice by letter free.

Call or send for Pamphlets and Testimonials. Free Trial of "Beauty" Preparations to Gallera.

PLEASE NOTE THE ADDRESS FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

MADAME CROSS, Dept. A, 70, Newman St., LONDON, W.

Fig. 11. Victorian advertisement for makeup. Madame Cross's aids to beauty from A Toilet Specialist. The Art of Beauty: A Book for Women and Girls. London: C. Arthur Person, [1899].

shades of skin, enamel always makes the skin appear to be an unadulterated white, underlining the fact that beauty was considered to be found in youthful skin that was smooth and highly caucasian. First known as ceruses, enamels made with egg white,
vindicy, and white enamel were used in the Elizabethan period by both men and women of high class. They continued to be used into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the best imported from Vienna. Their popularity spread to the English middle class as methods of transport improved, making them available across the country.

Many nineteenth-century beauty books warn against the use of face enamel to cover wrinkles and give a more youthful appearance. Bayard, Vane (1893) advertises their Venetian face enamel as “a velvety substance” that is “a temporary and instant means of producing a fresh looking, spotless complexion, which is irresistibly attractive” (31). Maria Gunning, Countess of Coventry, was a famous beauty who died of lead poisoning in 1760 as a “victim of cosmetics” (Angeloglou 50, 63, 70, 75). How to Preserve Good Looks (1871) invokes her story as a cautionary tale—though she “enchant[ed] the whole town . . . driving half the men mad,” she died “in the zenith of her glory” at age twenty-six because she was vain enough to insist on using cosmetics (34). Beauty’s Mirror (1830) enumerates the problems that can be caused by enamelling—it can “injure the eyes, change the texture of the skin, produce pimples, and destroy the teeth,” as well as “penetrating the pores” to “produce manifold diseases” (118).

In contrast, the perfumer Madame Rachel (1863) defends enamelling as “conductive to health and beauty, grace and youth” (18). She does admit that enamels usually contain “deadly leads and other injurious matters, which have been the cause of blighting many young and lovely faces.” She argues, however, that she offers a unique type of enamel that is healthy and warns that “all other persons who presume to style themselves enamellers to the different courts of Europe and restorers of youth and beauty, commit a gross fraud upon the ladies, and upon the public in general” (19). However, as
YOUTH AND BEAUTY
Can be secured and maintained by constant use of CLARKSON'S
LILLIE Puder,
FOR THE COMPLEXION.

Mrs. Langtry writes:
"The Lillie powder is a great success. I shawl use nothing else."

Madame Marie Rose:
"Your Lillie Powder is perfect; I always use it now."

Miss Fortescue:
"Has much pleasure in informing Mr. Clarkson that she finds
the Lillie Powder is most pleasant and refreshing to the skin."

Mrs. Chippendales:
"Having all my life objected to the whole tribe of confectioned
powders, I have used only simple powdered chalk; but I like your
Lillie Powders, finding it remains on, and spreads softly over the
face becomingly, without producing the horribly white and artificial
effect that too many prepared powders do."

Miss Violet Cameron:
"I think the Lillie Powder the best I have ever used."

in Three Tints, Blanche, Naturelle, and Rachel.

Price 1s. 6d. per Box. Sold Everywhere, or of

W. CLARKSON, Theatrical and Private Wig Maker,
46, WELLINGTON STREET, STRAND, LONDON.
Quite Harmless. Thousands Selling Daily.


earlier discussed, Madame Rachel is associated with fraudulent beauty products in Victorian culture. For the most part, in the nineteenth century enamel was considered too dangerous to be worth any benefit from covering wrinkles.

Powder is seen as a less harmful way to cover wrinkles and lighten the skin. Bayard, Vane (1893) advertises its May bloom face powder as a "perfectly harmless" product that "instantly imparts a beautiful natural whiteness and girlish softness to the skin" (31). According to several texts, covering wrinkles with powder is excusable only as long as it is undetectable. Montez (1858) calls it "a vulgar trick" and says its users "go into company with their faces looking as though they just came out of a meal-bag"—which not only is "ridiculous" but also is "disgusting to gentlemen." Montez moderates this argument, however, by noting that higher quality powders are less detectable and
therefore may be used (39). *Etiquette of the Toilet-Table* (1859) instructs that the finest powder is made from ground pearls, but because of the expense it is imitated by ground mother-of-pearl or oyster shells. These are problematic because they “leave a shining appearance on the face, which betrays the art which has been used at the first glance” (119-20).

Rouge is also considered a much less harmful product than lead-based enamel. *Beauty’s Mirror* (1830) calls it the “most innocent” cosmetic, made from vegetables such as sandal wood, cochineal root, brazil wood, or saffron (118). *Etiquette of the Toilet-Table* (1859) cautions, however, that rouges which contain vinegar are “liable to injure the beauty of the skin” (115). Montez (1858) invokes images of hell to prohibit paints—“If Satan has ever had any direct agency in inducing woman to spoil or deform her own beauty, it must have been in tempting her to use *paints* and *enamelling,*” but allows the use of rouge: “what has been said against white paints and enamels does not apply with equal force to the use of rouge” (38-9). *The Ladies Hand-Book of the Toilet* (1843) goes so far as to exclude rouge from the category of paints. Though “paint should never be resorted to; it is a senseless piece of hypocrisy, betraying a mean and degraded mind” that will “destroy the beauty it was intended to improve,” rouge is “sometimes allowable” to “impart a bloom to the pale or wan check of beauty” (29). Rouge can be especially important for the middle-aged woman, because as the “bloom” of youth fades, rouge can return a woman to her former color and the prime of her beauty.

By the end of the century, makeup began to increase in popularity. *How To Preserve Good Looks* (1871) notes that cosmetics were coming into common use and would soon be considered quite acceptable: “We believe that the time will come when we
shall think it as small a fault for our ‘pure, fair English girls’ to add the roses denied them by nature, or to whiten the shoulders the hue of the lily has deserted, as we think it now for them to replenish their scanty locks at Truefitt’s” (51). The writer also argues that use of cosmetics has spread to almost all social classes: “the number of customers is not so astonishing as is their position in life. The cosmetic art is no longer supported only by professionals or the *demi-monde*, but by almost every grade of society” (57).

The 1880s saw the rise of the beauty culturists in the United States and Great Britain, an industry that developed around beauty parlors, women’s magazines, beauty product manufacturers, advertisers and retailers. They advocated systems of beauty that involved the constant purchase of a line of products and participation in commercialized beauty rituals. Though beauty culturists were initially anti-cosmetics, stressing proper exercise, diet, exercise, and breathing to develop “natural” beauty which comes from “within,” by the turn of the century, relied more and more on the use of cosmetics to beautify women and enrich the businesses they frequented (Pleiss 375-6). By the 1890s, magazines had begun to advertise makeup (Angeloglou 107). Late in the nineteenth century, in attempts to create a rise in sales, manufacturers stressed the safety of their products—even arguing that certain powders and face tints had therapeutic value. They also stressed the invisibility of their cosmetics that covered flaws and enhanced complexions, as the idea of the “painted” and immoral woman gave way to a more natural look (Peiss 378). Beauty books from later in the century stress an artistic, light style. The “Professional Beauty” wrote in 1889 that a woman should try to correct faults with a little “care and art” instead of covering the whole face, and should be careful to apply cosmetics in a well-lighted room, or “otherwise the consequence will be
disastrous" (19). In 1899, the "Toilet Specialist" is opposed to "extensive 'make-up'" and argues that "if women and girls will use these things . . . it is just as well that they should do so artistically, and with as much care for the effect as possible" (90). As makeup became less obviously performative, mimicking the natural color of the skin, it became more acceptable and less associated with immorality and theatricality. Makeup came to be respectable and accepted for use by the middle class to the point that it was considered an integral part of female beauty and respectability by the early twentieth century (Whitlock 33; Peiss 384).

Victorian beauty, medical, and conduct books reflect the divided consciousness of the culture in regard to the midlife body. While insisting that the outer covering of the body signal a conscious performance of middle-age well past youth, Victorians left a wide latitude for the body itself to be subject to all sorts of tinkering with products and practices that produce a protracted youth. The existence and endurance of age engineering across the century shows that while Victorians believed that age was problematic and a loss, they also held that it could and should be resisted. By offering this option, these texts both villify age, reinforcing loss ideology, and also uphold the right and ability of the middle-aged to perform themselves as youthful, a construction of midlife as flexible and full of potential. In the next two chapters, I will explore how fictional texts depict midlife and its possibilities and performances within the genre of the marriage-plot novel.
Chapter Two

"Going Off": Age Anxiety in
the Victorian Midlife Marriage Plot

Studies of the novel have tended to overlook age as an aspect of subjectivity, though marriageable heroines in Victorian fiction are, almost without exception, young. As Jane Austen’s narrator wryly comments about the nuptials of Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland at the end of *Northanger Abbey* (1818): “To begin perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen is to do pretty well” (247). In countless nineteenth-century novels the pattern is repeated—a usually youthful male protagonist and his always younger female counterpart achieve “perfect happiness” in early adulthood, suggesting that the remainder of life is merely a decline from a youthful apotheosis. For women, whose fortunes are so heavily governed by the marriage market, age is an especially decisive factor. The last significant page of the novel and their lives seems to have been written in their late teens or early twenties, and women of any other age are important only in their roles as supporting figures within stories about the continuing stream of young marriageable females.

Both middle-aged men and women do appear as brides and grooms in nineteenth-century fiction, however. In this chapter, I will explore what marriage plots of middle age and their anxieties have to teach us about Victorian attitudes toward midlife. After establishing historical parameters for marriage in middle age, I will examine several novels that show the centrality of age anxiety in plots that mix marriageability and midlife. Margaret Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks*, in particular, centers around a system of age calibration that shows both male and female consciousness about aging but also
demonstrates that women are more at risk for becoming middle aged. Male age anxiety regularly appears in cases of age disparity, and their pondering about whether “the time of love has passed them by” causes midlife men to question their physical and emotional potency. In the novels I examine, these anxieties are not resolved by the men themselves but by their female love objects, who decide whether age has made the male unmarriageable. In contrast, plots of age anxiety for women do not center on age disparity. Instead, the suitor is usually of a similar age and the problem at issue is whether the female has retained enough viability on the market to obtain a mate. By comparing inner soliloquies about the significance of age to marriageability, I will show that though midlife women are more at risk for aging, they also have more power of self-determination. Women’s thoughts about their own aging revealed in mirror scenes are predictive of their career on the marriage market. Desirability is shown to be compounded less of chronological age or physical attributes than of attitude toward them. In fact, the youngest woman I consider is the one who ultimately depicts herself as aged and creates a future of decline for herself. Midlife characters involved in marriage plots frequently manifest age anxiety. The protean nature of Victorian midlife, tenuously located between youth and age and constantly under construction, is manifested in these multiple representations of midlife marriage plots through narratives of anxiety.

**Marriage and Age in Nineteenth-Century Britain**

As discussed in the introduction, I consider fiction both to reflect what is occurring in culture as well as to suggest new paradigms for behavior (25). For example, the nuptials in *Northanger Abbey* reflect trends that remained in place throughout the nineteenth century regarding age at first marriage. Because the mean age for first
marriage from 1800 to 1849 was 25.3 years for males and 23.4 years for females (Wrigley and Schofield 155), Henry Tilney’s twenty-six years put him at or near the average age for bachelors to marry. At eighteen, Catherine Morland embodies another important martial trend. William Farr reports an increase over the century in marriage by minors (i.e. those under age twenty-one), especially among women. In 1851, only 5% of men but 16% of women married before twenty-one, and the numbers had increased by 1872, though the three-to-one ration remained relatively similar, with 8% of men and 22% of women minors at date of first marriage (78). Catherine’s fictive marriage represents a minor nineteenth-century trend toward younger brides that continued to increase during the Victorian era.

Though the stereotypical fictive Victorian marriage occurs between a young man and younger woman in a first marriage, this paradigm omits certain complexities of the nineteenth-century marriage market as it appears in both fact and fiction. Two relevant factors are the extremely high number of second and subsequent marriages as well as a substantial proportion of marriages occurring at ages above thirty. As indicated in Tables 6 and 7 (see introduction), Farr found that second and subsequent marriages were more common than first marriages in 1851 and 1870-2, a trend especially prevalent among men. For example, in 1870-1872, four widowers married for every bachelor at ages 35 to 40, and the disparity increased with age: at 40-45, five widowers remarried for every bachelor who married, at 50 to 55, seven widowers married to each bachelor, and at 65 to 70, eight widowers remarried for every bachelor (80). This pattern also held true for

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1 Remarriages among the divorced would have not been statistically significant until at least after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. See the introduction for more information on remarriage rates among the divorced.
women, but to a far lesser extent: generally, for every spinster who married in each age category, approximately two widows remarried (80).

Second marriages often included a partner past the average age of marriage, though many of these second (or subsequent) unions occurred between parties still in their twenties. Farr's data, which is organized under categories for bachelors, spinsters, widowers, and widows, shows that though most marriages, whether first or subsequent, occur in the twenties, significant numbers also occurred in the thirties and forties among males, especially widowers, while many fewer women in their thirties and forties married. In 1851 12.2% of bachelors were age twenty at marriage, 3.8% were thirty, 4.5% were thirty-five, 2.8% were forty and 1.4% were forty-five. The numbers increase for widowers: 35.7% were twenty-five at marriage, 28.6% were thirty, 20.3% were forty, and 14% were forty-five. The same age trends hold true for women, though on a much smaller scale: 9% of spinsters² married at twenty-five, 6% at thirty, 3.8% at thirty-five, 2.5% at forty, and 1.4% at forty-five. Among widows, 14.9% married at twenty-five, 11.6% at thirty, 7.3% at thirty-five, 4.3% at forty, and 2.7% at forty-five. Thus, a quite sizable number of midlife men and smaller but statistically relevant number of midlife women were contracting marriages in Victorian England.

Victorian fiction does record the complexities of both middle-aged brides and grooms, and many novels have marriage plots resolved by a second marriage for one of the parties. Considering a few of the most canonical novels, we can easily find examples of second marriage for males—when Charlotte Brontë's Edward Rochester marries Jane Eyre or Charles Dickens's David Copperfield weds Agnes Wickfield. Even the less

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² While "spinster" here denotes merely a previously unmarried woman, this term will take on other connotations later in the chapter.
frequent case of female second marriage is also well represented in canonical texts such as George Eliot’s Dorothea Brooke who marries Will Ladislaw or W. M. Thackeray’s Amelia Sedley who unites with William Dobbin. Victorian novels, both canonical and those less well known, frequently depict marriages in which one or both parties are well above the average age of marriage, though they are usually found in subplots. These provide a rich field for the study of fictive representations of midlife marriage in the nineteenth century.

“Going Off”: The Gendered Age System of Miss Marjoribanks

Margaret Oliphant’s Miss Marjoribanks (1865-6) contains a highly developed awareness of aging into midlife as loss and even has a special term—“going off”—to indicate when a middle-aged individual begins to show signs of deterioration due to age. Though “going off” has a psychological component involving the characters’ anxiety, its markers are purely physical and the body’s aging is what the characters fear. To “go off” is to suffer a physical change that marks one as past youth and lessened in value, a phenomenon clearly seen and easily recognizable in the novel, much discussed by characters who constantly scrutinize themselves and others for its signs. Once one has obtained this look of age, chances of marriageability are immensely lessened, but the loss is especially pronounced for women. Miss Marjoribanks forthrightly acknowledges and reveals this system of midlife aging, exposing conventions that are often not as overtly represented but nevertheless operate subtly within most other Victorian novels.

The term “going off” carries a double significance. It connotes spoiling food or souring milk, the rotting of organic material when it begins to deteriorate. In accusing the midlife body of “going off,” the novel’s age system not only passes a sentence of
death on marriageability but associates the still-living human anatomy with the ultimate decomposition after death. In addition to its links with decomposition, to “go off” is to leave, to put oneself at a distance from a former location. The term implies that at midlife the body goes away from an ideal, more youthful form. The aging person also goes away in a sense, not only from marriageability, but from fertility, attractiveness, the social power available through these means, and from a former self that contains within its youthfulness the seeds of possibility seemingly denied the older incarnation. “Going off” is represented as an unequivocal decline in Miss Marjoribanks.

The novel is quite clear about when characters “go off” and how the process is manifested. Thirty is established in the novel as the age by which women should marry, and “going off” causes the onset of spinsterhood. When Lucilla Marjoribanks is nineteen, she fears that "[m]ost likely I shall begin to go off a little in ten years" (202), and when she reaches twenty-nine, she is still unmarried, and worries that "she might perhaps have begun to go off in her looks" (341). Though she has money and social position in her father’s house, she decides that "she had come to an age when most people have husbands, and when an independent position in the world becomes necessary to self-respect" (342). If her body betrays her by “going off,” she knows she will be aged out of the marriage market.

Lucilla has not undergone this change by the time she is thirty: “As for Lucilla Marjoribanks, she was rather better looking than otherwise, and absolutely had not gone off” (392). So, while women are at risk to “go off” around thirty, they do not necessarily do so, and midlife aging is presented as individually variable and physically, not chronologically, determined. Lucilla is the protagonist in the conventional marriage plot
and eventually marries soon after turning thirty, still showing no signs of aging out of romantic viability. As she moves from the village of Carlingford to a country estate, she feels “a larger sphere opened before her feet” (497), and her marriage is celebrated as a triumph.

Other characters, both male and female, do “go off” in the novel, though the consequences are quite different for women than those for men. Mr. Cavendish observes the signs of “going off” in both himself and in Barbara Lake when she is aged out of marriageability at thirty one—only a year older than Lucilla. No specific age is mentioned at which men are past marital viability, but even though there is not a category of spinsterhood for men, they still “go off.” Cavendish’s age is never stated, but he is probably in his forties or even late thirties:

Barbara had gone off, like himself, and like himself, did not mean to acknowledge it. She had expanded all over . . . [h]er eyes . . . owned an indescribable amount of usage; and her cheeks, too, wore the deep roses of old, deepened and fixed by wear and tear . . . "Poor soul!" he said to himself . . . She . . . had fallen from the pinnacles of youth. (443-4)

Several marks of “going off” are clearly described in this passage. Barbara has become corpulent, and her eyes show “usage,” which we can imagine as a reference to surrounding wrinkles, sagging skin, and darkness or “bags” under the eyes. Her cheeks are still pink, but the descriptive “wear and tear” evokes more images of wrinkles and drooping skin. Cavendish thinks of this physical aging in terms of a fall with the “pinnacle” of her past youthfulness an apex.
Though Cavendish acknowledges that he, too, has suffered a similar “fall,” he suffers much less than does Barbara due to the change. Because she has “gone off,” Barbara becomes a spinster, and when she fails to marry she leaves Carlingford, because she "was talked about, and looked down upon." From that experience, "she had learned that she was young no longer, and could not indulge in the caprices of that past condition of existence" (444). That Barbara has lost all personal power is clear when she assures Cavendish, as her former suitor, that she receives him now only as a friend, and his internal response is that he "need not have any fear of Barbara's fascinations,—as if a woman of her age, worn and gone off as she was, could be supposed dangerous" (444). The word “dangerous” shows just how far she has fallen. When Cavendish was still a possible match for Lucilla, Barbara had the potential to be a serious rival. After she loses her affective and erotic power due to aging, she is no only no longer a threat to Lucilla’s romantic future, but becomes emotionally and socially dislocated. Her romantic and sexual viability as well as the prospect of economic security in marriage seem to be extinguished.

As a man, Cavendish is never faced with the specter of spinsterhood due to aging, but only with a change in the quality of possible marital partners. The narrator describes the usual signs of “going off”—he has become "a great deal stouter, and altogether different from what he used to be” (382). Lucilla assesses this complete transformation in terms of unmarriageability: “it would be impossible to say what mists of illusion dropped away from her mind at the sight of him. Even while she smiled upon . . . [him] . . . she could not but ask herself, with momentary dismay—Had she really gone off as much in the same time?” (382). Cavendish’s thoughts about his aging, however, seem
cursory: "To be sure he knew that he was . . . older, and that there were several things which he could not do with the same facility as in his youth" (391). He seems only slightly concerned about his state, and his reasons for leaving Carlingford have nothing to do with shame over aging or loss of marriageability, as do Barbara's.

Though Cavendish is no longer suitable for Lucilla after he "goes off," his marriageability is not portrayed as utterly lost. Even Lucilla comments to him of his "going off," that "[i]t doesn't matter with a gentleman" (382). Barbara Lake still desires him and resists the metaphor of falling as she thinks about him: "She did not even remark that he had grown stout. He was not a man fallen, fallen, fallen from his high estate, to Barbara . . . Mr. Cavendish was still a great man in her eyes" (444). When Cavendish asks her if she finds him changed, she replies with downcast eyes, "I don't see any difference" (445). Of course, like Lucilla she does see how much he has aged, but she is willing to pretend otherwise.

The novel implies, without specifically stating it, that Barbara and Cavendish do eventually marry, and their union is presented as a downfall for Cavendish but not for Barbara. After he loses a political race,

the feet of the defeated candidate carried him ere ever he was aware . . . to Mr. Lake's door—and it may be here said, once for all, that this visit was decisive of Mr. Cavendish's fate . . . That was what he came to, poor man! . . . a man who, if he had made a right use of his opportunities, might once have had as good a chance as any other of marrying Lucilla herself. If there ever was an instance of chances thrown away and lost opportunities,
surely here was that lamentable example. And thus, poor man?! all his
hopes and all his chances came to an end. (464)

Barbara is a bad catch by the end of the novel. Not only has she “gone off,” but she has
proven herself to be a mean-tempered woman who comports herself vulgarly. Cavendish
himself is no prize, either—he is dishonest and lazy, qualities which cause him to fail in
his attempt at a political career. Barbara, however, is depicted as the less desirable of the
two. Though both have “gone off,” Cavendish apparently can be more easily forgiven for
midlife aging than can Barbara, and he remains “a great man in her eyes” (444).

Fear of age as rotting and deterioration is the nexus that links marriage, midlife,
and moderation in the novel’s age system. Miss Marjoribanks makes clear that “going
off” can be prevented by the practice of moderation. Cavendish believes self-restraint to
be the reason that Lucilla remains youthful: “He was rather disposed . . . to take a moral
view, and to consider that it was her feminine incapacity for going too far, which had
kept years and amusements from having their due effect upon Miss Marjoribanks” (392).
This “incapacity” for immoderation is seen as inherent in Lucilla’s femininity, but, as I
have discussed in chapter one, nineteenth-century conduct and medical books emphasize
the importance of moderation for good health in both genders. Within the self-help
genre, moderation includes temperance in diet, exercise, sleep, study and intellectual
development, and emotions. The consequences of “going too far” in these areas are
wrinkles, gray hair, baldness, poor health, emotional ruin, moral debasement, early aging,
and premature death. Moderation in all things is presented as the key to health and
propriety.3 As Henry Simpson, M.D. cautions his readers in 1888, “the middle-aged.

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3 See chapter one for a fuller treatment of nineteenth-century ideas about moderation and aging.
must be content with moderation, and not try to cheat himself into the belief he enjoys perpetual youth” (132).

Moderation is a component of character because it requires the ability to be self-disciplined, but it is also a link to class. Lucilla is unquestionable genteel and represents the epitome of Carlingford society. Constantly employed with tasks befitting a lady—entertaining as a society leader, performing philanthropic services in the community, and aiding males in their political endeavors—her moderation consists not in lack of activity but in knowing which tasks are suitable and doing them well—an index to her good character. In contrast, Barbara does not busy herself with such tasks but concentrates instead on social climbing. Her character is called into question from the outset by her pride and jealousy toward Lucilla, even when Lucilla is the one who provides her with “a brief entrance into society” (432). She is seen as increasingly vulgar, to the point that near the end of the novel Cavendish compromises his political career just by visiting her. Although social status plays a role, Barbara’s vulgarity is ultimately not a question of class but character, as evidenced by the case of her sister Rose who is depicted as ladylike from the outset, and establishes that gentility is a matter of inner rather than outer circumstances. The “wear and tear” that has aged Barbara is linked to her fruitless striving and failure to find a suitable sphere.

The novel also shows that a person who has been aged out of the marriage market can be rejuvenated and actually reverse age as well as the status of marital viability. When the Rector presents the Widow Mortimer to Lucilla as a possible chaperone, Lucilla mocks the notion by casting her as a candidate for her widowed father’s hand in marriage. The widow is so self-deprecating, pale, and feeble that she obviously has been
aged out of the marriage plot by her trials. Lucilla decides to take responsibility for the dependent woman, and through her patronage Mrs. Mortimer is transformed:

She had grown younger by ten years during the period of comparative comfort and tranquility which Lucilla’s active help and championship had procured for her. Her house, and her garden, and her little scholars, and the bloom on her cheeks, and the filling-up of her worn frame, were all Miss Marjoribanks’s doing. (211)

Lucilla works this age reversal in her friend by using her knowledge and influence to procure a well-moderated life for Mrs. Mortimer, providing the right amount of congenial work as a teacher in pleasant surroundings, an appropriate endeavor for a widow. The changes this makes in Mrs. Mortimer’s appearance return her to marital viability. Lucilla discusses the marriage possibilities of her friend with her father, commenting: "In some lights she might pass for being no older than I am--if she was very well dressed, you know; and it really does not matter what age a woman is if she keeps her looks. I shall be glad to see her nicely married . . . ." (265). A woman’s perceived age, at least in this fictive world, may override her chronological age for purposes of the marriage market. This point is made conclusively when the widow Mortimer eventually marries one of Lucilla’s potential suitors.

Oliphant’s novel is concerned with midlife onset and marriageability and does not address the issue of “going off” after marriage. Of course, people continue to age whether married or single, so presumably both Lucilla and her protégé Mrs. Mortimer will eventually “go off” at some point after their marriages. By discussing the topic only in regard to the unmarried, the text implies that “going off” after one has entered the
sanctuary of matrimony is not important. Aging seems to become as irrelevant for women as it is for men once they have been purchased on the market.

A system of midlife aging with similar gender distinctions and a causal relationship between immoderation and “going off” can be found in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893). Though Gissing never uses the term “going off,” he employs a model similar to Oliphant’s when he depicts disparate results of aging in the Micklewaithes. *The Odd Women* is a “new woman” novel that champions women’s right to work, but conflates work with decline narratives of age for women and progress for men.

Fanny Wheatley and Thomas Micklewaithe are teachers of the same age who have been engaged for seventeen years. Because Thomas supports his mother and Fanny supports her blind sister, they cannot afford to marry. Thomas finds a new job with a higher salary when they are both past forty, and they finally make wedding plans. The years of hard work and delay have opposite effects on the bride and groom. Fanny is described on her wedding day in terms of how the ordeal has aged her:

at forty she was wrinkled, hollow-cheeked, sallow, indelible weariness stamped upon her brow and lips. She looked much older than Mary Barfoot, though they were just of an age. And all this for want of a little money. The life of a pure, gentle, tender-hearted woman worn away in hopeless longing and in hard struggle for daily bread. (139)

The text indicates that Fanny’s aging is due to immoderation—her work as a teacher as well as the stress cause by waiting for Thomas have been too much for her. When they turned thirty, he had offered to release her from the engagement, because his financial
prospects were still unstable. At this point, she would have been at the limit of marriageability and losing her last chance to find a more certain match, but Fanny chooses to wait for Thomas. Her work and her wait are presented as unnatural, a too-heavy burden of labor and self-denial for a woman. Fanny has sacrificed her youth and enters marriage as a scared and aged bride.

In his longevity text, *Aids to Long Life* (1885), Nathaniel Davies warns against just this kind of excess in regard to labor, arguing that overwork is not only among "the common causes of disease" but also is responsible for "premature decay and untimely death" (3). Helena Michie points out that in Victorian fiction upper class women's bodies are considered unfit for physical labor, and women's work outside the home is equated with prostitution, even when done by the working class (30-33). In light of this Victorian aversion to physical labor by women as well as the pervasive fear of immoderation, it is not surprising that premature aging for women should be equated with overwork and fatigue.

In contrast to this female loss narrative, Thomas experiences a middle age characterized by gain. The offer of a high paying job as a mathematics lecturer at a London college, much less taxing employment than his previous teaching, enables him to marry and also makes him younger. He tells his friend Everard Barfoot:

I am renewing my youth. Nay, for the first time I am youthful. I never had time for it before. At the age of sixteen I began to teach in a school, and ever since I have pegged away at it, school and private. Now luck has come to me, and I feel five-and-twenty. When I was really five-and-twenty, I felt forty. (101)
Just like the Widow Mortimer in *Miss Marjoribanks*, finding congenial work that is not too taxing reverses his aging. In fact, the prospect of marital consummation and a better job not only switches the aging process for Thomas but gives him a type of youthfulness he has never before experienced. Now the feeling of having “time” for being young overrides his perceptions of chronological age. Gender plays a major role in the difference between loss and gain, so that what is excessive and damaging to a woman may be moderate and healthy for a man.

**Men in Love: Affect and Age Perception**

A fictive situation that focuses on the marriageability of midlife males is found in plots of age discrepancy. Typically involving middle-aged men in love with younger women, the outcomes of these plots hinge on whether the man can be made to believe that he is still marriageable at his age, not the least feature of which is the question of his sexual ability. Erotic viability is a significant factor in the specifically male midlife marriage plot. Both male and female love plots of age feature some form of the verb “to go” as the terminology for midlife aging, discussed in terms of “going off” as in *Miss Marjoribanks*, or as whether the “time of love has gone by” in the novels by Dickens and Trollope examined later in this chapter. With its focus on time, this construction emphasizes the distance from a former period of marriageability and fertility, as well as a separation from an ideal, more youthful self. The concept of going away invokes a sense of nostalgia for the past as well as a sense of loss in the present and fear for the future. The going “away” or “off” characteristic of Victorian midlife age is a costly departure.

Consider the case of Edward Casaubon in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871-2). Perceived by Sir James Chettam to be a “dried up bookworm towards fifty” (13),
Casaubon has “iron gray hair” and the air of an elderly man. Dorothea Brooke, who is twenty-seven years younger than her late-forties suitor, agrees to marry Casaubon, and he is unaware of any inappropriateness in their disparate ages. Her would-be suitor Sir James, however, is horrified, exclaiming, “Good God! It is horrible! He is no better than a mummy” (38). This metaphor invokes the fear of sexual impotence due to age, and figures the consummation of such a union as grotesque, associating it with necrophilia.

Dorothea’s uncle and guardian, Mr. Brooke, sees the situation differently, however, and approves the match. Though he cautions his niece, “he is not young, and I must not conceal from you, my dear, that I think his health is not over-strong” (26), Brooke also acknowledges the qualities that make Casaubon suitable to be a groom. He is quite learned, the possessor of both a good income and “a handsome property,” which are enough to make him a suitable match for any young girl despite a lack of “strength” or sexual vigor. So, Sir James’s objections notwithstanding, Casaubon does marry Dorothea.

The novel’s age anxiety, voiced in Chettam’s fears, proves to be well founded, and the marriage is a disaster. Dorothea’s naïve belief in Casaubon’s sagacity crumbles in the light of experience as it becomes obvious that he is nothing but an empty pedant. His age, that had seemed to be a mantle of wisdom, ultimately makes him querulous and narrow. The short union, which ends in his death, yields no children, an implied confirmation of sexual inability.

Casaubon’s lack of awareness about age inappropriateness is an exception even within Middlemarch, and other fictive males, like James Chettam, are highly aware of the possibilities of failure in a union of age disparity. Usually plots concerning middle-aged
men and younger women center on the male’s excessive worry that he is too old for love.

When these fears prove to be true and a younger rival marries the woman in question, the narrative confirms that the middle-aged suitor has aged out of any possibility for romantic affect. Moderation is not the key to overcome age inability in these narratives as it is in *Miss Marjoribanks*. Instead, the determination as to whether a man is aged out of the marriage plot is not made from any action of the man himself, but from the acceptance or denial given by the woman who is his love object. In these cases, age is man-handled into a type of gain when the spurned lover learns to substitute paternal or avuncular affect for romance. An example is John Jarndyce, in late midlife in Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-3). Jarndyce fails to marry the much younger Esther Summerson when she chooses her age peer Allen Woodcourt. Jarndyce then becomes an avuncular figure.

Anthony Trollope creates a similar character in *The Way We Live Now*. In his early forties, Roger Carbury falls in love with the much younger Henrietta. He is full of misgivings and insecurity, however, and resolves that he has “let his time for love making go by, and now it behoved him, as a man, to take the world as he found it, and not to lose himself in regrets for a kind of happiness which he could never attain” (668). Despite these fears, Roger goes on to pursue Henrietta, but she eventually marries a younger man. Roger then places himself in a paternal position, telling her that she will be his daughter.

His curious statement, “I will hurry to grow old that I may feel for you as the old feel for the young” (712), implies that he has control over the aging process, highlighting his attempt to construct age. These words also display his uneasiness when the line between legitimate erotic relations and incest is hazy and reveal his efforts to make the
demarcation more easy to discern. As in the case of John Jarndyce, age is given the power to transform his sexual attraction to Hetta, sanitizing it into an asexual and benevolent affection of a father that shields him from feeling a more improper desire. When the midlife male is spurned, he concludes that he is past the age of sexual function and performs as a sexless paternal and avuncular figure. By dismissing his erotic desire and channeling it into avuncular affection, he constructs midlife as a time when male sexual function wanes, an issue I will further address under the rubric of male menopause in chapter four.

The tale of the midlife suitor is not always resolved by desire transformed into the paternal, however. When the midlife male’s intended partner decides to accept him, age is shown to be only an imaginary barrier to affect and sexuality produced by his anxiety. In Fanny Trollope’s *The Widow Barnaby* (1840), Colonel Montague Hubert, age thirty-five, agonizes over his attraction to Agnes Willoughby, who is not quite seventeen. When he learns how young she is, he is chagrined: “She might be my daughter,’ thought Colonel Hubert, while a shade of melancholy passed over his countenance” (170). His attraction to her continues despite his misgivings, and when she faces dire circumstances—left abandoned when her aunt is arrested for debt—he impulsively proposes to her. Acting upon her own insecurities, she initially rejects Hubert because she believes her situation makes her unworthy. Though she tells him she has refused because she will not allow him to “ally himself to disgrace,” he attributes her refusal to his age:

Had I been a younger man, the offer of my hand, my heart, my life, would not have appeared to you, as it doubtless does now,—the result of sober, staid benevolence, desirous of preserving youthful innocence from unmerited
sorrow... Such must my love seem... So let it seem;... but it shall never
cost one hour's pain to you... even so; let me not be here in vain: listen to
me as a friend and father. (301)

Taking the same course as Jarndyce and Carbury, he assumes a paternal role and
desexualizes himself. However, when Agnes's fortunes change, she feels worthy of
Hubert's love, and opens herself to his attention. When he again proposes, she accepts
and the desexualized fatherly stance is reversed by her desire. Age anxiety continues to
be an issue, however, when he worries because he is "so much older."

Ultimately, Agnes invokes affect to resolve conclusively his age anxiety: she
replies, "if I love you, and you love me, I cannot see how your age or mine either need
interfere to prevent it" (392). After the wedding, the narrator comments that Hubert
"never again felt any alarm on the score of his age, but had the happiness of knowing that
he was loved with all the devoted tenderness that his heart desired" (400). The initial
psychological position of age as loss assumed by the male suitor is resolved when the
female accepts him. Love overrides the age difference when affect is privileged over
chronology. A reference to the son born to Hubert and Agnes, Compton Hubert Compton
(400), settles any lingering doubt about midlife male sexuality, proving his fears of age-
induced impotence to be unfounded.

In Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, we find a similar case. Arthur Clennam, in his early
forties, falls in love with Minnie "Pet" Meagles who is "about twenty" (54-5). He tells
himself that he is twice her age, but reasons, "He was young in appearance, young in
health and strength, young in heart. A man was certainly not old at forty; and many men
were not in circumstances to marry, or did not marry, until they had attained that time of
life” (239). But Arthur’s initial confidence in his marital viability is shaken when Pet becomes engaged to and then marries Mr. Gowan. This sets off a storm of age anxiety, and Arthur begins to see himself as a different kind of person due to age: “from that time he became in his own eyes, as to any similar hope or prospect, a very much older man who had done with that part of life” (383). He castigates himself for falling in love, believing that age has made him unfit:

forgetting how grave I was, and how old I was, and how the time for such had gone by me with the many years of sameness and little happiness that made up my long life far away, with marking it—that, forgetting all this, I fancied I loved some one . . . I found out my mistake, and I thought about it a little—in short, a good deal—and got wiser. Being wiser, I counted up my years and considered what I am, and looked back, and looked forward, and found that I should soon be grey. I found that I had climbed the hill, and passed the level ground upon the top, and was descending quickly . . . I found that the day when any such thing would have been graceful in me, or good in me, or hopeful or happy for me or any one in connection with me, was gone, and would never shine again. (432)

Arthur intreprets his attraction for the younger woman in moral terms and his words have a tone of confession, serving as an act of repentance for a misdeed. The final sentence of the passage goes so far as to equate his desire with immorality—while lack of “grace” can be read as a breach of manners, lack of “goodness” refers to a moral failing. By concluding that he is shut out from anything that is “hopeful” or “happy,” he decisively
casts his future in terms of decline—a construction of reality which he considers to be "wise."

The outpouring of age anxiety above is spoken to Little Dorrit, a young woman of twenty-two (93), toward whom the now love-shy Arthur sedulously adopts a paternal attitude, considering her "his innocent friend, his delicate child" and regarding himself "as a much older man than his years really made him" (573). So firmly does he keep the paternal role in place, that when he is told Little Dorrit is in love with him, he is bewildered:

Think of the improbability. He had been accustomed to call her his child, and his dear child, and to invite her confidence by dwelling upon the difference in their respective ages, and to speak of himself as one who was turning old. Yet she might not have thought him old. Something reminded him that he had not thought himself so, until the roses had floated away upon the river [i.e., Pet had loved another]. (798)

He has convinced himself "that he must regard such youthful hopes as having passed by; that he must be steady in saying to himself that the time had gone by him, and he was too saddened and old" (799).

Though Arthur has barricaded himself against desire by his avuncular position and his decision to age himself psychologically out of the marriage plot, when he experiences Little Dorrit's desire for him, he quickly and easily abandons the desexualization. His concept of her as a child suddenly shifts, and he sees her as a woman. Arthur is transformed from a shrinking, self-critical case of age anxiety to a confident husband as the book concludes with his modest wedding. With a reference to
the children of that marriage in its final paragraph, the text decrees Arthur’s conclusion that “the time for such had gone by” to be false, and the middle-aged suitor is valorized in what is ultimately a gain narrative of midlife affect and sexuality. The initial anxiety brought about by age disparity between a midlife man and a younger woman is dissipated by her decision to accept a midlife suitor and his easy acquiescence to the role of resexualized male.

These plots of male age anxiety contain a disidentification and then a subsequent reindentification with a body and perceived self located somewhere along an age continuum determinative of one’s possibilities. In the following section, I will examine a similar type of distancing and reidentifying with an age-dependent self-image for women that occurs in mirror scenes of novels by Anthony Trollope.

**Women in the Mirror: Constructing the Aging Self**

The realization that one is no longer “young,” the shock of seeing the signs of age on one’s own face and body, are heralded as a hallmark of middle age by many age theorists. Sociologists Mike Hepworth and Mike Featherstone see this as the point of midlife onset: “There are many ways of defining middle age but the best, because it applies to us all, is the time when it is first brought home to us that we are growing older” (14). Kathleen Woodward notes that this sense of aging often begins a dissociation between the inner and outer self: “As we age we increasingly separate ourselves—what we take to be our real selves—from our bodies. We believe our real selves, that is our youthful selves, are hidden inside our bodies, not commensurate with them. Our bodies are old, we are not” (55). Midlife onset may even be experienced as a transformation into an entirely different person.
The age system underlying Victorian novels links midlife aging with a new identity.\(^4\) In Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley* (1849), Mrs. Pryor sees herself as completely altered by the time she has reached middle age. She describes her appearance twenty years earlier: “then I was very different to what I am now—slender, almost as slender as my daughter is at this day: my complexion—my very features are changed; my hair, my style of dress—everything is altered” (438). While Mrs. Pryor concentrates on a sense of becoming a different person in a physical sense, the narrator of *Miss Marjoribanks* suggests a more complete transformation in the case of Lucilla Marjoribanks’s mother in midlife, a woman who becomes more and more “faded and helpless” until she finally disappears: “[a]s for the pretty creature whom Dr. Marjoribanks had married, she had vanished into thin air years and years ago” (28). Age, exacerbated by the effects of illness, seems to remake Mrs. Marjoribanks so completely that the younger individual is entirely erased.

Fictive moments of individual age consciousness and resultant identity shifts appear in mirror scenes where aging is self-constructed through reflection in a double sense. A character gazes at his or her own outer image in the mirror’s surface and reflects upon the reflection, in a simultaneously inner and outer process of age assessment and construction. As Woodward points out, mirrors are commonly used to register fictional age consciousness: “It is not surprising that the image of the mirror should dominate literary representations of the aged body. The horror of the mirror image of the decrepit body is the inverse of the pleasures of the mirror image of the youthful

\(^4\)Of course, fictive age introspection predates the nineteenth-century novel. For example, Moll Flanders registers such an identity estrangement in Defoe’s eighteenth-century novel, as she says at age 42: “I was not now the same woman as when I lived at Rotherhithe; for first of all, I was near twenty years older, and did not look the better for my age nor for my rambles to Virginia and back again; . . . there would always be
Narcissus” (55). A crucial and ubiquitous tool of self-evaluation, the mirror seems to be a truthful and sometimes cruel aging informant, but the way in which the beholder interprets the image is what really determines how he or she experiences age.

In her discussion of the dissociation between the aging self and the sense of a more “true” self within, Kathleen Woodward theorizes the mirror’s role in psychological experiences of age. Woodward posits a “mirror stage of old age” as an inversion of Lacan’s infant mirror stage. In the latter, the infant contrasts the disaggregated experience of self with a mirror image of harmonious wholeness, this distancing creating the basis for human identity and a sense of “I.” In Woodward’s mirror stage, the elderly adult separates the inner self from the image in the mirror but with the terms reversed: “the harmonious whole resides within the subject and the imago prefigures disintegration” (60). The aging person sees the image in the mirror as something other than the “true self” and resists it, which, Woodward points out, is a healthy impulse because to embrace age is ultimately to embrace death. This creates a double bind, however—rejecting the aged image in the mirror causes one to judge the elderly as inferior and ultimately to reject one’s own aging self, capitulation to the most radical sort of decline narrative.

The importance of the mirror in psychological aspects of aging is not restricted, however, to the beginning and end of life, as in Lacan’s and Woodward’s mirror stages. Rejection of the aged imago is reached through years of scrutinizing gradual changes, challenging and negotiating their relevance and meaning to the self. Identification with and

some difference seen between five-and-twenty and two-and-forty” (113-4). This is especially important for Moll, because she forthrightly uses her body to obtain men.
against the specular self is a function of age anxiety characteristic of middle age. A mirror stage of midlife aging would differ from both the infant and old age stages. In midlife, characters search for signs of age to respond against, signs which exist only partially. A midlife mirror stage would have a large component of anxiety, because the idea that these are only early signs, that age will exacerbate, is fundamental to recognition of midlife aging. The signs of age seen in the mirror at this time of life are only the thin end of the aging wedge which will threaten and ultimately overcome the current sense of identity. Of course, age markers exist to greater or lesser degrees in individuals, but whether these signs are accepted, denied, under-read, or over-read depends upon individual interpretation and response.

Because midlife is a stage positioned between others, within it resides a wide latitude for interpretation. As a character searches for age's signs, he or she distances the self from the body, looking with the eyes of culture and perhaps an imagined or potential lover. The interpretation of the image one sees and the response to that image create a reidentification with a self perceived through age consciousness. As characters in novels disidentify with their mirrored images and then reidentify with a relative age that seems valid, their construction often is not linked in a consistent way with chronological age, but is almost entirely dependent upon the thinker's self construction.

Fictive mirror scenes involving middle-aged characters reveal these intensely personal psychological processes of self-aging. Mirror scenes in three of Anthony Trollope's novels feature women who are well aware that age is not merely a physical fact, but a culturally scripted category of being. In Miss Mackenzie (1865), Phineas Redux

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5 Hepworth and Featherstone emphasize the mirror's importance to the human psyche in regard to aging, commenting that though "[a] detailed history of the evolution of the mirror is still to be written..."
(1874), and *The Way We Live Now* (1875), Margaret Mackenzie, Lady Laura Kennedy, and Lady Carbury calibrate disparities between chronology and physical appearance, exhibiting a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which women are aged in and out of Victorian marriage plots. Each woman is caught in a specular moment in which she dissociates from her body, reading the signs of age and then reidentifying her sense of self and the possibility of future happiness in accordance with how she interprets the reflected image. Whether she imagines herself into a progress or decline narrative seems to be largely determined by each woman's individual psychological relationship with her image in the mirror, and therefore, with her own aging body.

In *Phineas Redux*, the second book in Trollope's Phineas series, Lady Laura Kennedy is in love with Phineas Finn. Though she had been the object of his romantic attachment in the first Phineas book, she married Robert Kennedy and was later separated from him because of incompatibilities. In *Phineas Redux*, Kennedy dies and Lady Laura becomes a widow in her early thirties. She wishes Phineas to renew his intentions of marriage, but her experience of marital discord and separation have aged her. At thirty-two years old, she considers her future prospects with Phineas:

> Could it be that she was entitled to hope that the sun might rise again for her once more and another day be reopened for her with a gorgeous morning? She was now rich and still young,--or young enough. She was two and thirty, and had known many women . . . who had commenced the world successfully at that age . . . She gazed at herself in the glass, putting aside for the moment the hideous widow's cap which she now wore . . .

Though she was young in years her features were hard and worn with care

one can deny its central role in human affairs” (10).
... she now lacked that roundness of youth which had been hers when first she knew Phineas Finn. She sat opposite the mirror, and pored over her own features with an almost skilful scrutiny, and told herself at last aloud that she had become an old woman. He was in the prime of life; but for her was left nothing but its dregs. (2.271-2)

When Lady Laura first distances and disidentifies herself from her body, she thinks about how young she is in years. She then acquiesces to a determinist model that decrees a fixed law, and she chooses to believe that she has been transformed by age alchemy and is barred from romantic affect. Having internalized this law, she reidentifies herself with a body now perceived as “old,” as Other. Her loss of self-esteem is a self-inflicted punishment predictive of a decline narrative even though she is and knows herself to be relatively young in chronological terms.

When Lady Laura accepts deterioration as her identity, she begins to act the part. Though she is the same age as Phineas, she performs the role of his elder: “she took upon herself the tone and manners of an elder sister,--of a sister very much older than her brother” (1.108). Even before she is widowed, Phineas comes to see her in this way, and their former relationship seems distant:

The thing was so long ago that she was to him as some aunt, or sister, so much the elder as to be almost venerable... He owed her a never-dying gratitude. But were she free to marry again to-morrow, he know that he could not marry her. She herself had said the same thing. She had said that she would be his sister. (1.176)
Because of her perceived age, she dismisses herself from any possibility of romantic affect, as does Phineas.

Lady Laura’s premature aging in *Phineas Redux* contrasts with the extended youthfulness of Madame Max Goesler. Although Trollope does not present Madam Max in a mirror scene, her anxiety about aging and response to it provide a useful contrast to Lady Laura’s decline narrative. The novel seems to reign-in midlife female sexuality with Lady Laura’s loss of erotic viability, but Madame Max’s plot reintroduces it. She has devoted three years of her life to acting as companion to the ailing and elderly Duke of Omnium, and after his death she experiences age anxiety in regard to her chances of marriage: “She told herself . . . that the time had now gone by, and that in losing these three years she had lost everything” (1.266). Again, the “to go” verb invokes both the sense that she is distant from a younger self and a more ideal time. Like Lady Laura, Madame Max fears that she has run out of time on the marriage market even though she is only thirty-two.

Madame Max, however, escapes the sequestration of female sexuality at midlife that operates for Lady Laura. Though she worries about time running out, she does not internalize an image of herself as aged or perform herself as “old.” She also takes action by fighting for Phineas, providing evidence that frees him from unjust incarceration when he has been wrongly accused of murder. As I discuss at greater length in chapter three, the text works not only to make her appear youthful, but actually subtracts years from her age. This attempt to tame the midlife Madame Max, making her more consistent with traditional paradigms of youthful beauty, betrays the novel’s age anxiety as it attempts to contain women of a certain age. Her eventual marriage to Phineas as his equal contrasts
with Lady Laura’s end as a lonely, bitter woman and establishes the power of female midlife sexuality. *Phineas Redux*’s differing middle-aged marriage plots—one that figures midlife as loss and one as gain—show outcomes seemingly determined by the individual’s psychological stance toward aging.

The case of Margaret Mackenzie, protagonist of *Miss Mackenzie*, shows how pliable midlife can be on the complex borders between spinsterhood and marriageability. At the time of her mirror scene, Margaret is three years older than Lady Laura, but she does not think herself into a decline narrative. In fact, she thrives in a midlife marriage plot, despite Trollope’s original intentions for her. He writes in his *Autobiography*:

> Miss Mackenzie was written with a desire to prove that a novel may be produced without any love; but even in this attempt it breaks down before the conclusion. In order that I might be strong in my purpose, I took for my heroine a very unattractive old maid, who was overwhelmed with money troubles; but even she was in love before the end of the book, and made a romantic marriage with an old man. (122-3)

Trollope discovered while writing *Miss Mackenzie*, that “unattractive old maid” is a fluid category ripe for revision. As I will show, Margaret escapes the stereotype and proves herself to be a suitable romantic object. Even more important, though, is how malleable the descriptor “unattractive” becomes when linked to the word “old.” The definition of both terms and the relationship between them are demonstrated to be highly tenuous when the “old maid” finally transforms the author’s initial intentions and creates a progress narrative for herself.
When she is twenty-five, Margaret refuses an offer of marriage from Harry Handcock because her older brother needs her to nurse him, and for the next eleven years she has no more suitors. When she is thirty-six, however, Margaret’s brother dies, and she inherits his fortune. After becoming an heiress, Margaret suddenly has several suitors and four offers of marriage. The novel registers the subtle consequences of age on Margaret as she deals with her new fortune, and it shows that while spinsterhood can be reversed by money, age remains an important factor that can limit marriageability.

The text makes clear at the novel’s beginning that at thirty-six Margaret Mackenzie is considered to be a spinster. Her sister-in-law calls her an “old maid” (11), as does Trollope himself in the passage above. But the text also shows that while Margaret is able to be unspinstered by her new fortune, her youthful appearance helps to make this possible. The novel upholds a theory of ripening with age—Margaret has lost no physical charms in her spinsterhood, but instead has improved—“[s]he was a woman who at thirty-five had more of the graces of womanhood than belonged to her at twenty” (8). Margaret herself is aware that this is true: “she had looked at her glass and had perceived that years had improved her” (13).

_Miss Mackenzie_ does show that women can be put back in the running for marriage after age thirty when the bitter taste of age is sweetened by the honey of financial consolation. But, while the human propensity for greed might suggest that money will always trump age in a marital contest, the narrator makes it clear early on that age can still impose limitations:

Margaret . . . had been a nurse in . . . [her father’s and brother’s] houses, and nothing more than a nurse. Had this gone on for another ten years she would
have lived down the ambition of any more exciting career, and would have been satisfied, had she then come into the possession of the money which was now hers, to have ended her days nursing herself—or more probably ... gone to the house of her brother and have expended herself in nursing her nephews and nieces. But luckily for her—or unluckily, as it may be--this money had come to her before her time for withering had arrived. In heart, and energy, and desire, there was still much of strength left to her. Indeed it may be said of her, that she had come so late in life to whatever of ripeness was to be vouchsafed to her ... All this is mentioned to show that at the age of thirty-six Margaret Mackenzie was still a young woman. (26)

This passage demonstrates the relativity of both chronological age and spinsterhood. The highly individual nature of aging out of marriageability is exposed: by drawing explicit attention to the fact that Margaret is “still a young woman” at thirty-six, the text implies that other women may not be. The label “young” is therefore highly variable and perhaps even negotiable dependent upon the observer and context. Lady Laura in the Phineas books has reached the “withering” stage at thirty-two while Madame Max has not, and in Miss Mackenzie, Margaret will not be at risk until she is in her forties.

The notion of ripeness here is an apex ideology, with the inherent implication that a person who is “ripe” today will eventually become over-ripe. That Margaret’s apex is later than usual at age thirty-six shows the fluidity of age construction, but also underscores that women are especially at risk for aging. Ripeness is associated with both ambition and fertility—the desire to have a husband, children, and household of one’s own—is referred to as a woman’s “career.” “Withering,” in contrast, makes the unmarried woman into a
different kind of being, inaugurating an era of either solipsistic separation or substitute nurturing of other people's children. In addition to this emotional component, the term implies a physical decline that includes loss of sexual attractiveness and libido in midlife women.

Margaret's mirror scene shows the complex negotiations between culturally-dependent age markers, concepts of marriageability, and self determination:

she got up and looked at herself in the mirror. She moved up her hair from off her ears, knowing where she would find a few that were grey, and shaking her head, as though owning to herself that she was old; but as her fingers ran almost involuntarily across her locks, her touch told her that they were soft and silken; and she looked into her own eyes and saw that they were bright; and her hand touched the outline of her cheek, and she knew that something of the fresh bloom of youth was still there; and her lips parted, and there were her white teeth; and there came a smile and a dimple, and a slight purpose of laughter in her eye, and then a tear. She pulled her scarf tighter across her bosom, feeling her own form, and then she leaned forward and kissed herself in the glass. (110-1)

Margaret is not depicted as the virginal young woman who shyly blushes at the thought of her sexuality, even though she is undoubtedly a virgin at this point in the text. As she inventories her body, the cascading rhythm of the text, with its clauses linked by the repeated "and," seems to propel her irresistibly forward as her own sensuality is revealed in the mirror. Margaret becomes a woman who frankly assesses her own physical attractions based on experience—even if it is her own experience of looking at and
touching her body. As she flirts with her image and feels the shape of her breasts, Trollope provides a celebratory moment in which she revels in her sexuality, a type of self-exploration and autoerotic pleasure he never allows his younger protagonists. Margaret is, however, six years past the portentous thirtieth birthday, so she initially distances herself from her body as she peers in the mirror, reading the markers that say she is “old.” Her self-perceived erotic power allows her to reject that construction, however, and she reidentifies with her body as physically desirable and still youthful. She reads this body as an advantage, even a tool, that will make her a contender on the marriage market now that she has money.

Margaret’s thoughts in her self-congratulatory mirror scene are not the final word on her age consciousness, however. A short time later she reconsiders the confidence she felt while looking in the mirror:

Who was she, that she should be allowed to be in love? Was she not an old maid by prescription, and, as it were, by the force of ordained circumstances? Had it not been made very clear to her when she was young that she had no right to fall in love, even with Harry Handcock? And although in certain moments of ecstasy, as when she kissed herself in the glass, she almost taught herself to think that feminine charms and feminine privileges had not been all denied to her, such was not her permanent opinion of herself. She despised herself. Why, she knew not; and probably did not know that she did so. But, in truth, she despised herself, thinking herself to be too mean for a man’s love. (137-8)
Margaret’s view of herself as “mean,”—lacking, lowly, common—is an insecurity based on her knowledge that she fits the “prescription” for unmarriageability. That she had “almost taught herself” that she was attractive shows that self-determination is not quite powerful enough to overcome the hegemony of well-known age paradigms. With her outward change in status from spinster to marriageable woman, she must negotiate an inner transformation from asexual single woman to one who is sexually and matrimonially desired and pursued, yet with the knowledge that the transformation is brought about by money. She had reconciled herself to spinsterhood by developing a belief in an almost vocational calling to singleness, and she even goes so far as to use the word “ordained,” suggesting a God-given mandate for her spinsterhood. Despite her autoerotic moments, she thinks of herself as a different kind of woman from those who have feminine charms, and spinsterhood becomes only a public acknowledgement of what she has known herself to be all along, a romantically untenable figure. To reverse that self-judgment and see herself as desirable, Margaret must struggle with the image of dependency and lack she has internalized while considered a spinster.

Reinforcement for Margaret’s belief in her romantic inappropriateness is provided by Mrs. Stumfold, an interfering neighbor. Mrs. Stumfold warns Margaret away from being courted by Mr. Maguire who, she claims, is engaged to another woman. The busybody bases her case against Margaret on the concept that after thirty a woman is affectively unsuitable. With an intentionally offensive emphasis on age, she describes the putative fiancée of Mr. Maguire:

“Another young lady,”—with an emphasis on the world young—“whom he first met at my house, who was introduced to him by me—a young lady not
above thirty years of age, and quite suitable in every way to be Mr. Maguire’s wife. She may not have quite so much money as you; but she has a fair provision, and money is not everything; a lady in every way suitable.”

(157)

Mrs. Stumfold believes that age should be a more potent determiner of marital suitability than a fortune, and Margaret’s response to this attack shows how deeply entrenched is her internalization of spinsterhood. Though she is furious and ushers Mrs. Stumfold out of her house, the humiliated Margaret cries in private and thinks: “to have been called old and unsuitable—for that was, in truth, the case . . . was not all this enough to make her cry?”

(158-9). Margaret has a divided consciousness, believing that her youthfulness and fortune make her marriageable, while also thinking that compared to a woman who is not yet thirty, she is unsuitable as a love object. The acquisition of a modest fortune at a few years over the magic boundary of the thirtieth year does not always guarantee a reversal of spinsterhood.

Margaret does marry, however. She is courted by her cousin John Ball, ten years her elder, whose suit for her hand is initially based on his desire for her fortune. Though eventually John is proven to be the true heir of the money who can possess the fortune without having also to take the woman, he continues to pursue Margaret. He offers to split the inheritance with her, putting an independent life in her power, but she has overcome her internalized self hatred and believes herself to be a sexually and maritally viable woman, so she decides to marry him.

Margaret’s vision of herself before the mirror as a suitable love object triumphs over her internalization of spinsterish inadequacy. That Sir John marries her without the money
is a plot twist prioritizing affect over pecuniary considerations and allowing the early-midlife "old maid," despite her age, to become un-spinstered for love instead of money. As in the case of Madame Max, the early midlife woman overcomes her age anxiety and marries, despite the author's and text's initial plans for her.

In *The Way We Live Now* we find an older midlife woman who is much less sure of her charms than Margaret Mackenzie. Lady Carbury is a widow who earns a living as a writer. At the beginning of the novel, like so many other Victorian midlife characters, she resolves that "The time for love had gone by, and she would have nothing to do with it" (12). Instead of marriage, she decides she will concern herself with her career and the fortunes of her children. She is forty-three as she stands before her mirror and examines her face for signs of aging:

As she sat opposite to her glass, relieving her head from its garniture of false hair, she acknowledged to herself that age was coming on her. She could hide the unwelcome approach by art,—hide it more completely than can most women of her age; but, there it was, stealing on her with short grey hairs over her ears and around her temples, with little wrinkles round her eyes easily concealed by objectionable cosmetics, and a look of weariness round the mouth which could only be removed by that self-assertion of herself which practice had made always possible to her in company, though it now so frequently deserted her when she was alone. But she was not a woman to be unhappy because she was growing old. Her happiness, like that of most of us, was ever in the future,—never reached but always coming. She, however, had not looked for happiness
to love and loveliness, and need not therefore be disappointed on that score. She had never really determined what it was that might make her happy,—having some hazy aspiration after social distinction and literary fame, in which was ever commingled solicitude respecting money. But at the present moment her great fears and her great hopes were centred on her son. (89)

By acknowledging to herself that she is growing older, but still performing youthfulness in front of others, Lady Carbury shows her awareness of how constructed a category age is, a knowledge she uses to her advantage. She is already practicing age engineering, hiding age’s marks through the artificial methods of makeup and hair pieces. When she refers to cosmetics as “objectionable,” the text is unclear as to who is doing the objecting—Lady Carbury or society. The implication is, however, that she does not enjoy using artificial means but finds them a necessity. In addition to this practice, she believes she can employ discipline to override the “look of weariness round the mouth,” yet she still finds the advance of age inexorable. Lady Carbury dissociates herself and her chances of future satisfaction from the signs of age on her face, but this seeming independence from an aging female body rests on her resistance to the marriage plot, an undertaking doomed to failure in a Trollope novel.

In the beginning of the book, the narrator does not quite approve of Lady Carbury’s “hazy aspirations,” and her literary career is tainted from the first chapter with a description of her machinations to achieve publication based on political string pulling instead of literary excellence. As Helena Michie points out, her aspirations to work make her suspect anyway, and would “necessarily remove her from the moral purity of
her daughter and other leisure-class Trollope heroines" (33). Her hopes for her son are also obviously misplaced. The novel gives her only marginal literary success, and she is gravely disappointed in her son.

The trajectory of the story line is changed when Lady Carbury allows herself to entertain the idea of marriage, and her plot is not easy to categorize as either midlife loss and gain, because it partakes of both. Plot resolution is brought about as her circumstances change and she looks differently at her suitor, Broune. At the beginning of the novel, when she and Broune are friends on equal footing and he proposes to her, she turns down his offer of marriage because she conceives of herself as an independent woman. Later, however, when she has lost all her money and her son is involved in a scandal, Broune begins to take over her affairs, and she sees him as masterful, even omnipotent. When, at the book's end, Broune tells her she should not write novels anymore, she gives up her career. Her son is exiled to Germany to avoid his tarnished reputation and her daughter prepares to marry, and Lady Carbury's life seems barren.

As Broune proposes for a second time, her dependent state is evident when she kneels at his feet to accept him and claims she has nothing to offer. The text opines, "Was it not a career enough for any woman to be the wife of such a man, to receive his friends, and to shine with his reflected glory?" (759). Lady Carbury has gone from self determination to accepting an identity as the reflection of her husband. He has all the money, the status, the career, the ideas, and she comes stripped of those things she has schemed after, achieving them only at second hand. When she releases herself to subordination, the book writes her into a marriage plot, but the union is based on her
dependency and, though ostensibly a happy ending, has overtones of a female decline narrative.

The text attempts to palliate midlife age anxiety, however, in two ways. First, all along Browne has dismissed the relevance of Lady Carbury's physical aging and privileges her inner youthfulness. In the first proposal scene, he tells her, "you also are not as young as you once were. But you keep the beauty of your youth, and the energy, and something of the freshness of a young heart" (235). Second, and more importantly, the novel attempts to defend the middle-aged body as appropriate for romance and passion, denying that midlife disqualifies one from marriageability and, more specifically, sexuality. Mixed with the subordination of Lady Carbury to Browne's masculine mastery is a putative valorization of midlife passion:

Then he drew her towards him and in a moment she was kneeling at his feet, with her face buried on his knees. Considering their ages perhaps we must say that their attitude was awkward. They would certainly have thought so themselves had they imagined that any one could have seen them. But how many absurdities of the kind are not only held to be pleasant, but almost holy,—as long as they remain mysteries inspected by no profane eyes! It is not that Age is ashamed of feeling passion and acknowledging it,—but that the display of it is without the graces of which Youth is proud, and which Age regrets. (759)

The text does not present this passage as a straight love scene—made clear by the necessity of the words "considering their ages"—but seems compelled to qualify the moment in terms of age. The description of the embrace as "awkward," "absurd," and "lacking grace,"
because of their ages (Lady Carbury is forty-three and Broune is fifty) shows the book’s uneasiness with midlife sexuality and even suggests a grotesquerie about the situation. The narrator does override these descriptors with the more positive “pleasant” and then the almost hyperbolic “holy,” while the scene fades to black with the word “mysterious” and the injunction against “profane eyes.” By spiritualizing later midlife, Trollope attempts to rescue it from the grotesque, though his final accusation that age “regrets” its loss of “graces” and therefore is loath to display its courtship rituals, seems to ultimately denigrate midlife sexuality. Yet, the novel does champion midlife affect and eroticism by attributing “passion” to the couple. A more positive reading would argue that what the middle-aged body loses in youthful beauty it gains in the inner qualities of youth and freshness that Broune finds in his mate, as well as by the spiritual dimension assigned to midlife passion.

In the cases of Madame Max, Margaret Mackenzie, and Lady Carbury, an initial intent by Trollope to keep midlife women out of the marriage plot is overturned. This is a testimony not only to the power of the marriage plot itself, but also to the uncontainable nature of midlife in his fictive women. In contrast to these three examples of midlife progress, Lady Laura remains within the confines of decline, scripting herself into middle age as loss and debility while she is still quite young. Psychological orientation toward aging is shown, in these cases, to be a powerful predictor of marital outcome as well as a significant determinant of whether midlife is constructed as loss or gain.

Of these three plots, Margaret Mackenzie’s is the most nostalgic, preserving marriage as the uncomplicated solution to happiness, looking for little or no revision of the Victorian paradigm. Lady Laura’s story is one of self-inflicted punishment for the sin of experience and the marks of age. Lady Carbury’s tale is the most experimental,
because she attempts to claim new ground for nineteenth-century women, initially resisting romance and beauty as the sole avenues to female wholeness. When she rejects the marks of age on her body as her only cultural capital, she looks toward the twentieth century and works with the idea of a new female imago. But, in the final analysis, she is not the most enlightened of the three protagonists. Margaret Mackenzie’s moment of autoerotic celebration is perhaps the most liberatory impulse, and her hard-won self-confidence finally enables her to have a marriage that she goes to self-assertively with high hopes. She makes far fewer sacrifices of dignity and self-esteem than do Lady Laura and Lady Carbury.

The preceding narratives provide but a few examples of age anxiety connected to midlife marriage in Victorian texts. Such plots establish and modify chronological borders of marriageability, inflect them with individual issues of physical aging, and demonstrate the tremendous difference made by gender and by individual attitudes toward aging. The interplay of physical and psychological factors shows that midlife is not portrayed in Victorian fiction as a rigid and unchanging construct, but is constantly being questioned and modified. Women are depicted as having a surprising amount of agency as a result of how they register and interpret aging, perhaps because they are so much more constrained by its dangers. While age anxiety appears to be resolved in gain narratives such as those of Madame Max or Arthur Clennam, its influence for decline is manifested in loss narratives like those of Lady Laura or Roger Carbury. Ultimately, the tensions between these ideologies are upheld instead of resolved, keeping midlife in its protean position, under construction.
In the next chapter I will consider middle-aged women on the marriage market in the guise of the remarrying widow. Though made fun of as voracious husband-hunting flirts, they achieve a surprising amount of freedom and self-determination in the particular instances I explore.
Chapter Three

Marriageable at Midlife: The Remarrying Widows of

Frances Trollope and Anthony Trollope

In 1863, Frances Trollope was eighty-four and living in Florence with her son Thomas. The author of forty-one novels, she had long since ceased writing and had even been senile for two years. Back home in England, her son Anthony was producing his fifteenth novel, Can You Forgive Her?, but he took a hiatus in September in order to accompany his oldest son, Harry, to Florence for tutoring. On that journey, Anthony made what would be his last visit to his mother. She died on October 6, after he had returned to England (Hall 257). He resumed work on the novel several days after her death.

The relationship of literary influence between Frances Trollope and her son Anthony is curiously highlighted in his work at the time she died. Perhaps the most popular of her characters was the scampish heroine of The Widow Barnaby (1839), a middle-aged women scheming to remarry. Her antics challenge stereotypes of female dependency even as they entertain, and the novel was so successful it was followed by two sequels, The Widow Married (1840) and The Barnabys in America (1843). At the time of Frances Trollope's death, Anthony was producing Arabella Greenow, a figure initially so similar to the Widow Barnaby that she is a virtual rewriting. However, the break in composition of Can You Forgive Her? caused by Anthony’s travels occurs at the end of chapter ten, just after the flirtatious Arabella’s beach picnic, and when her story
resumes in chapter fourteen, she has undergone fundamental change, transformed from an amusing flirt like Martha to a woman valorized in a serious plot of midlife affect.¹

Though we can only speculate about the psychological impact of Frances’s death on Anthony, we can see a clear change in the direction of his work at the time in what must have been an unconscious appropriation of her character into his novel. After Fanny’s life ended, his version of the remarrying widow took on a form of its own, less akin to her satiric style. Her death seems to have led him away from her transgressive feminism expressed in comedy to a more gradualist version portrayed in a romance plot. As I will demonstrate, the correspondences between Martha and Arabella are so numerous, it is hard to believe that Anthony did not realize he was rewriting a character first created by his mother. He does not mention the matter when discussing Arabella in his autobiography, though he does claim that he never knowingly adopted the work of any other author.² Anthony would have been familiar with The Widow Barnaby—he comments that Frances’s “best novels” were written in the 1830s (Autobiography 25), which indicates that he both read and approved of at least the first widow novel, and The Widow Barnaby was lucrative, helping to save the floundering fortunes of the Trollope family.

Both Martha Barnaby and Arabella Greenow defy Victorian notions of women’s need for protection and guidance, each proving mastery over men and the limitations that

¹ Details of composition dates for Can You Forgive Her?, are recorded on Trollope’s handwritten “work sheet” in the Trollope Business Papers at the Bodleian Library.

² Anthony wrote in his autobiography: “How far I may unconsciously have adopted incidents from what I have read,—either from history or from works of imagination,—I do not know. It is beyond question that a man employed as I have been must do so. But when doing it I have not been aware that I have done it. I have never taken another man’s work, and deliberately framed my work upon it.” He goes on to say
Victorians usually placed on widows. While Frances uses the comedic aspect of her widow to subvert restrictions under which women lived, Anthony shifts his initial Martha-like portrayal of Arabella and in a more serious romance plot depicts a midlife remarriage that grants a woman the ability to chose a mate for pleasure rather than prudence because of her age. After transforming Arabella, Anthony then goes beyond the pleasure principle in *Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux* and creates Madame Max Goesler, a middle-aged widow who establishes a companionate marriage of equals that champions age and experience as requirements for an enlightened union. In this chapter, I will suggest that Anthony may have turned from comedy, which had been so successful a vehicle for Frances in the 1830s, because he had access to a cultural paradigm of women empowered by the political gains of the 1850s, a development that allowed him to valorize midlife marriages in serious plots in the 1860s and 70s.

The main work of this chapter, however, is to demonstrate that in both satiric and straight plots Martha Barnaby, Arabella Greenow, and Madame Max Goesler demonstrate that possibilities are available to middle-aged women in Victorian second-change marriage plots because of the experience and property they have gained due to their age. While Frances Trollope uses comedy to depict midlife as a time of self-determination for women on the remarriage market, Anthony Trollope, beginning with his appropriation of that portrayal, produces increasingly progressive narratives of gain for women seeking new lives and new loves at middle age.

"I think that an author when he uses either the words or the plot of another, should own as much, demanding to be credited with no more of the work than he has himself produced" (77-8).

3 I am indebted to Margaret Morganroth Gullette for the concept of "second-chance plots." See "Puzzling Case."
The Widow in Victorian England

Progress narratives of widow remarriage in the Victorian era are remarkable because, though widows had to contend with behavioral proscriptions before that period, they were in a unique position of restriction in the nineteenth century. In early modern England, high death rates had made for short marriages, the average being seventeen to nineteen years among the poor and twenty-two years for the squirarchy in the early 1600s (Stone, *Family* 55). Due to falling adult mortality rates, marriages began to last longer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the 1730s, 24% of marriages were terminated by the death of a spouse within 10 years, and 56% within 25 years, but by the 1850s the numbers had dropped to 19% and 47%, and in the 1880s only 13% of marriages ended before 10 years and 37% before 25 years (Anderson 29). Lawrence Stone suggests that marriage lasted longer during the Victorian period than at any other time in history, because rising divorce rates had not yet counteracted declining mortality rates (*Family* 56). 4

While marriages lasted a long time in the Victorian era, remarriage became less common. Several centuries before, though remarriage was stigmatized, it was also quite common. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield note that 30% of those marrying in the sixteenth century were widows or widowers (258), and the numbers were still as high in the latter part of the eighteenth century, with 15% of men and 20% of women marrying as

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4 The average length of marriage in the twentieth century continues to fall. Anderson reports that in the 1980s divorce had caused marriage duration rates to fall to those caused by death in the 1820s (30). In fact, in *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800* Stone looks at modern divorce as "little more than a functional substitute for death," arguing that the "decline of the adult mortality rates after the late eighteenth century, by prolonging the expected duration of marriage to unprecedented lengths, eventually forced Western society to adopt the institutional escape-hatch of divorce" (56).
widowers and widows. By the mid-1800s, however, the figures had dropped to only 14% of grooms and 9% of brides remarrying after death of a spouse (Anderson 31).

Longer marriages and fewer remarriages resulted in a large number of widowed persons living in England in the nineteenth-century, and, the majority of the widowed were women. In the second half of the nineteenth century, of the total male population, widowers made up 4% at ages 35-44, 7% at 45-54, and 14% at 55-64, while, for women, the numbers of widows in similar age ranges were 8%, 15% and 30% respectively, double the male rate in every age cohort (Anderson 30). The disproportionate number of widows reflected higher mortality rates and higher incidences of remarriage for men (Jalland 230). In 1851, the marriage rate per 1,000 of population of widowers was 36% at age 25 and 14% at age 40, while for widows the rate was 15% at age 25 and 4% at 40. The discrepancy continued later in the century--William Farr reports that in 1870-72, 30% of widowers remarried at age 25 and 15% at 40, while only 16% of widows remarried at 25 and 4% at 40 (79-80). These figures attest to divergent gender expectations for bereaved males and females in the nineteenth century giving men chances for second unions that were denied to women.

In her survey of diaries and letters of bereaved Victorians, Pat Jalland concludes that widowhood was looked at as “a final destiny, an involuntary commitment to a form of social exile” (231). Because women had no careers, widows faced more financial repercussions at the death of a spouse than men and often became dependent on extended family members. They also did not have the diversion of work to help them resolve grief and remake their lives (235-6). While widowers found consolation in work and expectations of remarriage, widows looked to religion, memory, and their surviving
family members for comfort (240, 52). Widowers were told to “get your wounds healed as quickly as you can” and were warned against “learning to love your sorrow instead of bearing it,” but widows were discouraged from seeking new marriages (256, 9).

The expectation that widows would remain unpartnered was a change from earlier attitudes: while marriage for lust was considered wrong in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was also a commonplace that widows, deprived of their regular libidinal outlet in a husband, searched for replacements out of sexual need, as evidenced in the Elizabethan proverb, “He that wooeth a widow must go stiff before” (Stone, Family 281). The prenuptial pregnancy rate for widows in eighteenth-century France was five times higher than for other single women, which indicates that, at least on the continent, widows were more sexually active than other single women (Stone, Family 609). In nineteenth-century England, however, while the need for companionship, sexual and otherwise, was considered an excellent reason for widowers to remarry, the same consolation was offered much less frequently to widows.

The early nineteenth-century prohibition against female remarriage is well documented in The Whole Duty of Woman or, A Guide to the Female Sex, From the Age of Sixteen to Sixty, Shewing Women, Of All Conditions, How to Behave Themselves for Obtaining Not Only Present But Future Happiness (1815). According to the author, a widow’s primary concern in life must be to her deceased husband, because wifely affection can still “burn[ ], like the funeral lamp of old, even in charnel houses and vaults.” She argues that “conjugal love, transplanted into the grave as into a finer mould, improves into piety, and lays a kind of sacred obligation on the widow to perform every office of respect to his remains,” which are delineated to be not only his body, but his
memory, and his children (81-2). Widows are warned not to "advance yourself in a second marriage" because "this not only cancels your pretended love to your deceased husband, in violating his will and the trust reposed in you, but [is] a manifest defrauding of your own children, which is the highest injury of all others; for it envenoms the crime, and adds unnaturalness to deceit" (85). According to this logic, if a widow marries again, her love for her first husband is invalidated or shown never to have existed at all, a charge that would not have been made against a remarrying widower. The text metaphorically slanders widows who remarry, the words "defrauding" and "envenom" equating them with criminals and snakes. The idea that widows should remain forever single placed them a world of isolation suggestive of suttee. Their social state was publicly signaled by mourning dress which was much harsher than that for widowers, producing "the perception that a wife's identity and sexuality were subsumed in her husband's and died with him" (Jalland 301).\footnote{Jalland paraphrases Taylor's argument from \textit{Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History}.}

The prohibition against second marriage for widows is especially portentous in the nineteenth century because of their great numbers. A widow's plight was often serious: if she did not have sufficient resources left from her husband's estate and had no financial recourse in remarriage, she was left at the mercy of her relations or the limited employment options for women. Physically and emotionally, widows fall under the economic parlance of the "redundant woman," seen as a problem not only for themselves but the society which must support them.

Fictive narratives of remarriage that emerged in this environment challenged deeply engrained paradigms of decline for middle-aged widows. The fact that mourning
restrictions for widows lessened at the end of the century implies that widows were given a new freedom to be considered persons in their own right, which would conduce to a more positive view of remarriage.\(^6\) Statistics show, however, that widows married less and less over the course of the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth.\(^7\) Victorian novels representing widow remarriage imagine behavior that departs from restrictive traditions. Because she is a rogue, the Widow Barnaby can use her wily ways to force the world around her to accommodate her desires, challenging restrictive paradigms for widows. Martha Barnaby and Madame Max challenge the status quo even further as self-determining widows remarrying in serious plots of midlife affect.

**Changes in Women’s Legal Status in the 1850s**

It is easy to see that, in an era of superfluous, problematic widows, such women make good topics for jokes, and a widow’s campaign to find a husband was seen as a suitable subject for satire. Changes in the political climate between 1839, when Frances Trollope’s *The Widow Barnaby* was published, and 1864, when Anthony Trollope’s *Can You Forgive Her?* entered serialization, made it more feasible for a widow remarriage to be presented in a straight plot. In the 1850s, debates over women’s property and the Divorce and Marital Causes Act of 1857 began to change ideas about remarriage. These

\(^6\) The claim of lessening mourning customs was made throughout the second half of the century. In 1866 *Etiquette for Ladies* states, “Mourning is subject like everything else to the fickle changes of fashion. It is not worn now for so long a time as it used to be worn” (66). An 1880 manual states, “Formerly mourning was worn both for a longer period and of a much deeper character than is usual at the present time” (Campbell 85). In 1889 Davey writes that “[p]rivate mourning in modern times, like everything else, has been greatly altered and modified, to suit an age of rapid transit and travel” (97). In 1894, Fanny Douglas claims “mourning is...not carried quite to the extremity it once was” (110). See Richard Davey, *A History of Mourning* (London: McCorquodale & Co., 1889) and Mrs. Fanny Douglas, *The Gentlewoman’s Book of Dress* (London: Henry and Co., 1894).

\(^7\) Anderson states that “[b]y the mid-nineteenth century about 14 per cent of males and 9 per cent of women who married were widowed. The figures fell slowly for the rest of the century, reaching 8.9 per
developments, by both validating women's right to independent ownership and creating the specter of the remarrying divorcee, gave widows more credibility on the marriage market.

Until later in the century, the basis for the production of dependent women in Victorian England was the concept of coverture. Under common law, married women (by far the majority of adult females in the population) were not able to possess property—all material possessions were in the legal control of the husband. Man and wife were seen as one person and that person was represented by the husband. Even if a husband deserted a wife, he could, and sometimes did, return and seize resources the wife had amassed since his departure.

The well-publicized case of Caroline Norton brought attention to the problem. Though she lived separately from her spouse and supported herself as a poet and novelist, her husband acted upon his legal right to seize the proceeds of her writing. Norton protested in print, and her 1855 *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* was used as an example of the need for reform in women's property rights during Divorce Act debates (Huddleston xii).

In 1856, reformer Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon sent a petition to Parliament which asked for the right of married women to hold their own property and was signed by 25,000 people—among them prominent citizens, scientists, politicians, artists, and writers, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Harriet Martineau (Stone, *Road* 376, Horstman 78). This petition was used in the debates over the Divorce
Act passed the next year. By drawing attention to the inequity of coverture, reform efforts such as these aroused public sympathy for women’s need to have control of their own property and demonstrated the inequity of allowing men greater rights of ownership. The reform movement eventually lead to the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 which gave all married women the right to own property under their own names.

Along with the debates about women’s property going on in the 1850s, the Divorce and Marital Causes Act of 1857 made a decisive change in the way the law—and, therefore, culture—looked at women. The Act ended the era when divorce was available only to the very rich, but, though giving the power of divorce to the middle class, it incorporated a gendered double standard and denied women equal access to marital dissolution. While men could sue for divorce on grounds of adultery, women not only had to prove adultery, but also incest, bestiality, desertion, or cruelty. A furious debate waged over this inequity which raised social consciousness about unfair treatment of women, and reformers did win protection orders in the Divorce Act that guaranteed a woman’s right to hold property separately from her husband in the case of his desertion.

After the Act was passed, the number of divorces slowly increased, and by the early 1860s when Anthony was creating Arabella Greenow, stories of divorce were much in the press, while trials became such a spectator sport that seats were hard to obtain (Horstman 87). Before the Act, some had speculated that women would hesitate to seek divorces, shrinking from conflict and publicity, but in 1858, the first year the Act was enforced, 97 of the 253 divorce petitions were filed by women (Horstman 86), and in the
period 1858 to 1868, women initiated 40% of divorce proceedings and 92% of judicial separations (Savage 26).

Reform efforts for property rights and the Divorce Act influenced perceptions of remarrying widows as they altered perceptions of marriage, women, and property. A widow's case is not entirely unlike that of the deserted wife who was a focus of reformers. She, like the deserted wife, is suddenly and involuntarily single. In both instances, women hold property after a spouse has departed. After the reforms brought about by the Divorce Act, the idea that a deserted wife could own property became acceptable. Early in the century, though widows were allowed legal control of property, they were viewed as mere stand-ins for their dead husbands, retaining the family's holdings until inherited by their children, especially sons. With agitation for changes in property laws, women began to be recognized as the rightful owners and users of money and goods, and widows no longer had to be relicts who merely stood in for dead husbands. Consequently, the prospect of a widow owning the property from her previous marriage not only legally but morally and using it as she saw fit, including to finance a second marriage, advanced into more respectability. A widow's pursuit of remarriage could be seen as an appropriate response to her situation rather than as unethical or ridiculous.

The Divorce Act also changed the climate for widow remarriage by introducing a new and scandalous phenomenon—previously married but now single men and women who were not widowers and widows. A short paragraph titled "Indefinite Parties" that appeared in *Punch* on September 5, 1857, one week after the Divorce Act was passed, illustrates the unsettling effect that divorce law had on the concept of remarriage:
A curious question might arise under the new Divorce Act. Suppose two divorced parties choose to be married by banns, how are they to be described? They are not bachelors and spinsters, neither are they widowers and widows; in fact, they are indescribable.

Because divorce for the middle class was impossible before 1857, remarriage by them was unthinkable—and therefore unspeakable—until the Divorce Act was passed. The legislation introduced a specter into society—the middle-class divorced. No longer limited to a rare occurrence in the highest echelons of the rich, now ordinary men and women could shift from one marriage to another without benefit of an act of God sundering the previous marriage by death.

The idea caused an uproar among the clergy even before the Act was passed, and they strenuously objected to the possibility that they would be forced to remarry the adulterous party of a divorce. The Attorney General agreed that clergymen could refuse to perform such marriages on the basis of conscience but stipulated that the church could not be forbidden for use by such couples (Stone, *Road* 381). Initially, the number of remarriages was small: of the 4,000 divorces that were granted between 1861 and 1876, only 696 marriages involved one divorced partner, and in only 13 were both partners divorced. The number of remarriages increased steadily over the century, however. While in 1861 only 10 divorced people remarried in all of England, 390 remarried in 1900, indicating that the stigma of remarriage for the divorced continually waned (Horstman 156).

The emergence of the remarrying divorced had a direct influence on the status of the remarrying widow. Next to a divorced bride, a widow on the marriage market would
seem a paragon of virtue. In comparison to a divorcee, a widow sharing her former husband’s property with a new husband could be conceived of no longer as a harridan, but as a reasonable adult acting within her legal and moral rights. Though Martha Barnaby, Arabella Greenow, and Madame Max Goesler are all fictional widows with significant amounts of property gained from their previous marriage which they are eager to bestow upon their eventual husbands, the latter two conduce much more readily to a straight versus a comic plot because they were created after these political developments.

I am not arguing that Anthony Trollope wholeheartedly embraced these changes in the status of women. While Frances Trollope is linked with protofeminism, her son Anthony is not. Critics read Martha Barnaby as an expression of Frances’s feminism. She is a product of the long-standing literary tradition of the picaresque hero—as Helen Heineman argues, “[w]ith the widow Barnaby, Mrs. Trollope created the feminine picaresque, a lady ready to pack her trunks of a moment’s notice, one who enjoyed herself immensely while exploring and exploiting life’s possibilities for a middle-aged woman” (Mrs. Trollope 157). Critics point out that her roguery makes her a feminist avatar, because she is based on a literary type that usually features only male rogues.

Martha was also, of course, created to entertain. When Frances Trollope set out to create the widow, she told her publisher that she had in mind a character who would supply comedy “from efforts and pretensions resulting from vanity, a vulgar desire for fashionable homily” (Frances Trollope, “To Bentley” 266). Frances did just that—on the first page of The Widow Wedded, the third and final novel in the widow series, she writes: “I scruple not to confess that with all her faults, and she has some, I love her dearly: I owe
her many mirthful moments, and the deeper pleasure still of believing that she has brought mirthful moments to others also” (1).

Critics have interpreted Frances’s relationship with Martha as going beyond fondness to a rewriting of the author’s life that highlights her own autonomy and proto-feminist qualities. Martha sails to the United States as a famous author and purports to write a book on her travels, parodying Frances’s own journey to America which produced perhaps her most enduring book, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (Ransom, *Frances Trollope* 124; Heineman, *Mrs. Trollope* 165). Helen Heineman argues that Martha is Frances’s “first heroine to project clearly the author’s own fortitude and autonomy, self-assertiveness and curiosity about the world and to embody the significance and drama of her own strenuously active life” (*Frances Trollope* 88). She finds such an identification of Frances with her character that she states “the widow was a creation that arose from the deepest wellspring of Frances Trollope’s own personality” (*Frances Trollope* 88).

Heineman sees Frances’s message in *The Widow Barnaby* as “uncomplicated and direct”—that “women could maintain their inner autonomy and gain the maximum of economic independence.” When the novel’s narrator comments that Martha is “a strange mixture of worldly wisdom and . . . female folly,” according to Heineman the “folly was all for show, the worldly wisdom was the real woman” (*Frances Trollope* 90).  

In contrast to his mother, Anthony Trollope’s personal and public statements show that he was no feminist. He wrote in *North America* (1862): “The best right a

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8 For further discussion of Frances as feminist reformer see both Heineman books as well as Marilyn D. Botton, “Reclaiming Mrs. Frances Trollope: British Abolitionist and Feminist” and Susan S. Kissel, In Common Causes: The “Conservative” Frances Trollope and the “Radical” Frances Wright, “More Than Anthony’s Mother: Frances Trollope’s Other Contributions to British Literature,” and “What Shall Become of Us All?: Frances Trollope’s Sense of the Future.”
woman has is the right to a husband” (265), and he declared in one of his letters that “the necessity of the supremacy of man [over woman] is as certain to me as the eternity of the soul.”* But, though Anthony may be antifeminist in his public statements and nonfiction writing, he seems to have feminist sympathies when he creates heroines. Several critics have linked his female characters to an underlying feminist discourse that begins to appear during the 1860s when the debate over women’s rights was at its height, which is also when he was composing _Can You Forgive Her?_ He met the feminist Kate Field in 1860 and she became a close friend. Margaret F. King has also established a connection in the 1860s between Anthony Trollope and the Langham Place Circle of feminists through his friendship with Emily Faithfull.

Anthony often portrays women who question traditional roles and yearn for a different kind of life, creating what Deborah Denenholz Morse calls an “ongoing fictional dialectic between belief and subversion of Victorian ideals for womanhood” (3). Bill Overton posits two Trollopes (that is, two _Anthony_ Trollopes), the official, conventional Victorian of public and private discourse, and the unofficial, contradictory novelist—a bifurcation which can best be seen, he argues, in his ideas about the role of women: “He will start out from a bland moralism—that a woman’s place is in marriage, or that marriage for ambition is wrong—but these simplifications the novels soon disarm” (7). James Kincaid argues that the issue is complicated: “within the novels themselves, the platitudes disappear completely, and the easy answers of both male supremacists and

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feminists alike are seen to be irrelevant entirely to the dilemma of the woman faced with no satisfying alternatives” (29).

Several critics discuss a shift in Trollope’s attitude toward women, generally after the mid-1860s. Jane Nardin argues that the change occurred sometime between the writing of *Barchester Towers* (1855) and *The Belton Estate* (1865), which would place it in the time frame of the historical revisions of the 50s as well as the writing of *Can You Forgive Her?* She notes that “Nearly all the techniques that Trollope uses so energetically in the later novels were pioneered in the early 1860s. The dissatisfied women of the late novels are more dissatisfied, the independent ones more independent, and the novels themselves more openly on the side of such women” (xviii). Margaret Markwick finds that though Trollope lampooned husband hunters in his early novels, after 1868 he ceases to do so (95-6)—a development we can see occurring during the progress of *Can You Forgive Her?* as he initially satirizes Arabella’s career on the marriage and ultimately endorses her quest.10

Some critics have recognized Anthony’s feminist discourse in the widow subplot of *Can You Forgive Her?* King argues that though he ultimately silences the feminist discourse of Alice and Glencora, Trollope allows Arabella to “combine self-direction with domesticity” and prevents patriarchal ideology “from having the last—or at least the

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10 Barichman et al argue that his novels “present his understanding of the conditions that produce frantic husband hunting and give it far-reaching social significance” (209). Juliet McMaster says his depiction of the women’s cause became more sympathetic as his career progressed, so that he was “no longer a reactionary” by the end of the Palliser series (166). Robert M. Polhemus argues that “The sixties brought new frankness and objectivity about love, sex, and women to Britain which is reflected in Trollope’s love plots” (“Changing World” 90). Richard Barickman et al note that “from the sixties on, when women’s rights had become the subject of much public debate, jesting references to the subject are scattered through Trollope’s novels,” but readers “find Trollope sympathetic to women and concerned about the same problems troubling Victorian feminists” (195-6).
only—word” (312, 323). Morse finds a feminist impulse in Arabella because “she embarks as a widow upon a new life of freedom and sexual possibility,” and her plot “images the dislocation of conventional attitudes about women in relation to courtship and marriage” (10-11). King sees Arabella’s plot as a “discourse and narrative of comic—and specifically female—liberation” in which she has power to attack patriarchal conventions, subverting the wild man/worthy man paradigm by virtue of the fact that she can choose at all (320-1). These critics read Arabella as an example of Anthony’s feminism as she disrupts marital conventions by obtaining mastery over her affianced husband and her fate. Though he may profess conventional notions about gender, Anthony cannot seem to escape from subterranean feminist impulses, a tendency evident in his creation of Arabella.

The Anxiety of Influence: Anthony’s Unconscious Appropriation

While the differences between Frances’s and Anthony’s remarrying widows can be explained by political developments, the similarities between them have their genesis in the direct influence of a literary mother upon her literary son. Of course, one possible explanation for the similarities between Martha and Arabella is that both Frances and Anthony were merely responding to the trope of the remarrying widow which already existed in British literature before either one of them wrote. An 1839 review of Frances Trollope’s The Widow Barnaby from The Athenaeum provides a clearly pejorative view of the remarrying widow in nineteenth-century literature:

As a distinct personage in our fictitious literature, The Widow occupies a place . . . entirely apart and individual . . . a blithe and self-seeking pursuer of every man who is marriageable and modest—an unsympathizing ogress
in the ranks of her own sex—audacious and experienced in planning—
resolute in obtaining—turning off her deep designs, when threatened with
discovery . . . making of her weeds a flower-bed under which lurks
artifice and device—calling up the memories of a dead husband as a bait
to ensnare a living one—loquacious—lynx-eyed-oily-tongued: something
like this . . . with whose bereavements satirists, prose and verse, make
merry, is the Widow in general . . . (9)

Drawing on a trope common in Renaissance and Restoration drama, the passage figures
widows as ludicrous objects of marital intent, the subject of much misogynistic humor.11
Frances Trollope clearly presents Martha Barnaby as part of this tradition, and Anthony
Trollope initially portrays Arabella Greenow the same way, but the remarkable
similarities between Martha and Arabella ensure that Anthony’s appropriation of
Frances’s work goes beyond a general trope of the comic remarrying widow. That
Frances influenced not only Anthony’s life but his writing is obvious—he devotes an
entire chapter to her in his autobiography—an honor he does not confer on any other
person including his father.12 He claims, “Filial duty will not allow me to be silent as to a

11 In the earliest extant English play, Ralph Roister-Doister (1550’s), Constance Custance is a
widow made ridiculous by Ralph’s amorous advances. The tradition continues in Restoration drama with
the Widow Blackacre in Wycherley’s The Plain Dealer and Lady Wishfort in Congreve’s The Way of the
World, plays which “engendered an enduring stereotype of the early modern widow as a woman who
anxiously sought a husband at any cost” (Todd 54-5). The convention persists in the eighteenth-century
novel with women like the Widow Wadman who is an incongruous object of love in Sterne’s Tristram
Shandy.

12 Biographies of Frances Trollope and Anthony Trollope, as well as book-length literary analyses,
usually comment on the relationship between the two. See the following: N. John Hall, Trollope: A
Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Heineman, Francis Trollope; Heineman, Mrs. Trollope; Jane
Nardin, He Knew She Was Right: The Independent Woman in the Novels of Anthony Trollope (Carbondale:
Southern Illinois UP, 1989) 11-13; Pamela Neville-Sington, Frances Trollope: The Life and Adventures of
a Clever Woman (London: Viking, 1997); Bill Overton, The Unofficial Trollope (Sussex: The Harvester
parent who made for herself a considerable name in the literature of her day" (18). He identifies himself with Frances as a fellow writer when he comments with pride that his brother Tom, his mother, and he himself lived "with the destiny before us three of writing more books than were probably ever before produced by a single family" (19).

It is apparent that Anthony derived his writing habits from watching Frances. He describes her method of composition and her output in detail: "She was at her table at four in the morning and had finished her work before the world had begun to be aroused" (Autobiography 21). He records that she "continued writing up to 1856 when she was seventy-six years old;--and had at that time produced 114 volumes"—a total of forty-one novels. When Anthony was 19, he watched his mother pursue a strict writing schedule while also nursing three of her children and her husband until all four died. He comments that "Her power of dividing herself into two parts, and keeping her intellect by itself, clear from the troubles of the world and fit for the duty it had to do, I never saw equalled" (24).

Anthony’s method of writing is remarkably similar. He developed the habit of getting up at 5:30 every morning, revising and writing for three hours with a goal of producing ten pages, so that, as he describes it, "I could complete my literary work before breakfast" (Hall 195). By writing early every morning, he was able to divide his life in


two as he had seen his mother do, maintaining full-time employment as a postal surveyor, while simultaneously producing forty-seven novels and sixteen other books.\textsuperscript{14}

His mother’s literary influence extended beyond Anthony’s writing habits. He met his first “literary men” while living with her (\textit{Autobiography} 58), and Frances provided his entrance into the world of authorship, helping in the publication of his first book. He was filled with insecurities about his abilities in the light of her celebrity and wrote in his autobiography that while she “had become one of the most popular novelists of the day,” he was merely a postal clerk. He recalls that when he gave the manuscript to his mother so she could show it to her publisher in London, they agreed that she should not look at it, because “I knew that she did not give me credit for the sort of cleverness necessary for such work” (51-2). This novel, \textit{The Macdermots of Ballycloran}, was published in 1847, but was not successful despite the fact that the publisher, Thomas Cautley Newby, tried to convince the public that the book was really by Frances (251). By the time Anthony did begin to achieve some success a few years, and novels, later, Frances had decided to put down her pen. He remembers: “she expressed to me her delight that her labours should be at an end and that mine should be beginning in the same field” (75). From its inception, Anthony’s work has been linked with his mother’s through her example and influence.

Despite her evident presence in his authorial development, Anthony does not envision himself in the autobiography as a literary descendent of his mother. Her first book, \textit{The Domestic Manners of the Americans}, was a great success and allowed the financially floundering family to reunite in a comfortable home in the country, but

\textsuperscript{14} Overton 12.
Anthony distances himself from the book by his criticism. He dismisses Frances as too naively female to do justice to her subject: “No one could have been worse adapted by nature for the task of learning whether a nation was in a way to thrive. Whatever she saw she judged, as most women do, from her own standing point”—a point of view that he obviously finds deficient. He does concede “Her volumes were very bitter;—but they were very clever, and they saved the family from ruin” (Autobiography 21). He rejects her satiric style, however, saying that “She was endowed . . . with much creative power, with considerable humour, and a genuine feeling for romance. But she was neither clear sighted nor accurate; and in her attempts to describe morals, manners, and even facts, was unable to avoid the pitfalls of exaggeration” (27). The “pitfalls of exaggeration” that he and other critics lambast are part of the satiric style that gives Frances the power of social commentary, the quality that gives Martha Barnaby mastery.\footnote{An unsigned review in The New Monthly Magazine rails against her satire memorably: “Satire is, perhaps, the characteristic of Mrs. Trollope’s writings—satire of a hard, poignant, persevering sort . . . It wears an almost vicious look—goes about seeking whom it may devour—snaps at strangers—bites as well as barks, and, when it does bite, makes its teeth meet.” “Female Novelists—No. V,” The New Monthly Magazine and Humorist 96 (1852): 19-27.} Anthony’s comments make it clear that he did not consciously understand himself to draw upon his mother’s materials, even though he commanders her work to produce his remarrying widow, Arabella Greenow.

The Noble Jilt

Though Anthony Trollope he did not acknowledge the wily widow Barnaby as the basis for Arabella, he does credit his own early, unsuccessful play, The Noble Jilt, as the source for Can You Forgive Her?, and in the widow figure in the play (later to become Arabella Greenow in the novel) we can see the beginning of his appropriation of Martha.
The Noble Jilt is the story of Margaret De Wynter (later to become Alice in Can You Forgive Her?) and her two suitors, the worthy Count Upsel (John Gray) and the wild Steinmark (George Vavasor). This plot is paralleled by the story of a widow, Madame Brudo, who is pursued by the conventional, wealthy VanHoppen (Cheesacre) and the rascally Belleroach (Bellfield).

Madame Brudo is, in several senses, Anthony’s first rewriting of Mrs. Barnaby—like Martha she makes much of her widow’s grief when anyone is around to hear, she claims she will never remarry while obviously angling for suitors, she declares a hypocritical because fabricated love for her niece, she plays her two suitors against each other, and her maid is a go-between in the love affairs. An important parallel between Frances’s novel and Anthony’s play is the depiction of Madame Brudo as the manipulative, insincere, and ridiculous widow. Though both Madame Brudo and Martha transgress mourning strictures and remarry too early, the widow in the play is even more precipitous than Martha, marrying only three months after her spouse’s death while the Widow Barnaby weds after seven.

The two widows also differ, however, in fundamental ways. Perhaps the most significant contrast between Madame Brudo and Martha is that the former shows no triumphant self-determination like that displayed by Barnaby throughout each of her novels. In fact, Madame Brudo argues for female dependence, telling her niece that women “are born to be slaves. They cannot throw off the yoke. Tis better for them twice to submit than once to rebel” (182). Another significant difference is that Madame Brudo is simply not funny. George Bartley, the theater manager to whom Anthony sent The Noble Jilt for evaluation, responded that no character in the play could “challenge the
sympathy of the audience” (Hall 121), a quality evident in Madame Brudo, whose lumbering antics do not entertain, even though the play was intended to be a comedy.

As the basis for Anthony's later novel, small elements which are original to the play show up in Can You Forgive Her? The men are aware of the widow's sexual appraisal of them--Bellerroach criticizes VanHoppen for being “podgy” and tells him, “Madame Brudo does not prefer a podgy man” (101), as Bellfield will later tell Cheesacre. Madame Brudo is like her later incarnation Arabella Greenow in that she does freely chose the wild man Bellerroach over the worthy man VanHoppen. But Brudo seems merely to acquiesce to Bellerroach’s insistence, caught in his ploy to win her for her money instead of choosing her fate freely. The name alterations Anthony made in converting the play to a novel demonstrate the change from the failed comedic play to the novel of serious midlife affect. VanHoppen, the pompous, posturing burgomaster of Bruges, remains pompous and posturing as Cheesacre, a farmer who can provide both cheese and acres—in the form of Oileymead, a farm overly abundant in its housekeeping, produce, and the “rich heaps” of manure that fertilize the soil, producing the unwanted tribute Arabella receives of broccoli, celery, cream, eggs, and turkey. But Bellerroach becomes Bellfield, the name changing from “beautiful fish,” a quarry to be landed,¹⁶ to “beautiful field”—a place of open spaces and fruitfulness. And Arabella herself, no longer Madame Brudo--brooding and brutish--is named Greenow--a midlife woman starting over with an appellation that suggests possibilities for growth and new life because she is “green now.” Though Madame Brudo is Anthony’s first appropriation of

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¹⁶ A “roach” would have been defined as “a small freshwater fish” by Victorians instead of as a cockroach. “Roach,” The Oxford English Dictionary, 2⁰Ed.
some aspects of the widow Barnaby, not until he creates Arabella does he capture the true Barnaby spirit of comedic audacity and self-determination.

**Mirror Images: Two Transgressive Widows**

Martha is a rogue who transgresses social convention and is involved in a series of adventures negotiated by her creative exploitation of the boundaries of propriety. As she travels from location to location she is presented satirically, preying on the weakness and vanity of others, humorously blind to similar traits in herself. She inhabits the hazy territory between petty fraud and actual criminality and usually stays one step ahead of authorities. Victorian reviewers found her to be rather alarming. As a writer for *The Times* of January 24, 1839 describes it: "Her vulgarity is sublime"--she is "amiably disagreeable" and "delightfully disgusting," producing a feeling of "charming horror" in the reader. In 1852, *The New Monthly Magazine* recommends *The Widow Barnaby*, calling Martha "a lady of real character and definite idiosyncrasy," due to the fact that she is "[s]howy, strong-willed, supple-tongued, audacious, garrulous, affected, tawdry, lynx-eyed, indomitable in her scheming, and colossal in her selfishness" (24-5).

That Arabella is initially an appropriation of the comedic widow is made quite clear by a comparison of their traits and behaviors. Martha and Arabella are demographically similar--Lord Mucklebury describes Martha as "a widow, fair, fat, and forty" (252), and she possesses an estate in excess of 400 pounds a year. Arabella is widowed at age forty and possesses an estate of 40,000 pounds (1.66-7). The repetition of forty in Martha's age and fortune are taken to new heights when Anthony multiplies

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17 Martha is actually 35 at the time of her husband's demise. Neville-Sington notes that the phrase is used by Frances again in both *Hargrave* and *The Lottery of a Marriage* (267).
her 400 pounds into Arabella’s 40,000. The reiteration of forty is not only an artifact of the widows’ similarity, but also stresses their middle-aged status in contrast to the typical young heroine. In addition, these precise statements of their fortunes emphasize that they have maintained their high social class in widowhood and even experienced a personal class rise in that they now have control of their deceased husbands’ money.

Martha is a forthright husband hunter from the start, made evident when she catechizes herself soon after her husband dies: “Q. What is it that I most wish for on earth? A: A rich and fashionable husband” (56). Arabella repeatedly claims she is not looking for a new spouse, saying “My heart is desolate, and must remain so” (1.73), and “[o]ne husband is enough for any woman, and mine lies buried at Birmingham” (2.75). Her actions belie her words though, and she is obviously on a quest to remarry as she strategically flirts with her two suitors.

In order to attract husbands, both Martha and Arabella flaunt their fortunes. Upon her arrival at Clifton, Martha asks for the “best rooms in the house” (78), and Arabella makes a point of staying at the largest house in the row at Yarmouth, because she “desire[s] that all the world should see that she ha[s] forty thousand pounds of her own” (1.69). The widows also try to look more prosperous by attempting a class rise through engineering a change in their maids, giving them elite-sounding names. Martha calls Betty Jacks “Jerningham” (75), and Arabella alters her maid Jenny’s name to “Jeannette” (1.68), designations that conform to the widows’ notions of gentility.

The widows not only promote outer evidences of their financial solidity, they also find great inner satisfaction in the autonomy of widowhood. The narrator describes Martha’s feelings at her bereavement: “She certainly felt both proud and happy as she
thought of her independence and her wealth. Of the first she unquestionably had as much as it was possible for a woman to possess, for no human being existed who had any right whatever to control her” (53). Arabella tells Kate after her husband’s death, “I’m not dependent on the world,--thanks to the care of that sainted lamb. I can hold my own; and as long as I can do that the world won’t hurt me,” and narrator adds that “Mrs. Greenow was probably right in her appreciation of the value of her independence” (1.73). Each woman appreciates the autonomy of widowhood made possible by property and experience, even though both women make it a point to describe their great grief and cry ostentatiously in the presence of others.

Martha and Arabella both use duty to their nieces as an excuse for their early resumption of social life, and their explanations to the younger women are almost identical. Martha tells Agnes,

be assured, my dear, that however much my own widowed feelings might lead me to prefer the tranquil consolations of retirement, I shall consider it my duty to live more for you than for myself; and I will indeed hasten, in spite of my feelings, to lay aside these sad weeds, that I may be able, with as little delay as possible, to give you such an introduction to the world as my niece has a right to expect. (54)

Later she says, “it is for your sake, my dear, that I am determined, as far as in me lies, to stop the sorrow that is eating into my very vitals” (85). When Arabella puts her name down at the Assembly Room, she tells her niece Kate:

my dear; I know very well what I owe to you, and I shall do my duty . . . society can have no charms now for such a one as I am. All that social
intercourse could ever do for me lies buried in my darling's grave. . . . But I'm not going to immolate you on the alters of my grief. I shall force myself to go out for your sake, Kate. . . . (1.72-3)

By making a claim to duty as they present their nieces on the marriage market, both widows enable themselves to circulate in society. When they say they sacrifice their own wishes to obey this duty, they infer an inner inclination for the retirement of mourning, but satire is produced by their evident relish to resume socializing.

In addition to the prevarication in their claims of sacrifice to assist their nieces, both widows lie about how long their husbands have been dead in order to circumvent the protracted mourning period required of widows. Martha Barnaby tells her landlady that she's been a widow for "very nearly six months," while the narrator informs us that "Mr. Barnaby, however, had been alive and well exactly three months after the period named by his widow as that of his death" (83-4). Arabella Greenow, too, doubles the time of her widowhood; when her husband has been dead for six months, she tells Cheesacre "you don't know what it is to have buried the pride of your youth hardly yet twelve months" (1.213). When she has been a widow for nine months, she refers to the "melancholy circumstance" as having taken place fifteen and then eighteen months previously (1.413-4).

Martha and Arabella accelerate the chronology of their widowhood because, as midlife women, they are running out of time in the marriage plot. They do not want to waste time and enter society with the express intention of finding a mate before they are buried alive for life in the social insignificance of permanent widowhood. They augment a midlife second-chance plot by dissembling about the length of their widowhood,
creating a time that is parallel to and triumphs over the mourning period. They are successful in controlling their money, and, as I will discuss, their bodily performance as widows. By lying about the length of their widowhood, they even manage to exert a certain amount of control over time—the most threatening element to their search for husbands in midlife.

The widows reenter society in the same types of public entertainment. When Mr. Barnaby has been dead about six months, Martha puts her name down for the Assembly rooms at Clifton, subscribes to the library (a center for gossip and meeting), and attends a ball. She does decide it may be politic to dance at the ball in front of her wealthy sister-in-law, but she plays cards, displaying much “vivacity” and “enjouement” (145). Arabella settles in Yarmouth when she has been a widow for four months and makes similar social advances, registering at the Assembly Room, receiving guests, (all the while smiling “from beneath her widow’s cap in a most bewitching way” (1.73)), walking on the pier with Kate and Bellfield, and rowing with friends down the beach for a picnic on the sands (1.94).

Martha and Arabella transgress mourning customs by using their widow’s weeds in service of the marriage market. Though in later years Victorian advice manuals counseled moderation, Victorians rigidly adhered to such conventions in 1839 when The Widow Barnaby was published. In 1864-5 when Can You Forgive Her? was serialized, mourning dress was still de rigueur as indicated by the author of Etiquette for Ladies who notes in 1866 that though mourning is not as strict as it used to be, the custom is still generally observed for two years (66). Victorian widows were held to exacting standards of mourning: two years of full black mourning were required until late in the century.
For a year and a day dresses of dull, non-reflective black paramatta and crepe were worn, followed by dullish black silk trimmed in crape for nine months and three months of combined silk and wool or cotton paramatta. In the final six months widows could assume the colors of half mourning—grey, lavender, or black and white in their trimmings (Jalland 300; Cunnington and Lucas 268). Widows also wore indoor caps of white muslin trimmed in front with ruched white crape, with a long white streamer hanging down from behind by mid-century. An outdoor bonnet with veil was considered essential (Cunnington and Lucas 266-7). Widowers, in contrast, added black mourning-cloaks to their regular clothes until 1850, and after that date used only black gloves, hatbands, and cravats (wide neckties) to indicate their mourning (Jalland 301). Obviously, the sumptuary strictures of mourning fell most heavily upon women. As Mrs. John Sherwood observes in 1888, “everyone who has seen an English widow will agree that she makes a ‘hearse’ of herself” (189). For men with deceased spouses, however, clothing changes amounted to a change of accessories, but women had to assume what amounted to an entire costume of grief.

Wearing mourning for the proper period was considered essential for respectability. Mrs. John Sherwood argues that “Many people hold the fact that a widow . . . wears her crape for two years to be greatly to her credit” but if she changes her widows’ weeds before that time it is said that she “did not care much for the deceased” (198). An etiquette advisor, Fanny Douglas, wrote that while excesses of mourning can be harmful, “[a]lmost worse than the woman who mourns too much is the woman who mourns too little. One can forgive her garments, but not her apologies” (114).
After the proper period had expired, changing from mourning to regular dress was a necessary, though delicate, passage; it is “a matter in which every gentlewoman should decide for herself, and in which none should too rashly condemn the other. The safest principle is, that whatever the feeling instinctively dictates cannot be wholly wrong” (Douglas 110). Sherwood counsels the widow to use discretion by gradually effecting the process: “It shocks persons of good taste to see a light-hearted young widow jump into colors, as if she had been counting the hours. If black is to be dispensed with, let its retirement be slowly and gracefully marked by quiet costumes, as the feeling of grief, yielding to the kindly influence of time, is shaded off into resignation and cheerfulness” (196).

Mourning functioned in Victorian society to “identity the mourner, show respect for the dead, elicit the sympathy of the community, and match the mourner’s sombre mood” (Jalland 302) and Victorians, particularly women, were identified as finding psychological benefits in this public identity as a griever. Fanny Douglas writes that some women cling to mourning because it “soothes their own feelings to express them outwardly, and the thought that by so doing they render tender homage to the dead has also its consolation” (111). Sherwood argues that “mourning dress does protect a woman while in deepest grief against the untimely gayety of a passing stranger. It is a wall, a cell of refuge. Behind a black veil she can hide herself as she goes out for business or recreation, fearless of any intrusion” (189). Some women even chose to remain in mourning for the rest of their lives. Sherwood notes in 1888 that Queen Victoria is still wearing her widow’s cap, though Albert had been dead for over two decades (195). When a widow begins to make concessions to vanity in her dress, Douglas argues that the
grief has begun to heal: “The widow who considers with seriousness whether she will best express her sense of loss by a Marie Stuart cap or an Alsatian bow of tarlatan, is already half consoled” (112). In nineteenth-century England, the body and its clothing became a metonymy for the sincerity of a widow’s grief. Victorians believed that as mourning gets lighter, so does the heart.

Martha Barnaby challenges the conventional paradigm of mourning by finding her weeds “so hatefully unbecoming in her estimation that she firmly believed the inventor of it must have been actuated by some feeling akin to that which instituted the horrible Hindoo rite of which she had heard, whereby living wives were sacrificed to their departed husbands” (57). In her defiance of mourning and her comparison of it to suttee, Martha charges the custom not only with being inappropriate, but unchristian or (perhaps even worse) unBritish. In either case, by flouting propriety, she suggests that women’s identities should not be subsumed by those of their dead husbands.

Martha begins to flout mourning customs when she has been a widow only three months. During a short sojourn in Exeter she not only leaves black crepe for black satin and silk, but wears lavender half-mourning until soon “there was no colour of the rainbow that did not by degrees find its way amidst her trimmings and decorations” (84-6). Though she assumes deep mourning again six months into her bereavement when she reaches her sister-in-law’s house at Clifton, she soon moderates black satin with bright colors, so that “although in mourning, her general appearance was exceedingly shewy and gay” (123). The widow’s audacity is increased by her contrast with Agnes, who continues to wear mourning at her aunt’s behest (ostensibly because Agnes looks well in black, but, the narrator tells us, really because it will save the widow money to have her
serviceable mourning dresses made over for the younger girl). Agnes, true to the female mourning prescription, says that her veil makes her feel “more comfortable” in public (132). Though Martha’s ploy to be free of mourning and outshine her niece is comically perfidious, it is also liberating, enabling her to circumvent the confines of mourning and husband-hunt to greater advantage.

The emotional aspects of Martha’s mourning are quite practical. She is “really very sorry” for her husband’s death and weeps “with little or no effort” the week he dies. But, after the funeral and reading of the will “she very rationally began to meditate upon her position, and upon the best mode of enjoying the many good things which had fallen to her share” (1.53). She continues to use her bereaved state as a convenient device for arousing sympathy, while also making the most of the freedoms and goods garnered from her widowed state. She is level-headed about financial matters and her machinations demonstrate the power and freedom she has as a widow with property on the marriage market, presented within the comedic widow trope as audacious husband-hunting.

Like Martha, Arabella defies standards of proper behavior about mourning, but instead of mourning too little she uses her weeds to her advantage. At the picnic in Yarmouth, we are told, “She had not mitigated her weeds by half an inch. She had scorned to make any compromise between the world of pleasure and the world of woe” (1.80-1). Instead of slighting mourning early, she wears her black dresses and widows caps coquettishly, employing them to make her more attractive to her suitors. Her impropriety is not in gaudy colors but in the amount of attention she lavishes upon her gowns. Arabella shows her widow’s weeds to Kate “with all the pride of a young bride when she shows the glories of her trousseau to the friend of her bosom” (1.70), obviously
not the proper attitude for a grieving widow. She also wears her widow’s cap “jauntily,” so that it shows “just so much of her rich brown hair as to give her the appearance of youth which she desired” (1.413). By wearing her mourning as a flirtation device, she undercuts its intended purpose: “there was that of genius about Mrs. Greenow, that she had turned every seeming disadvantage to some special profit, and had so dressed herself that though she had obeyed the law to the letter, she had thrown the spirit of it to the winds” (1.413). She makes her mourning too attractive, and angles too obviously for another suitor to be grieving according to standards of propriety.

Arabella does wear complete mourning dress, repeatedly calls attention to the excellencies of her dead spouse, and does not resist having her body linked to his through her black dresses. Her actions, however, are more portentous than Martha’s, because while Barnaby’s attractions are satirical, Arabella’s weeds actually make her attractive to men. A second marriage will obviously be the inevitable result of her bereavement—a concept that challenges notions of a widow’s perpetual social isolation.

The widows’ wiles are effective: six months after her husband’s death, Martha has a proposal from Major Allen, and she decides to leave Clifton so that “her marriage, within seven months of her husband’s death, might not take place under the immediate observation of his nearest relations” (183). This engagement is later canceled, and she becomes the bride of Mr. O’Donagough a few months later. Arabella receives a proposal from Cheesacre at the picnic when she has been a widow for about five months (1.96), but she takes it as an insult. She gives Bellfield “ground of hope” before she has been a widow a year (2.149), and he is accepted and kissed just a year from Greenow’s death (2.261).
Straightening Out: Arabella’s Plot Gets Serious

Arabella’s plot has been dismissed by critics as unimportant because of its comedic aspect. Sir Edward Marsh writes in the introduction to the 1973 Oxford edition of *Can You Forgive Her?* that her story is “farce at its lowest,” and he dispatches it outright: “luckily it is easily detachable, and I strongly advise anyone reading the book for the first time to skip it ruthlessly” (v). What Sir Edward misses, of course, is the transformative power of Arabella’s story as a feminist statement. The generic change from satire to a straight plot reveals what is possible for women—in the 1830s, Frances Trollope wrote of a self-determining widow as comedic, but though Anthony begins this way in the 1860s, he is able to imagine his widow into a realist mode and transform the comedic to the serious.

The change in tone of Arabella’s story is registered through the consciousness of other characters. At first, Kate Vavasor, Arabella’s niece, sees her as “a good woman . . . of a bad sort” who was wrong to marry a rich man thirty years her senior. She protests against having to visit her aunt, but concludes that she has no choice. From the perspective of Kate’s reservations, Arabella appears to be acting hypocritically, outrageous in the vanity of her mourning, ready to flirt with any man. Kate describes Arabella’s eyes as “always red with weeping, and yet she is ready every minute with a full battery of execution for any man that she sees” (1.56). Initially, Arabella seems both boring and vain to Kate, interesting only because she has forty thousand pounds (67).

Early in the novel, the narrator describes Arabella’s lamentations about her husband’s death as a “performance” in which she would “address the shade of the departed one in terms of most endearing affection” using ostentatious—and incorrect—
Latin ("Peace be to his manes"). Though Kate "is surprised to see that real tears... were making their way down her aunt's cheeks" (1.70), she observes that the tears are checked by a fashionable mourning handkerchief, an image which draws attention to the performative quality of Arabella's grief, thereby questioning its sincerity.

After chapter ten, however, Arabella's mourning is presented as sincere, and as James Kincaid argues, her grief "is not entirely hypocritical" (47). Even after her engagement to Bellfield when prevarication about her grief would no longer be of service to her campaign on the marriage market, Arabella tells Kate that though she will remarry, she will never truly love again: "As for love, my dear, that's gone,--clear gone!...Some women can love twice, but I am not one of them. I wish I could" (2.241). Kate notes later that even after her engagement her handkerchief "still bore the deepest hem of widowhood," and she knows Arabella will continue to use it until she is remarried (2.390). The handkerchief has become a symbol of sincerity instead of a marker of performance. Despite her engagement, Arabella's grief over Greenow's death has become believable by the end of the novel.

As King argues, Arabella "becomes increasingly a figure of comic delight, even admiration--a shift signaled by Kate's changing discourse about her" (321), and, I would add, by the narrator's comments. The niece learns that "Mrs. Greenow had about her something more than Kate had acknowledged when she first attempted to read her aunt's character." Kate finds that she is clever, generous, and pleasant (1.197), and by the time that she and Arabella are together at Netherfields after the Squire's death "[t]here had come to be a considerable amount of confidence between the aunt and the niece" (2.239).
In both *The Widow Barnaby* and *Can You Forgive Her?*, a rivalry between the generations is set up as the texts call attention to the middle-aged widows’ bodies in contrast to those of their nieces, especially in regard to their clothing. The two cases differ in that Agnes acts as a reverse foil for her aunt, augmenting Martha’s comic dowdiness, while Kate, in contrast, is overlooked in favor of her aunt. Arabella is allowed to be authentically attractive in a serious plot that takes her beyond the satiric widow trope.

In *The Widow Barnaby*, Agnes’s simple elegance is often contraposed with Martha’s audacious showiness. When they attend church for the first time in Clifton, Agnes is wearing deep mourning for her uncle—all black except for a white collar—provided from Martha’s cast-offs. The widow is the antithesis of Agnes, claiming many liberties of dress, and her excessive costume is described with comedic copiousness:

> On this occasion she came forth in a new dress of light grey gros-de-Naples, with a gay bonnet of paille de riz, decorated with poppy blossoms both within and without, a “lady-like” profusion of her own embroidery on cuffs, collar, and pocket-handkerchief, her well-oiled ringlets half hiding her large, coarse, handsome face, her eyes set off by a suffusion of carmine, and her whole person redolent of musk. (129)

The text comments that the two are “as strangely matched a pair in appearance as can well be imagined” (129). This juxtaposition continues throughout the novel, highlighting Agnes’s superior taste and looks. For example, when Frederick Stephenson first sees Agnes he proclaims, “In my life I never beheld so beautiful a creature . . . Her form, her feet, her movement,” while his companion, Colonel Hubert, is taken aback that she would
appear with a companion who is “such a dame as that feather and furbelow lady” (133). Repeatedly in the novel, Martha’s forthright showiness is developed by her contrast with her understated and refined niece.

Even before the shift from comedy to realism takes place in *Can You Forgive Her?*, Arabella’s physical presence eclipses that of her niece. Her clothing is not minutely described, but her overall presence suffices to switch the usual paradigm of an older woman giving way to the superior beauty and marriageability of a younger one. For example, when Arabella goes to church on her first Sunday in Yarmouth in “all the glory of her widowhood,” the niece knows she has been overshadowed:

Kate Vavasor became immediately aware that a great sensation had been occasioned by their entrance, and equally aware that none of it was due to her . . . How many ladies of forty go to church without attracting the least attention! But it is hardly too much to say that every person in that church had looked at Mrs. Greenow. (1.71)

But, though Arabella outshines her niece when they appear together, she makes a genuine attempt to assist Kate in finding what she considers to be a good match for her in Cheesacre, ludicrous though he may be as a suitor for Kate. This impulse to generosity is not presented as completely altruistic—Arabella does, after all, only offer Kate her own discarded suitor. Arabella, however, eventually does make a successful match between Cheesacre and Charlie Fairstairs, one that Kate defends to Alice as suitable (2.389). Not only are Arabella’s charms presented as authentic, but her altruism toward her niece takes the remarrying widow from satire to a straight presentation of an aunt’s benevolent patronage.
Martha and Arabella consistently differ in regard to their habits of selfishness and generosity. Martha always acts as an agent of the self. Autonomously intent on her own advantage, she never balks at the chance to use others to promote her schemes, but constantly challenges the convention of the shrinking, dependent widow. While Martha uses Agnes for her own devices, Arabella is more altruistic toward her niece. Kate says of Greenow, “with all her faults, I believe she would go through fire and water to serve me” (1.324). Martha gives away her used clothes to her servant Jerningham as bribes to get her to spy on men and to Agnes as a way to save money. Arabella’s cast-off clothes are presented as desirable acquisitions in their own right: “When Mrs. Greenow made a slight change in her mourning . . . Jeanette reaped a rich harvest in gifts of clothes” (1.198), and the narrator tells us that Arabella “would spare neither herself nor her purse on Kate’s behalf” (1.74). Martha loudly attests to her sacrifices and generosity toward her niece while giving her only a closet to sleep in, cast-off mourning gowns to wear, and eventually threatening to turn her out “neck and heels into the street” if Agnes will not agree to be Martha’s purveyor while she is in debtor’s prison (306). Arabella’s behavior, though not always entirely selfless, is represented by the text as motivated by genuine goodwill toward her beneficiaries.

Martha and Arabella both lie in the cause of husband-hunting, but Arabella is eventually forgiven for her mendacity. After the failure of her first flirtation with Major Allen, because she has deceived him about the extent of her fortune (as he has her), Martha plans her “next campaign” at Cheltenham. The narrator tells us that “[s]he knew that the exploits she contemplated were hazardous, as well as splendid; and that, although success was probable, failure might be possible. . .” (221). Her lies are presented as
comic and daring, one of the skills by which she will attain her goal of entering into society and marrying a rich husband. *Can You Forgive Her?*, in contrast, downplays Arabella’s dissimulation by presenting it as merely a foible. While other characters as well as Arabella herself acknowledge that she reconstructs the truth, her lies are presented as either unimportant or acceptable. Kate has been aware of Arabella’s revisions in regard to the length of her widowhood, her intentions in regard to remarrying, and her pursuit of suitors, but this does not prevent her shift in attitude from vilifying to admiring her aunt. Near the end of the novel, Alice, hearing Arabella’s version of events, realizes that her aunt is consciously reshaping what has happened, but that “she had a pleasure in telling her own story, and told it as though she believed every word that she spoke” (2.391). Arabella’s prevarication is presented as charming, perhaps even a bit cute.

Arabella is also less comedic than Martha because she does not attempt to cover up increasing signs of age with makeup. Perhaps the most scandalous of all Martha’s personal habits is her propensity to wear rouge, an offense mentioned many times by other characters in the novel as a marker of her vulgarity and mendacity. Victorians thought rouging improper (though it became increasingly popular and more accepted over the course of the century), because it was considered to be not only vanity, but a visual lie. Mrs. Merrifield writes in 1854, “We violate the laws of nature when we seek to repair the ravages of time on our complexions by paint . . . [it] is not only bad taste, but it is a positive breach of sincerity” (2). Other characters in the novel disapprove of Martha’s tendency to “paint.” The narrator tells us that when she “touched up her bloom to the point she deemed to be the most advantageous,” her sister-in-law concludes she looks “precisely like a clever caricature” of herself (104). Her brother-in-law decides that
he will “feel more comfortable when the rouge pots were all gone” from his house, because they are a bad influence on his daughters (108), and even Martha’s fiancé O’Donagough threatens to delay their marriage unless she stops rouging (373). Martha does abate her use of makeup when such action serves her purposes, but though other characters disapprove of her cosmetics, she flouts their censure by continually returning to the “paint pot.”

In contrast, Can You Forgive Her? specifically points out that Arabella does not use rouge. When Bellfield accuses her of giving way too much to grief, she cries and her tears “in their course [show] that she at any rate used no paint in producing that freshness of colour which was one of her great charms” (1.207). Instead, age engineering is a device used to lampoon Bellfield as vain and performatively insincere. Kate writes in a letter: “He paints his whiskers, too, which I don’t like; and, being forty, tries to look like forty-five” (1.139). Despite the other wiles she may use to capture male hearts, Arabella’s beauty as a midlife marriageable woman is presented seriously even though her eventual husband’s aging charms are satirized.

Martha Barnaby is presented as a caricature of sexuality, the feminine grotesque, but Arabella is also an unusual Victorian heroine because she is allowed to be genuinely sexual. When she chooses for pleasure, the text indicates that the pleasure is sexual. She expresses both emotional and physical components of desire and champions them as appropriate for women. Recently, critics have begun to notice and comment upon Arabella’s sexuality. Nardin refers to her as a “sex-starved widow” (130) and notes that the narrator does not censure her interest in sex (134), and George Levine comments that Arabella has an “un-Victorian frankness that’s quite satisfying” (11). Markwick argues
that Trollope’s novels refute the Victorian sexlessness paradigm and finds in Arabella “an open acknowledgment that being in love and desiring to marry is about wanting to touch someone in an intimate way, and about enjoying being touched” (80). Morse finds in Arabella an “obvious sexuality” (9) and argues that while she repressed her “strongly sexual nature” to marry the elderly Greenow, as a widow she “embarks on a new life of freedom and sexual possibility” and finally makes a choice that is sensual rather than moral (10). Through Arabella, Trollope participates in a liberatory discourse for women based not only on his acknowledgment of their libido, but on a discourse of desire for women “of a certain age” who are not virginal but have knowledge brought about by experience.18

Arabella’s avocation of flirting is a publicly permissible expression of her sexuality. Early in her career on the marriage market before her first marriage the narrator notes:

At thirty-four she was still unmarried. She had, moreover, acquired the character of being a flirt; and I fear that the stories which were told of her, though doubtless more than half false, had in them sufficient of truth to justify the character. Now this was very sad, seeing that Arabella Vavasor had no fortune . . . . (1.66-7)

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18 For an interesting discussion of sexuality and scenery in Can You Forgive Her? see Mary Hamer, Writing By Numbers: Trollope’s Serial Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987). Hamer argues that juxtapositions of dramatic and domestic scenery “allow Trollope to investigate the heroine’s feelings by proxy . . . . Thus the account of the Rhine in the early part of the novel allows a long excursion on the seductive sweetness of running waters and thereby suggests how open Alice is to seduction . . . . at the novel’s close . . . . we are more unequivocally reminded of the dangers of surrendering, as we see the excited swimmers do, to the joy of the river’s swift-running current” (116).
The direct address is humorous in its mock seriousness, yet beneath the comedy is realism—Arabella is on the verge of spinsterhood, with no prospects in sight, and she has possibly tainted her chances of making a good match by her flirtatious behavior.

When Arabella becomes a woman of experience, however, flirtation is transformed from pejorative to purgative. She tells Kate, “If I had sons and daughters I should think a little flirting the very best thing for them as a safety-valve” (1.100). Arabella advocates using flirtation in a Foucauldian sense to discipline sexuality. Through coquetry she avoids the dangers of complete free expression and has a means to control rampant sexuality. In her “doctrine on the subject of flirtation” Arabella includes an age dimension: “It seems so natural; why shouldn’t young people flirt? . . . . When people get to be old, there’s a difficulty. They want to flirt with the young people and the young people don’t want them. If the old people would be content to flirt together, I don’t see why they should ever give it up . . . . (1.100). According to Arabella, the young should flirt with the young and the old with the old, and she makes it clear that the term “old” is used in reference to herself. She not only acknowledges midlife sexuality, but proposes that middle-aged libido is so powerful it requires a safety valve to keep it under control.

Randall Craig argues that “Mrs. Greenow’s failure to take the accusation of flirtation seriously—in fact, she defends it—is proof of her incorrigible character and excludes her from polite society” (221). While the narrator presents this as a danger for Arabella when she is an unmarried virgin, as a widow and a woman of experience she is able freely to promote flirtation as reasonable and even prudent. Because she has attained a certain age, Arabella becomes a wise counselor, advocating the performance of sexual
attraction for the “young” as well as the “old” and advising a means of keeping it under control.

When Arabella puts her “doctrine of flirtation” into action, the narrator draws attention to her behavior, not condemning but commenting in a humorous and indulgent manner. She and Bellfield put their heads into the same picnic hamper, which the narrator describes as “innocent by-play” (1.82) and when they repeat the action later in the day, “a great intimacy was thereby produced” (1.88). The narrator addresses the morality of this situation: “I by no means mean to insinuate there was anything wrong in this. People engaged together in unpacking pies and cold chickens must have their heads in the same hamper” (1.88). The narrator’s denial of wrong-doing, of course, suggests that this may indeed be improper, but that only contributes to the production of pleasure in flirtation’s liberties. Arabella knows how to negotiate skillfully the dangerous, and therefore, highly sensual and desirable, space between the appropriate and the vulgar.

Arabella had been critical of Bellfield before this scene, but the narrator tells us after the intimacy over the hamper, “the widow seemed to have laid aside altogether that prejudice of hers” (1.88), so behind the surface labor of unpacking the hamper is the deeper work of productive flirtation that advances the players along the novel’s trajectory of affect. The same narratological move is made when Arabella and Bellfield bend over an album containing pictures of Greenow. Her mourning bonnet touches his whiskers, and their fingers touch over a picture of the deceased. The narrator notes that Arabella knows Charlie Fairstairs and Mr. Cheesacre are watching her, and comments that she “was certainly a woman of great genius and great courage” (1.419). The mock heroism attributed to her is comedic, yet beneath the satiric the narrator calls attention to her art,
her ability to conduct delicate negotiations of attraction as she plays the tension between her two suitors with finesse. By making much of her flirtations, the narrator indulges in them with a sense of pleasure.

Arabella shows her sexuality not only in her flirting, but in her frank references to the human body. She comments on Kate’s ability to attract men, “nothing can be nicer and fresher than you are;—especially since you took to bathing,” and the contrast of Kate’s prudish reply, “Oh, aunt, don’t!” emphasizes Arabella’s boldness about the body (1.75). Arabella also makes an “almost improper allusion” in regard to Charlie Fairstairs when she asks Cheesacre, “Are you so ignorant that you cannot see when a girl’s heart is breaking beneath her stays?”—and this bodily allusion has “quite an effect on Mr. Cheesacre’s sensitive bosom” (2.397). Again we see her skill, and her frank attitude toward sexuality and the human body are productive in advancing her scheme to join Fairstairs and Cheesacre.

Arabella is also developed as sexual when the narrator assumes her desire for physical attractiveness in descriptions of Bellfield. Not only is his face “handsome” with “well arranged features,” but his body is foregrounded when he is described as “a well-made man.” The narrator even suggests a direct sexual appraisal by Arabella when calling attention to “the exquisite shapes of his pseudo-sailor’s duck trousers” (1.79). That Arabella desires a certain kind of male body is acknowledged when Bellfield comments to Cheesacre: “You’re a podgy man, you see, and Mrs. Greenow doesn’t like podgy men” (1.416). Bellfield is portrayed as cognizant that he and his rival are subjects of the female gaze, that Arabella is evaluating their sexual attractions.
Arabella champions the idea that women should be sexually self-actualized. She takes the part of female sexual savant with Kate when she instructs her about how to attract men. Arabella tells Kate of female beauty, “it isn’t that that’s wanted.” She cautions, “There’s a stand-off about some women,–what the men call a ‘nollimy tangere.’” According to Arabella, not only do Victorian women have a “touch me not” attitude, but they “look as though matrimony itself were improper, and as if they believed the little babies were found about in the hedges and ditches.” She finds this attitude is “a deal too backward” (2.240). Arabella believes that women should be sexually informed and should let men know they like and want to be touched. Kate responds, “Yours is a comfortable doctrine, aunt” (2.240). While this argument would not have been plausible from a virginal unmarried woman, from the remarrying widow, a woman of age and experience, it sounds healthy and reasonable and is accepted by the sexual novitiate.

While she promotes female sexuality, Arabella is developed as practical and realistic in her attitude toward romance. She decides that since she has already successfully married for money, now she will “venture on a little love” (2.65). Arabella is a woman of experience, however, and she is not naive about the limitations of romantic feeling. She tells Kate, “... I do like a little romance about them,–just a sniff, as I call it, of the rocks and valleys. One knows that it doesn’t mean much; but it’s like artificial flowers,—it gives a little colour, and takes off the dowdiness. Of course, bread-and-cheese is the real thing” (2.242). Romance, sexuality mixed with affect, is for pleasure, but before one can indulge in this pleasure, one must have the bedrock of monetary stability, the “bread and cheese” that a man like Cheesacre can offer. But, Arabella has provided her own bread and cheese by her first marriage and can now seek pleasure, the
“rocks and valleys” offered by Bellfield. When Bellfield tries to flatter her with high-flown praise, however, she deflates him. He says, “Arabella, you’ll make me the happiest man in the world,” and she responds, “That’s all fudge” (2.251). She will not let Bellfield indulge in romantic hyperbole. Romance is a sensual aesthetic in which she indulges, but she retains her sense of practicality and her level-headed grasp on reality. Because she is a woman of experience, she is portrayed as reasonable and wise, yet at the same time sexual.

When they are engaged to be married, Arabella and Bellfield are described as a romantic couple that is specifically middle-aged and sexual. When they go out walking together, she teases Bellfield that perhaps he will think her too old, but he replies that “she was just the proper age for a walking companion, as far as his taste went” (2.250). This walk is to lead to a kiss—the first overt expression of their sexual attraction, and it is performed with pointed attention to their age. Bellfield kisses Arabella as they are on the high road from Shap to Vavasor, and the narrator comments that because she is still in widow’s weeds and because “neither he nor his sweetheart were under forty, perhaps it was as well that they were not caught toying together in so very public a place” (2.252). This not only again titillates with a hint of impropriety in Arabella’s sexuality, but announces that midlife lovers, because not the expected young couple, should observe certain proprieties. The warning also indicates that their liaison is sexual—in fact, so sexual that it requires privacy when it is expressed. In contrast to Martha who is corpulent, excessive, and ludicrous in her middle aged body, the text presents Arabella as a woman who is both middle-aged and attractive in her sexuality, kissed on the high road.
Arabella revises the proscription against remarriage when she conscripts her deceased spouse to her cause. After her engagement, she tells Alice: “I know that he is looking down upon me, and that he approves all that I do. Indeed, he told me once that he did not want me to live desolate for his sake. If I didn’t feel that he was looking down and approving it, I should be wretched indeed” (2.389). Far from being a buffoon in remarriage, Arabella suggests that even the patriarchy, in the guise of her elderly deceased husband as a godlike figure of approval hovering above her with an avuncular blessing, believes in the practicality and appropriateness of a widow moving out of her grief into a new marriage.

The Denouements of Martha and Arabella

Despite the shift from the comedic to a romance mode, Arabella’s plot is resolved in ways similar to Martha’s. Both widows use a strategy of practical compromise and chose a flirtatious rake for pleasure, but one who will allow them a large measure of independence. This strategy hilariously challenges propriety when practiced by Martha, but is suggestively liberated in the romance plot of Arabella.

Frances Trollope compares the inception of Martha Barnaby’s career as a widow to a young person starting out in life, setting up her story as a midlife bildungsroman that outdoes any more youthful journey of initiation:

We hear much of the beautiful freshness of hope in young hearts just about to make their first trial of the joys of life; but it is quite a mistake to suppose that any such feeling can equal the fearless, confident, triumphant mastery and command of future enjoyment, which dilates the heart, in the case of such an out-coming widow as Mrs. Barnaby. (78)
Frances directs her readers to consider this as a second-chance plot, with experience giving the heroine more appreciation of her situation than a younger heroine would enjoy. Martha is independent, inventive, self-determining, and comically audacious.

Martha decides to marry the would-be missionary Patrick O’Donagough after she has experienced several reverses—the failure of her plan to snag Lord Mucklebury, her arrest for debt, the refusal of the flirtatious lawyer Morrison to render legal help when he discovers her financial problems, and Agnes’s resistance to obeying her commands from prison. These events cause her hopes and expectations to be lowered, vexing her (368). Thus humbled, she decides to make the best match she can with the possibilities open to her. She prudently looks into the affairs of O’Donagough, a penniless but well-connected man, the illegitimate son of a lord who provides him with financial bail-outs. She decides that he will do quite nicely, because not only would “‘The reverend Mr. O’Donagough’ . . . look very well in the paragraph which she was determined should record her marriage in the Exeter paper” (370), but he is handsome and a decade her junior (333). In addition, with O’Donagough she will be able to maintain autonomy by retaining control of her money. They immigrate to Australia and the charming scoundrel suits Martha until his excesses at the horse races lead to his death. Always dexterous in adapting her plans to suit her need of the moment, she manages quite easily on the last page of the novel to make a similar match with another rascal, her old lover, Major Allen, who conveniently turns up in Sydney at the right moment. Martha manages to have it all her own way—obtaining a husband for her pleasure while also retaining her independence.

Arabella’s husband hunt ends in a similar way. Though her forthright determination does seem to usher Arabella through problems with disarming dexterity,
she does not find the marriage market uncomplicated. She settles for a solution in
Bellfield that is problematic yet palatable. She is aware of his limitations as a spouse,
and the struggle she faces as his wife:

he’ll give me a great deal of trouble. I know he will. He’ll always be
wanting my money, and, of course, he’ll get more than he ought . . . And
he’ll smoke too many cigars, and perhaps drink more brandy-and-water
than he ought. And he’ll be making eyes, too, at some of the girls who’ll
be fools enough to let him. (2.241)

The description of her marriage, however, is genuinely laudatory. The narrator
assures us that “Mrs. Greenow’s own marriage was completed with perfect success”
because she “took Captain Bellfield for better or for worse, with a thorough determination
to make the best of his worst.” Bellfield had “had been in luck” to marry her because she
would forgive him, gratify his wants, and keep him from ruining them both” (2.400). As
Morse notes “she certainly does not recognize her ‘better self’ in Bellfield” but “chooses
a weak man whom she can master” (11). King points out that she reinforces the ideology
she challenges by “her contentment with two seriously flawed husbands” (323). This is
not a perfect union, but a compromise between pleasure and prudence made by a woman
with the experience and self-determination to make her own choice. Based on the model
established by the self-determination and worldly success of Martha Barnaby, Arabella is
allowed to achieve midlife affect valorized as appropriate to her needs and age.

Arabella can chose emotion—“the rocks and the valleys”—because she balances
romance with reason. In the other romance plots Alice and Glencora cannot each have
two men, and they must make a choice between passion and prudence. Arabella can have
both a worthy and a wild man because she has married them sequentially. As a widow, a woman of age and experience, she is allowed options not available to her younger counterparts, and she is allowed both sense and sensibility. In her plot, a progressive, gradualist feminism emerges that allows women to exercise the “right” to chose husbands and yet maintain autonomy and control of their own lives in significant ways.

Arabella’s independence is directly attributable to her likeness to Martha Barnaby. Before she began writing novels, Frances Trollope had learned only too well that women must learn to take care of themselves. In Martha, she expresses a transgressive picquaresque feminism that allows a woman to defy the rules and, even when she appears to be thwarted, ultimately succeed in all her campaigns. When Anthony Trollope rewrites the remarrying widow, he allows her to seek out a new life and to achieve midlife affect valorized as appropriate for her needs, part of the nineteenth-century construction of middle age as a space for second chance narratives.

**Madame Max Goesler and The Marriage of Equals**

While Arabella Bellfield’s marriage attains success through compromise, Madame Max Goesler achieves something more. As Jane Nardin argues, Marie Goesler offers “Trollope’s most feminist revision of the genre” of romantic comedy, successfully challenging Victorian patriarchy, and ultimately achieving greater liberty than any other heroine in Trollope’s later novels (193). In *Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux*, Marie changes from a vamp to a self-actualized, independent woman married to her equal.  

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19 Anthony Trollope says *Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux* are “but one novel, though they were brought out at a considerable interval of time and in different forms” (*Autobiography* 203).
Anthony Trollope employs a fictional sleight of hand in order to achieve this ideal union, freezing Marie’s age in early midlife while the other characters grow older around her.

In *Phineas Finn*, Anthony begins by stereotyping the widow as a middle-aged, foreign temptress, the daughter of a German Jewish attorney and the widow of a wealthy Austrian banker. She is introduced as a minor character in the second half of the novel and seems at first to be only an ambitious and crass social climber (Letwin 74). The subject of gossip, she is said to have a second husband and later to be the duke’s mistress. She distances herself from the novel’s other characters by repeatedly making statements such as “You English are so peculiar” (*Finn* 146) and claiming (usually facetiously) to be mystified by the British. Marie’s eroticism also makes her more unEnglish, because it is both ambitious and intentional. She uses her arresting eyes “in a manner which is as yet hardly common with Englishwomen . . . to intend that you should know that she employed them to conquer you” (*Finn* 2.25). Her sexuality is dangerous when the duke is attracted to her, enticed by her exotic quality (Morse 71). His desire is so obvious that Lady Glencora, who fears her son could be supplanted by a new heir, begs Madame Max to drop the seduction.

The narratological gaze lingers on her body via the metonymy of clothing, but in this case, her volitional “unlikeness” is emphasized: her “dress was unlike the dress of other women . . . unlike in make, unlike in colour, and unlike in material” and “the ordinary observer would not see that it was unlike in form for any other purpose than that of maintaining its general peculiarity of character” (*Finn* 2.25-6). Physical description becomes an occasion for a sensuous journey over her body: “My pen may not dare to describe the traceries of yellow and ruby silk which went in and out through the black
lace, across her bosom, and round her neck, and over her shoulders, and along her arms, and down to the very ground at her feet” (Finn 2.26). The enumeration of body parts combined with the “in and out” movement of the eye produces a sexually suggestive passage cloaked as a description of mere silk. The self-conscious narratological voice, denying itself permission to do what it nevertheless does do, signals both the text’s pleasure in the body of the midlife female and its nervousness over her eroticism. Only because she is not a virgin but a woman of age and experience can the text be so sexual with a woman and then later valorize her.

After initially distancing her as a seductress, Anthony revises Madame Max. As Epperly has convincingly argued, “Trollope seems to change his mind about her . . . by the end of Phineas Finn it is clear that Madame Max is both desirable and worthy” (29-30). Epperly states that the change in Madame Max occurs when the reader is allowed into her consciousness and can see her “struggling for position and self-control” (28). When she considers the duke’s marriage proposal, described metaphorically as playing with his coronet in her lap, she still seems a bit conniving. But, as Kincaid observes, her “ruthlessly unsentimental examination of her own feelings” allows her to see that the match would be ludicrous (Finn 211). When she decides to reject his offer, she is portrayed as having both self-knowledge and humility and is never alienated by the text again.

By the end of Phineas Finn, Madame Max has become an appealing figure of female maturity, a woman with a sense of her limitations and abilities, admired for her strength. Her “unlikeness” no longer distances her but begins to signify an admirable uniqueness. As a result of her independence, she has an androgynous quality compared
to other Victorian heroines. In the first description of Marie, Anthony evokes manliness by comparing her to a knight who intends to conquer (Finn 2.25). Critics evaluate her in terms of “masculine” attributes: as Nardin notes, she has qualities which are often attributed to men such as “aggression, foresight, and courage” (193). She enjoys the usually male prerogatives of a business life, involvement in political debate, financial independence, and living alone (Barickman 230-1; Morse 69). She also claims the “male privilege of sexual aggression” when she proposes to Phineas (Nardin 195). Madame Max “refuse[s] to be frustrated and confined by the limits of her sex” and is “entirely independent, fully resourceful, and self-reliant” in financial affairs and later in finding evidence to acquit Phineas (McMaster 178). Shirley Robin Letwin calls Madame Max “the most perfect gentleman in Trollope’s novels” (74). Her androgynous characteristics are used to establish her as a woman of ability and experience and ultimately valorize rather than vilify her.

As Phineas Finn progresses, Marie’s eroticism is transformed from a threat to mature sexual knowledge combined with self-control. Like Arabella Greenow, she advocates flirtation, claiming that croquet is good for boys and girls because it gives them an opportunity to flirt (Finn 2.88), calling for a disciplined sexuality kept from unrestrained expression through the controlled paces of a sedate lawn game. When Glencora suggests that the duke may yet produce an heir, Madame Max laughs—a forthright response that possibly hints at her experiences with waning libido in her previous marriage to an elderly man (Nardin 194). Some critics read her sexuality as progressively feminist, such as Nardin who argues that she “becomes the first of Trollope’s respectable, ‘serious’ female characters to have access to a range of conjecture
upon sexual matters greater than that of the narrator” (194). After her eroticism is transformed, Madame Max is allowed to be both sexual and valorized throughout the rest of the novel.

Transformed from a scheming vamp with unlimited sexual power, Marie is humanized as a woman with fears about her own attractions. Because she is in early midlife, she feels the encroachment of time in regard to her romantic possibilities with Phineas: “She had never yet known what it was to have anything of the pleasure of love. . . . Might there not yet be time left for her to try it without selfishness,—with an absolute devotion of self,—if she could only find the right companion? There was one who might be such a companion” (Finn 2.203). Like Martha Barnaby and Arabella Greenow, she wonders if she is being aged out of the marriage plot but feels constrained by social proprieties from doing anything about it. As a single woman, she is, as she tells Phineas, “the most cabined, cribbed, and confined creature in the world! I have been fighting my way up for the last four years, and have not allowed myself the liberty of one flirtation” (Finn 2.316). Marie finally meets the strictures of time with a direct attack—she proposes to Phineas. Though she transgresses female paradigms and meets with failure, the chapter title, “Madame Max’s Generosity,” suggests that her action is approved by the novel (Morse 79). McMaster argues that “Trollope by no means wants his readers to condemn Madame Max’s offer of herself to Phineas. That is a true and courageous gesture” (169). Glencora even defends the practice of women proposing, saying it is becoming common. While McMaster finds Glencora’s words to be hyperbolic, she also thinks there is “a case in her observation of social change, even if only of that which occurs within the world of Trollope’s novels” (170).
At the close of *Phineas Finn*, Marie is not yet a suitable mate for the protagonist, so in *Phineas Redux* Anthony rewrites her yet again. First, he removes any vampish taint by completely purging her of all foreignness. She no longer draws attention to her un-English origins, and while in *Phineas Finn* she is “that German woman” (2.345), in *Phineas Redux* Marie becomes only “she with the German name” (1.123). Her Jewish background is discussed pejoratively in the first novel, but in the latter she is no longer connected with Judaism. Instead, anti-Semitism is channeled toward Emilius, Lizzie Eustace’s bigamist husband. Madame Max is no longer the subject of gossip and is held in high esteem by others throughout *Phineas Redux*. The narrator tells us, “Credit was given to her everywhere for good nature, discretion, affability, and a certain grace of demeanour which always made her charming. She was known to be generous, wise, and of high spirit” (*Redux* 2.70).

Of more portent than Trollope’s devamping and British assimilation of Marie is the author’s legerdemain with her age (Epperly 24). Anthony insists that with the Phineas books he makes a special effort to register time’s passage and change characters as they age:

> In writing *Phineas Finn* I had constantly before me the necessity of progression in character,—of marking the changes in men and women which would naturally be produced by the lapse of years ... I knew not only their present characters but how those characters were to be affected by years and circumstances. (*Autobiography* 202-3)

Trollope achieves this with Phineas, evolving the naïve political acolyte into a seasoned member of Parliament who addresses the assembly with aplomb and conducts national
business. Phineas's age chronology is consistent; he is twenty-five at the beginning of *Phineas Finn* (1.34), thirty at the end (2.335), and thirty-two at the start of *Phineas Redux* (1.96). Other characters are pointedly aged between the two novels as well. Violet Chiltern has become a mother, and Lady Laura has lived for several years in Dresden to avoid contact with her husband. In contrast to this careful tracking of time's passage with other characters, Madame Max is not allowed to age. When she is introduced midway through *Phineas Finn*, Marie is "probably something over thirty years of age" (2.25), several years older than Phineas, but halfway through *Phineas Redux* she is "hardly yet thirty" (1.267), and later she is said to be a few months younger than Lady Laura (*Redux* 2.225), who is said to be the same age as Phineas, thirty-two (*Redux* 1.96). Therefore, Madame Max has remained the same age or even become a bit younger between the two novels.

This uncharacteristic revision is a fictive magic that uses age equality to make Marie and Phineas more compatible mates by Victorian standards, which usually require an older husband and younger wife. Attraction to a slightly older woman is unpalatable to Phineas when he is first drawn to Lady Laura: "he was by no means in love with Lady Laura,--who was, as he imagined, somewhat older than himself" (*Finn* 1.30). While Marie is older than Phineas she desires their union, but he prefers the youthful Mary Flood Jones. When Marie has been transformed to be same age as her suitor, however, and Phineas is a widower, he prefers the midlife woman.

Chronological age is not the only way in which a woman is aged out of the marriage plot, however. The novel develops a contrast between number of years lived and perceived age in the case of Lady Laura, who loses her attractions due to an
individually distinct experience of aging. The effects of separating herself from her husband cause Lady Laura to look forty while in reality she is twenty-nine (*Finn* 2.346). That this appearance of age disqualifies her for any possible future in the romance plot is evident when Phineas visits her in Dresden. Though they are the same age, he thinks of her as “so much the elder as to be venerable” and concludes that “were she free to marry again to-morrow, he knew that he could not marry her” (*Redux* 1.176). When she does become a widow and is free to remarry, Phineas can only think “how entirely her youth had passed away from her” (*Redux* 1.342). Marie, even before the revision in her age, is consistently portrayed as youthful. The narrator describes her “young and fresh” lips (*Finn* 2.144), Lady Laura calls her “young and pretty” (*Finn* 2.166), and Phineas tells her she is “young and beautiful” (*Finn* 2.319). She flirts with Phineas in age-related terms: “you as a young man can hardly understand how natural it is that a young woman,—if I may call myself young,—should minister to an old man” (*Redux* 1.151). As I discussed in chapter two, age is constructed here as a highly individual experience. Lady Laura is old while Marie is young, and the youthful-looking woman is the one suitable for the marriage plot.

Marie is presented as youthful, but she is also depicted as a mature midlife woman, in contrast to the first Mrs. Finn. Anthony regretted marrying Phineas to the inexperienced Mary Flood Jones. He writes in his autobiography, “I was wrong to marry him to a simple pretty Irish girl, who could only be felt as an encumbrance on such return [to London political life]. I had no alternative but to kill the pretty simple Irish girl which was an unpleasant and awkward necessity” (202). Anthony finds the neophyte inadequate and creates a successor with independence and experience. In order to have a
truly companionate marriage, Phineas must learn to prefer the midlife woman over Mary's "sweet, clinging, feminine softness" (Finn 2.282). As Polhemus argues, his "love changes from Mary, a cute blob of Irish dew bound to fade... to Marie, an active, sophisticated woman with independent spiritual and physical needs, a sharp mind, and an erotic history" ("Being in Love" 395). Morse finds that the contrast between Mary and Marie, a contest between the sophisticated versus the simple woman, shows Anthony's ambivalence toward the feminine ideal (40). Ultimately, Marie is the better choice and, as Morse puts it, a union is achieved by the "strong witty passionate woman mated with a man who appreciates her unconventional qualities and is himself sensitive and sexual" (39).

The middle-aged remarrying widow, seasoned by the past, knows herself better than her counterpart of lesser years and so can achieve more. Instead of acquiescing to the stigma associated with second marriage, Anthony writes one of the most successful unions in the Palliser series as possible because the spouses are experienced. Due to her previous marriage, Marie not only has freedom to choose because of her money, but also the wisdom to desire a companionate union. When given the chance to attain more money and power by marrying the aging Duke, she declines. Phineas, too, is able to find a more fulfilling marriage, because experience has taught him that he needs a more mature wife, a woman who can be his equal.

Madame Max does not have to settle for the compromises of a flawed union like Arabella Greenow. Marie tells Phineas when he proposes to her, "It must be an even partnership" (Redux 2.355), and equality is presented as the ideal. Morse argues that their "easy camaraderie" is evidence of their equality (79), which is physically pictured by
their seated position, holding hands, when Phineas proposes (83). The midlife progress novel is pushed to new heights by Anthony Trollope’s depiction of Madame Max. As Nardin describes it, their marriage is “the Victorian ideal transformed out of recognition” because both can balance involvement and detachment, sharing “power, freedom, professional engagement, and the right to obey conscience on equal terms” (200), forerunners of the two-career marriage of the twentieth century.

Frances Trollope’s presentation of Martha Barnaby as a comic subversion of the restrictions placed upon middle-aged widows on the marriage market is sustained throughout the Widow Barnaby series. Anthony Trollope’s plots incorporate fissures and revisions—from Arabella Greenow’s satiric story converted to seriousness, to the transformation of both Arabella and Madame Max from flirts to valorized women. Whether comedic or satiric, the fictive midlife of these women on the marriage market challenges narratives of inevitable decline. The course of female middle age is both reflected and directed by these novels in a world where second-chance progress narratives thrive.

In this discussion of remarrying widows as well as in the former chapter on age anxiety in nineteenth-century novels, I have explored the importance of marriageability to concepts of midlife in fiction. Fertility and marital viability are obviously linked in these texts, though the subject is referenced only obliquely. In the following chapter, I will consider how the medical discourse of fertility complicated issues of midlife loss and gain through the rhetoric of male and female menopause.
Chapter Four

Midlife Sexuality and the Change of Life

in the Nineteenth Century

In the 1990s, menopause became a hot topic. Hundreds of books began to appear—Amazon.com lists over three hundred titles relating to menopause published in the 1990s and first few months of 2000. The major concern of most of these books is the inevitability versus avoidability of symptoms through diet, exercise, and/or hormone therapy. But, though menopause is a physiological rite of passage inherent to female midlife whose obvious indications are biological, it eludes a merely physical definition. In the medical community, the social sciences, and humanities, as well as in popular culture, a great debate rages about menopause as a newly “medicalized” aspect of female life and the extent to which it is culturally or biologically determined.

Anthropological studies that investigate cultural differences in menopausal symptoms and ailments report a surprising variation between cultures and classes.¹ For example, Margaret Lock reports that in Japan, the most typical symptoms of the menopause or kōnenki are shoulder stiffness, headaches, and dizziness, and the most common complaints of western menopause—hot flashes and night sweats—are hardly reported at all (“Deconstructing” 63). As Dona Davis points out, the question is not as simple as whether symptoms are real are imagined. The physical signs of menopause are produced within a complex cultural matrix that can render them either “a) biologically experienced but not recognized or culturally elaborated; b) not recognized and therefore not experienced, or c) simply not physically present in the population” (73).

¹ See essays by Davis, Lock, Kearns, Wright, and Beyene for studies that use an anthropological and biocultural approach to establish cultural differences in menopausal symptoms.
The cacophony of voices raised in menopausal discussion is not limited to women’s issues. A dozen or so titles on male menopause appeared in the 1990s addressing male hormonal changes and therapies, fears of waning sexual potency and physical decline, re-evaluation of self and the first half of life, the sense that time is running out, methods for regaining youthfulness, and treatments for depression.² Books on female change of life beget those about males: Cheryl Solimini’s tongue-in-cheek title, *The Not-So-Silent Passage: How to Manage Your Man’s Menopause*, is a spin-off from the name of the most well-known 90s text on female change of life, *The Silent Passage: Menopause* by Gail Sheehy. An abundance of information is even available on the internet at websites such as www.malemenopause.com, a promotional tool of a publishing company that includes *Male Menopause* among its titles, and provides the hopeful information that male change of life is “the passage to the most passionate, powerful, productive, and purposeful time of a man's life.” Though male menopause has not become the darling of publishing houses like the female version, it is increasingly well represented by a discourse of its own.

Both the medicalization of female menopause and the rise of male menopause are usually understood to be issues of the late twentieth century. Sociologists, anthropologists, and feminist theoreticians have argued that female menopausal disorders in themselves are a cultural construction of recent origin and did not exist to any significant extent in populations of the past.³ “Male menopause”—a term first articulated in the U.S. in a 1973 *New York Times Magazine* article and in Great Britain in a 1975 Michael Parkinson television show—seems to be a specifically twentieth-century idea

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(Hepworth and Featherstone 36). However, the discourse of menopause for both males and females has a much longer history. Medical historian Michael Stolberg shows that physicians’ writings dating from the fifteenth century forward contain discussions of menopausal symptoms as a common feature of women’s lives in western culture. The topic received only moderate attention as an adjunct to general reproductive health matters until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the quantity and character of medical menopause discourse underwent a major change that, among other things, recast female menopause as a gain instead of a loss (Stolberg 405). In addition, by the end of the Victorian era revisions to concepts of female menopause had resulted in the formulation of a theory of male “change of life,” the source of later concepts of male menopause in the twentieth century.

In this chapter, I will explore how nineteenth-century concepts of menopause were used to construct midlife sexuality. The change of life gained a new prominence in nineteenth-century medical discourse, which led to new theories of menopause generated in response to eighteenth-century reconfigurations of the body and sexual difference. Based on the new concept of incommensurability of the sexes, male and female sexuality were constructed as entirely different in the nineteenth century. For middle-aged women, this meant that menopause was seen as a troubled period increasingly linked to physical and mental illness. In contrast, for most of the century male sexuality and fertility were figured as fairly immune to aging, necessitating only some cautious moderation to remain functional. Post-menopause, women were seen as sexless androgynes, which was considered a gain because they were, thereby, considered to be more like men—men, that is, with a depleted and dormant sexuality. At the turn of the century, however, in

\[\text{In addition to the essays mentioned in footnote number one, see also Bell.}\]
response to theories of female menopause, a corresponding discourse of change of life for men began to depict males as undergoing a loss of fertility and potency at midlife. Men were then written into the same mixture of sexual deterioration and emotional and physical gain outlined for women. Midlife sexuality came to be governed less by gender and more by the concept of fertility’s cessation instituting a new stage of passionless quietude and fulfillment for both males and females. Gender, which had been the determining factor in the experience of midlife sexuality throughout the nineteenth century, was replaced by age as the more potent influence when the paradigm of male menopause figured men and women as analogous.

**Pre-Nineteenth Century Conceptions of Menopause**

Concepts of menopause until late in the eighteenth century were dominated by two overarching concepts: a one-sex model of the human body and the humoric theory of Galen. As Thomas Laqueur explains, since at least the time of the ancient Greeks, male and female bodies were considered to be “hierarchically, vertically, ordered versions of one sex”—variations on a normative prototype fully represented by the male (10). Female reproductive organs were considered simply an internal version of a male’s, the vagina an inverted penis, the uterus a type of scrotum, and the ovaries homologous to the testicles.

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4 Sybylla, in her comparison of nineteenth- and twentieth-century menopause ideology, argues that she wants to demonstrate that “the truths of menopause are contingent . . . relative to our time and culture,” while at the same time avoiding any claims for historical improvement in our understanding, discussing instead how our ideas on the change of life reflect wider power relations within culture (2). In the same manner, I will not argue that progress has been made in the development of menopause ideology but will discuss various historical models as paradigms that show the socially constructed nature of menopause in its changing forms in nineteenth-century Great Britain. I agree with Stolberg’s statement about the relationship between historical and current theories of menopause: “Rather than illustrating ideas of a linear progress of medicalization, the medical history of menopausal disorders appears as a history of changing and competing concepts, each based on a different theory of menstruation and the female body, organized around a somewhat different set of symptoms and diseases, and commanding different prophylactic and therapeutic approaches. Seen from this perspective, the modern, primarily hormonal understanding of menopause and its effects is only a product of the latest of these reconfigurations, though many physicians today undoubtedly would maintain that it is the first to be true to nature” (11).
In fact, the ovaries were denoted by the same terms used for the testes until the seventeenth century (Laqueur 4, 6). Both male and female bodies were thought to be governed by Galen’s first century A.D. theory of the humors. According to Galen, the body was composed of four humors—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, all of which had to be properly mixed. As one of the four humors, blood was considered to be an essential element of the human constitution that required proper regulation. When a plethora or excess of peccant blood and other extraneous toxins built up in the system, it was purged by bleeding from any bodily orifice or artificially produced by such methods as leeching and phlebotomy. The fact that only women menstruated was explained by the notion that females had less “heat” than males so were less physically active and less able to digest and incorporate food into the body. As a result, they required the monthly purgation of the menses. Males were also considered subject to plethora, and bleeding from any part of the body—either naturally or with medical intervention—was considered a substitute for menstruation until well into the eighteenth century. Nosebleeds and hemorrhoidal bleeding, for example, were considered to be substitute menses (Laqueur 107).

Because post-menopausal women were considered to be filled with an unreleased plethora, they were seen as “plugged vessels” suffering from sluggishness, accumulations of fat, and bodily stagnation due to the excess toxins in their bodies. In addition, before the Enlightenment women were considered to have highly charged libidos, and in an exact inversion of the later stereotype, were seen as having limitless desires of the flesh while male desire was associated primarily with friendship (Laqueur 3-4). Though a woman after menopause was considered still to have rampant sexual desires, she was no
longer considered a fit sexual partner because she was filled with impurities (Stolberg 407, 426).

This understanding of post-menopausal women as poisonous was also a product of misogynistic beliefs that cast the menstruating woman and menstrual blood itself as toxic and dangerous, as can be seen in the following graphic warning about the hazards of menstrual blood from 1672:

The penis of one who cohabits with a menstruating woman will become excoriated. If a vine shoot is handled (by a menstruating woman) it is permanently injured (while) fruit trees which are touched become sterile . . . If a pregnant woman steps over another’s menstrual discharge, she aborts . . . The breath and moisture (of a menstruating woman’s mouth) obscures (destroys) the brightness of mirrors and ivory. Dogs who taste (lick) menstrual blood become rabid . . . It is for this reason that the ancients regarded it as a poison even of equal malignancy of that of elephant’s blood. (trans. by Wilbush, “Climacterie” 10)

The belief that menstrual blood was poisonous began to be moderated in the sixteenth century, but the idea persisted that an excess quantity of blood during and after menopause caused problems for women. Increasingly, disease began to be linked with the change of life (Stolberg 409).

The perceived menopausal plethora and resultant diseases were treated by attempts at reducing the quantity of excess blood. Physicians employed emmenagogues or agents considered to promote a renewed menstrual flow, as well as leeches which were applied to the external genitalia or cervix to alleviate blood quantity. “Vicarious
menstruation” was created through causing hemorrhoids to bleed. Phlebotomies or the drawing of blood, as well as cupping, which draws blood from the skin by a glass vessel evacuated with heat, were also practiced. The plethora was believed to be lessened by other types of bodily excretions as well, so purgatives, vesicatories that caused blistering, and cauterization of the skin by hot iron or other agents that burn, sear, or destroy skin tissue were used for sloughing off excess internal matter. Sweating and bathing were also used for this purpose (Wilbush, “Climacteric” 3). Because of the humoric theory of excess blood, the post-menopausal woman could be subject to such treatments for the rest of her life, but especially in late midlife when blood levels were seen to be most disturbed by menopause.

A New Paradigm for Menopause in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century saw a moderation in this rather painful view of menopause, though the new formulation contained atrocities of its own. The nineteenth-century understanding of menopause was based on two developments in eighteenth-century thought—a rejection of both the one-sex model of the body and Galen’s humoric theory. The one-sex male prototype model was replaced by the concept of males and females as two different types, and the idea of “the opposite sex” was born. As Laqueur explains it:

Organs that had shared a name—ovaries and testicles—were now linguistically distinguished. Organs that had not been distinguished by a name of their own—the vagina, for example—were given one. Structures that had been thought common to man and woman—the skeleton and the nervous system—were differentiated so as to correspond to the cultural
male and female . . . Women’s bodies in their corporeal, scientifically accessible concreteness, in the very nature of their bones, nerves, and, most important, reproductive organs, came to bear an enormous new weight of meaning. Two sexes, in other words, were invented on a new foundation of gender. (149-50)

Laqueur points out that this new understanding is not due to scientific discoveries about the physical body—many of those were to come later as a result of curiosity about the nature of woman and man resulting from the new concepts. Instead, the genesis of the change rested on an epistemological shift away from belief in the great chain of being in which woman existed below man as a lesser type of the same created entity (19, 151). In addition, intrinsic to the two-sex model are developments such as evangelical religion and Enlightenment political theory of the social contract, both of which focus on the supposed incapacities of women and use their sexual difference as the basis for their subordination (11, 157). The concept of woman as the sexual “opposite” of man is the basis of nineteenth-century theories of women as sexually “other”--reproductively more complicated, diseased, and hysterical than men as well as the idea that they are, in their normal state, passionless. From this concept of women grew theories of menopause as a special and complicated female disease.

Another basis of the new nineteenth-century understanding of menopause was the late eighteenth-century questioning and dismissal of humoric theory. Hippocratic humoralism was replaced by the revivial of Asclepiadean solidism. Asclepiades of Bithynia, a second century physician, had argued against Hippocrates’s concept of the humors in favor of Democritus’s atomic theory that traced the etiology of disease to
relaxed states of solid particles that make up the body ("Asclepiades Of Bithynia"). As a result of the renewed interest in solidism, menstruation was no longer looked at as a hydraulic event, a flow that rid the body of poisons, and came to be understood as a result of glandular activity. The removal of impurities from body was still an issue but the influence of the uterus and/or ovaries became primary rather than the issue of a plethora. The uterus was seen as a highly irritable organ linked to all other organs through the central nervous system. By the mid-nineteenth century, Edward Tilt credited the ovaries with influence over the entire female body “through the medium of the nerves” during the years of fertility. Tilt proposed that an “ovarian aura” must maintain an appropriate amount of influence over the female system in order for health to be maintained during the years of fertility (11). The female central nervous system was viewed as more delicate and easily disturbed than that of the male, and menstruation and menopause came to be seen as potentially pathological events (Stolberg 416).

With menopause, the dominion of the uterus and ovaries was seen to end. In 1879, Charles Evans explained that menopause is caused when, at about forty-five to fifty, the vesicles of the ovaries “are unable to approach the surface of the organ; they exist, but they are imprisoned, their development is arrested they shrink or disappear; the powers of regeneration and reproduction are therefore lost” (16). Tilt attributed menopause to ovarian involution, an age-induced degeneration. With the waning of the ovarian aura, women experience menopausal symptoms such as “uneasy sensations” in the stomach, feelings of sinking, and fainting (11). In the nineteenth century, the earlier theory of toxic blood was entirely displaced by the idea of glandular influence that figured women as completely different from men. Because men did not have ovaries and
uteruses, and their reproductive organs were no longer seen as analogous to women’s, the male was considered to inhabit an unperturbed fertility after puberty which was only moderated by the coming of great age.

The Rise of A Menopause Discourse

This change in the theory of menopause is evidenced by and constructed in a menopause discourse that proliferated at an unprecedented rate in the nineteenth century. Since classical times, medical discourse had been made up of commentary on previous work, and because menopause was not a traditional topic, it had garnered little attention in medical treatises (Stolberg 413). A change of life discourse began to develop in eighteenth-century Europe and spread to the rest of the western world. Early in the 1700s, German monographs appeared on the subject, and by the end of the century the discussion was dominated by French authors. (Stolberg 412). The discourse was taken up by English writers as well--John Freind published a book on menstruation in 1703, and John Fothergill’s 1774 paper, “Of the Management Proper at the Cessation of the Menses” was the earliest British treatise solely on menopause. The rise in interest in menopause as a medical topic in its own right is evident by the end of the eighteenth century in the marked increased in discourse which is aimed specifically at the change of life, instead of being subsumed under discussions of menstruation and reproductivity in general.

5 The first treatise on menopausal disorders was a thesis for the University of Magdeburg at Halle in Saxony in February 1710, written by Simon Daniel Titius. In 1722 and 1737 two additional theses were presented at the University of Leiden by Buhl and Regemann (Wilbush, “Climacteric” 1).

6 Freind believed in the plethora theory, which he attributed to women’s manner of life because they stayed indoors with little exercise. Freind saw the uterus as the most suitable organ for sloughing off the plethora of blood, but he believed that after the menses ceased this process was accomplished by bleeding from the nose or lungs. Freind wrote that with age the plethora was neither gathered or released, the uterine blood vessels becoming too hardened. Any residual plethora was either released by other types of bodily evacuations, or stored in excess body fat (Formanek 7-8).
In the nineteenth century, gynecology became a distinct branch of medicine, and Tilt's *The Change of Life in Health and Disease*, the first book-length British study of menopause, appeared in 1857, establishing the change of life as a prominent medical topic in Great Britain. Tilt emphasizes that the discourse was international and presents French experts such as Gardanne, Bierre de Boismont, Dusourd, and Menville as his predecessors in this work, crediting Recamier as beginning the science of gynaecology in 1816 (ii). He also mentions the contributions of Americans and includes statistical information on research done in India, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Lapland, and Russia.\(^7\)

The creation of the term “menopause” is a product of the new discourse, coined by the French physician Gardanne in 1812 as *ménopause* and later shortened to *ménopause* in 1821. The word was known throughout Europe and America by the 1840s, and began to appear in British medical dictionaries late in the 1880s (Wilbush, “Climacterie” 5, “La Menopause” 148). Before that time, what we now call menopause was referred to in Britain as “the change of life,”\(^8\) the “critical time,” the “turn of life” or “turn of years.” If menopause was of a protracted nature instead of characterized by a sudden cessation, the period during which menses waxed and waned was known as the “dodging time” (Webster 36, Chevasse 182, Ashwell 148\(^9\)). In accord with his inclusion

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\(^7\) Unlike most other theorists, I concentrate on British texts in this account, which is a rather artificial separation of a discourse that developed in several countries simultaneously. Twentieth-century age theorists Featherstone and Hepworth use American and English texts together when discussing the history of menopause literature, describing it as a cross-national development, while Stolberg and Wilbush both conflate European and British works and discuss the impact of continental works on England, especially that produced in France.


\(^9\) Though Ashwell’s book, *A Practical Treatise on the Diseases Peculiar to Women*, was published in Philadelphia, Ashwell himself was a member of the Royal College of Physicians in London and obstetric physician and lecturer to Guy’s Hospital. Therefore, I have included his text as part of the British body of works on menopause.
of international concepts of menopause, Tilt lists not only the English term “climacteric disease,” but “climacteria” in Latin, “temps critique” and “age de retour” in French, and “Aufhören der Weiblichen Reinigung” in German (7). The creation of the new internationally recognized medical term “menopause” is etymological evidence for the prominence that the change of life achieved due to the nineteenth-century rise in discourse.

The increase in discussion of menopausal disorders and higher incidence of reporting about them among physicians has caused some theorists to argue that menopause was actually created as a disease in the nineteenth century and was not considered to be linked with physical disorders before that time. Wilbush argues that because “[n]o menopausal disturbances were . . . recorded until the social convulsions of the French Revolution” the influence of that movement and the regimes which followed “seem to have crystallized the various complaints of the climacteric into a disease-expression” (“La Menopause” 145). According to Wilbush, because of the increased sexual license during and after the French Revolution, menopausal French women “lost possessions and status and were about to lose their last asset, their sexual attraction;” therefore, they began to see themselves as ailing, sought out medical attention, and created the concept of menopause as a disease (“Climacteric” 4).10

However, Stolberg’s study of early modern Latin and vernacular writing on female reproduction and disease, the body of work that served as the basis for western medical treatises on the topic, shows that early modern physicians did conceive of

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10 The misogynistic overtones of Wilbush’s argument, which assumes that with the loss of fertility women also lose their ability to be sexually attractive, is highly troubling in an academic text published in 1988. His argument also has other problematic limitations—statements such as “Science, medicine, and women believed that . . . sexual ageing . . . accompanied the climacteric . . .” are not backed up by any
menopause as associated with certain disorders. He argues that "[t]here is little evidence that, apart from the changing age structure of the population, the actual frequency of menopausal disorders rose in the eighteenth century" (413). He attributes the increase in medical interest in menopause to the establishment of gynecology and obstetrics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though he concedes that there was probably a slight pathologization of menopause as a result of the increased medical discourse and interest about the topic (413).

The rise in menopause discourse was a product of the Victorian penchant for scientific data, and statistical studies of menstruation and menopause were begun in an attempt to establish the parameters of a "normal" reproductive cycle for women. The intricacy of statements on age of onset attests to medical writers' desire to establish a reliable norm backed by research data. An example is J. C. Webster's detailed summary of his findings from 1892: "in about one-half of the women in this country, the change occurs between the ages of 45 and 50; in about one-quarter, between 40 and 45; in about one-eighth, between 35 and 40; and in the same between 50 and 55. In a few recorded cases the age is as low as 20 to 30, or as high as 70, 80, or even higher" (38). Other writers propose various chronological age spans for menopause, Ryan (1841) placing the change at the forty-fifty to fiftieth year (287), Moore (1866) between the ages of forty-four and fifty-two (48), and Laycock (1840) from forty-two to forty-nine (Jalland 287). Chevasse (1880) gives forty-five as the average age of menopause (175), while Tilt (1883 edition) argues that though menopause is usually expected between forty and fifty, when this number is normalized by taking out cases of unusual illness, the "normal date of
cessation” is likely to be under forty-five years (12-3). Stolberg’s recent research corroborates, finding forty-five to be the average age of cessation in both French and English texts (428).11 In addition to a concern with statistical measures of menopause onset, abundant data was offered as to the variations of length and severity of menopause. By establishing statistical parameters of menopause, physicians made it scientifically quantifiable and therefore seemingly more easily understood and controlled.

The Status of Menopause in the Nineteenth Century

Margaret Lock points out that some age theorists have argued that because the average life expectancy for women in the nineteenth century was about forty-seven or forty-eight, women rarely lived past middle age and most of them did not even experience menopause. For example, biologist Roger Gosden and gynecologist John Dewhurst portray postmenopausal women before the twentieth century as “anomalies of nature,” seen to be unsuited to live beyond the years of fertility. According to this argument, post-menopausal women were a new phenomenon in the twentieth century and not a significant factor in the Victorian era or at any previous time. Lock counters, however, that mean life expectancy is misunderstood in this paradigm (“Deconstructing” 52). If women lived past the dangerous years of infancy and survived into young adulthood reaching age twenty, their life expectancy was in the sixties (Wilbush, “Climacteric” 2, “La Menopause” 145). Lock points out that nineteenth-century medical texts make it clear this was understood (“Deconstructing” 52). Menopause was a phenomenon well known and experienced in nineteenth-century culture, and post-

11 It is interesting to note that earlier writers, whose texts were often the basis for later work of western physicians, usually found menopause to occur between 40 and 50. In the fourth century, Aristotle considered 40 as the average age of menopause, though he stated it could occur until the fiftieth year. In
menopausal women were an established feature of British populations. Menopause was considered a common and significant event of the female life cycle.

Smith Rosenberg argues in 1985 that with menopause, nineteenth-century women were considered to enter old age (192). Most of these women, however, would be only in their forties. Tilt's nineteenth-century comments challenge this idea, however, and make it clear that he does not consider the change of life to signal the advent of old age: "it is necessary to guard against a prejudice firmly rooted in the minds of many, that the change of life is synonymous with old age; for the principles of treatment applicable to diseases of old age are not always suitable to those of the change of life" (34).

Menopause was a feature of middle age, for some even late middle age, but in and of itself, it did not constitute the beginning of a new life stage according to age grading. It did signal, however, a change from a state of fertility to infertility for women, and this was a significant passage to which sexual and social meanings were assigned.

Symptoms and Treatment

In the nineteenth century, the old fear of menstrual blood was reformulated into a paradigm that equated the female reproductive cycle with physical debility (Formanek 4). Menopause was considered a fraught period that intensified the complaints experienced during the menses, a time of excessive irritation and internal turmoil (Stolberg 426). Nineteenth-century menopause discourse writes women into a period of physical decline manifested in a myriad of physical symptoms. Digestive disorders such as stomach pain, vomiting, and diarrhea are seen to be frequent, as well as headaches, feelings of being stuck with pins, numbness, giddiness, fainting, sinking feelings, and drowsiness (Tilt 29,

the sixth century, Aetius of Amida argued that menopause occurred between 35 and 50. In medieval Europe, the age of menstrual cessation was considered to be on average at age 50 (O'Dowd 317).
Cancerous tumors and pulmonary diseases are an increased risk at this time (Mason 289). Sympathetic bleedings from extra-uterine parts of the body are seen as “compensating discharges” (Tilt 26, Galabin 297). Hot “flushes” (like our current “hot flashes”) and cold chills are both reported, but “flushings” are most common, seen to be a form of necessary fluid release (Galabin 297). Chevasse reports these phenomena are connected; the menopausal woman experiences “great flushings of heat; she, as it were, blushes all over . . . goes very red and hot, almost scarlet; then perspires; and afterward becomes cold and chilly.” These “flushings,” he believes, serve as a purgative because they are an “effort of nature to relieve itself through the skin” (183).

Another manifestation considered to be a common side effect of menopause is, as Ryan describes it, that women become “remarkably corpulent” (288). Ashwell believes that menopausal weight gain is a result of an “increased congestion” of internal organs (149-50). Tilt explains that the “evident effect of the change of life is to remodel the female frame, so that health may be made consistent with the absence of an habitual drain” and the result of no longer having the purgative effects of menstruation is obesity. Tilt backs up this theory with statistical evidence: “Quetelet found that woman attains her average maximum of weight at fifty, when she has ceased to have children; whereas this average maximum of weight is reached by man at forty” (28).

A menopausal change in female sexuality is another factor also considered in nineteenth-century texts. Tilt argues that “injudicious use of the reproductive organs” can cause menopausal problems, so that single (and, by inference, sexually inactive) women suffer less complications than those who are married. He therefore also advises
against marrying during the menopausal years (31). While some women report an augmentation of sexual desire during menopause, the much more common case is considered to be a slackening of sexual interest (Tilt 40, Webster 46).

Along with these physical symptoms comes a link between menopause and emotional or, in nineteenth-century parlance, “nervous” disorders. This is based on the theory that the uterus communicates to the brain through nerves and blood vessels (Formanek 19). A “sympathy” was thought to exist between uterus and mind which led to the association of mental disturbances with menstruation and menopause (Wilbush “La Menespausie” 147). Because of their dominion over the body and brain, a woman’s reproductive organs, which undergo trauma during menopause, can produce side effects ranging from slight emotional upsets and minor behavioral changes to fully developed hysteria. Menopause came to be associated with a risk of insanity (Formanek 14).

Examples for nineteenth-century medical texts are easy to find, ranging from mild depression to complete mental derangement. Barnes lists impairment of memory, mental irritability, and restlessness as frequently accompanying menopause (291). Chevasse associates menopausal “flushings” with “symptoms of hysteria” (183). Ashwell writes that “functional derangements of the brain and nervous system” are the most numerous of the symptoms that “accompany catamenial deline” (149) and sees nervous and hysterical symptoms as common. Associated problems are “timidity, a dread of serious disease, irritability of temper, a disposition to seclusion, impaired appetite and broken sleep, with physical weakness and inquietude” (149). For Webster, “[a]mong the most striking phenomena [of menopause] are those relating to the character and disposition.” At the change of life, there is a “depression of vital energy, the woman losing her former spring
and vigour. She takes less interest in work, becoming often indifferent to pleasures or duties, which once greatly interested her.” The extrovert may become shy and the impulsive restrained during this period, while some become “dejected and downcast,” fearing illness. Irritability, peevishness, restlessness, lack of concentration, and hypochondria often occur, and for those who are susceptible, hysteria is common (41-2). Tilt believes that ovarian influence in both menses and the change of life is felt as “continued fretfulness, peevishness, and capriciousness . . . a temporary perversion of moral feeling, or by moral insanity . . . motiveless high spirits or depression, by delirium, then called hysterical . . . the mental faculties . . . for a time in a state of misty haziness; the brain feels muddled, memory is faithless, [and] there is an unconquerable desire to sleep during the day . . .” (12). Equations of menopause with mental and emotional debility placed late midlife women into a decline ideology of risk and danger.

The advent and cessation of menstruation were considered periods of life that “both exert important influence on the constitution” because in both there is an increased liability of disease and in the case of menopause an increased rate of mortality (West 18). The conduct and outcome of menopause were also considered to be predictive of a woman’s future health. This idea is based on the influential arguments of Tilt, who believed that menopause not only ends the period of uteran irritation, but determines what will follow: “the change of life not only terminates critically many complaints of the preceding years, but it governs the state of health during the whole subsequent period of life; so much so, that from the manner in which this crisis is accomplished, I believe it

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12 Although West’s book was published in Philadelphia, the title page identifies him as a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and an examiner in midwifery at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, physician-accoucheur to St. Bartholomew’s Hospital; therefore, I include his text as a contribution to British medicine.
possible to predict whether, in after life, health will be good or bad” (9). In addition, the onset of menstruation can be predictive of the nature of its cessation: “Menstruation is likely to end as it begins, and the storms at puberty foretell a stormy change of life. Disease which precede first menstruation may be expected to precede its cessation . . .” (Tilt 31). Chevasse agreed with Tilt, writing that the change of life “is one of the most important periods of a lady’s existence, and generally determines whether, for the rest of her days, she shall either be healthy or otherwise” (183). 13

Burnet assigns some agency to women and their ability to control menstrual disorders through wise health practices. He discusses menstruation as a monthly purification that is analogous to baling out a leaky ship—it is an outlet for disease and germs. When the menses stop, danger is rife: “many of the ailments at and after the menopause seem to me to be, so to speak, nature’s wreakings of wrathful vengeance for persistent disobedience during the previous course of the life” (27-8). If a woman has a good constitution and has guarded her health, she will survive menopause well, but if she has problems, they can be traced back to her past life, even her early childhood (159). He sums up his philosophy: “The fundamental idea underlying this little work is that an absolutely healthy woman changes without any ills or ailings whatever, and therefore a normal woman, married or maiden, who has no disease or disease taint, has nothing to fear from the change of life. The period will cease as it began, almost imperceptibly: it just leaves off, and there is an end of it” (154). This theory, while offering women hope that they can have some control over the progress of menopause, also would accuse them

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13 Though Chevasse’s book was published in the United States, he was a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, England.
of causing their own problems if they suffer from menopausal symptoms. It is easy to imagine that such counsel would only have increased women’s anxiety.

Besides the conduct of early puberty and constitutional proclivities for menopausal disorders, Tilt considers that individual temperament plays an important role. Women of “lymphatic” or sluggish temperament can benefit from menopause because “their colder nature is less liable to bilious and to nervous disorders, which the blood that could ill be spared every month is turned to the strengthening of the frame.” Those of a sanguine, or active and cheerful temperament are more at risk in menopause because they “are naturally most liable to plethora, and therefore to floodings and other hemorrhages” but they are also most amenable to treatment. Maintaining a healthy constitution is the best way to guarantee a trouble-free menopause according to Tilt (32).

Environmental and class factors were also considered determiners of menopausal outcome by nineteenth-century physicians. Climate was seen as important—in warmer locations, menstruation was considered both to begin and to cease at an earlier age than in cold climates (Formanek 27). The pace and pressures of upper-class urban life were believed to cause menopausal disturbance (Stolberg 419). Ashwell argues that the general opinion that menopause is accompanied by disease is wrong and blames any problems experienced on the poor health practices of the upper class:

there are healthy women, who pass over this time without any inconvenience, and many whose indisposition is both transient and slight. That this does not more constantly happen, arises from the fact, that nature and health are often sacrificed (sic) to fashion and luxury . . . the ills attendant on catamenial decline, are attributable not to necessity, but
mainly to habits, unwisely begun, and still more unwisely continued.

(148)

Ashwell disagrees with Tilt's more deterministic arguments that a difficult menstrual onset necessitates a difficult cessation; menopausal disorders are caused by health and social habits and can be prevented. Tilt argues that rural French women rarely report disorders at the change of life, because their situation gives them general good health. In contrast, the urban poor, who must suffer "[t]he necessity for working hard, the anxieties of poverty, the impossibility of escaping the annoyance of children" have more problems with menopause than other women. He also mentions certain occupations among the working class, such as those of book-folders and catgut-makers, that increase menopausal disturbance because of many hours spent in "close, damp, and heated rooms" (32).

Despite concessions of the possibility that menopause could be a healthy and symptom-free experience, all menopause texts concentrate on symptoms and diseases associated with the cessation of menstruation, indicating that such problems were to be expected. As Ashwell states it, "Menstruation may with truth be said to be a function of the highest importance to women; so intimately connected with the whole of their economy, that its partial or entire suppression, may and does often induce serious and sometimes fatal disease" (14). The entire body is seen to be affected by the end of fertility, as Ashwell explains: "there is scarcely any organ or part of the body, and the statement is particularly true of the uterine system, which may not suffer from acute or chronic inflammation as the direct or remote consequence of this great change" (150-1). Though Tilt argues that "the majority of women pass through the change with little or no suffering" (40), he devotes many pages of his book to a discussion of menopausal
disorders and believes that with the presence of certain factors, the change of life “may be characterized by very complicated morbid phenomena” (30). Tilt lists 116 “morbid liabilities” he has found in his study of 500 menopausal women, though he states that only the first twenty-five are “common complaints” of the change (29-30). Barnes asserts that “[p]robably few women pass through this epoch without some nervous perturbation” (291).

The idea that menopausal women were automatically diseased and dangerous—a fear based on lingering of the old plethora model—was a common attitude among both men and women in the nineteenth century. Therefore, the trend among nineteenth-century physicians was to underplay the dangers of the change in order to reassure the public (Stolberg 420). Despite the connections that physicians saw between menopause and disease, Featherstone and Hepworth have found that the “tone of nineteenth-century literature on the change of life tends to be relentlessly optimistic,” and the intent of physicians was to “dispel the aura of anxiety surrounding middle age which they believed stemmed from an ill-informed and misleadingly negative stereotype of the effects of the change of life circulating amongst the general public” (“History” 250). But, while women were urged not to fear, they were also encouraged to seek medical help (Stolberg 419). The result of this guarded optimism on the part of the medical community was that doctors’ attempts to dispel the gloom surrounding menopause by presenting it as a natural function tended to lessen its association with disease, but they also simultaneously increased its identification with illness by medicalizing it, asserting that it was a potentially dangerous yet controllable passage that should be negotiated only with medical advice (Stolberg 419).
Another result of the medical discourse was an increasingly informed public awareness about menopause issues, especially among women. Nineteenth-century physicians argued that, in order to better negotiate “the change,” women should be given more information so they could understand the process their bodies were going through. This was considered imperative due to the complex and significant nature of menopause in women’s lives: “[t]he phenomena met with at this period are so varied in character, the changes in the reproductive system of woman so profound, and their relation to many conditions of disease so intimate, that it is very desirable that the female sex should be put in possession of the fullest information on the subject” (Webster 36). A general knowledge of the change and its diseases and complications would help women avoid fearfulness and “face their troubles bravely, calmly, and patiently” (Webster 50-1). Understanding the conditions of menopause was seen to be a way of granting women some control over the menopausal years, though they were always to be under a doctor’s supervision: “It would be well if they were made to understand that if in tolerable health, provided they will conform to judicious rules, they have only blessings to expect from the change of life” (Tilt 40).

Nineteenth-century methods of treatment were aimed at alleviating what were believed to be the physical and emotional causes of distress. On a purely physical level were techniques for counteracting the effects of a bodily plethora. Though humoralism had been questioned since the eighteenth century, a moderated belief in excessive amounts of blood which must be released continued in the nineteenth century. The loss of credence in humoralism caused Fothergill to question the poisonous nature of menstrual blood, and he declared it benign in his 1729 treatise (Wilbush, “Climacteric”
4. But, though Fothergill argued against the poisonous nature of menstrual blood, he still held to the plethora theory for some menopausal symptoms. He concluded that most symptoms, however, were iatrogenic in origin, caused by the treatments of doctors attempting to rid the female body of peccant menstrual blood instead of endemic to the change of life itself (Wilbush, "La Menopause" 147). By the nineteenth century, menstrual blood was no longer conceived of as a poison, but it was still considered to be different than other blood in the body. In 1845, Ashwell calls it “the catamenial secretion” that, though generally the color of blood, is more “florid...less viscid...and without the power of coagulation,” a fluid with “no analogous secretion in other animals” (14). Chevasse argues in 1880 that, “The menstrual fluid is not exactly blood, although, both in appearance and in properties, it much resembles it; yet it never in the healthy state clots as blood does. It is a secretion from the womb, and, when healthy, ought to be of a bright-red color” (177). Though menstrual blood was considered to be a unique female fluid, it was not thought to be toxic. Though physicians used various techniques to rid the body of this blood, their methods were more moderate, because they were removing simply excess volume of fluid and not any matter they considered to be poisonous.

For example, John Moodie, a Scottish surgeon, recommends both purgatives and leeches to release blood: “At that period of life when the monthly discharge ceases, or is about to cease, there is (sic) frequently some discomfort and headaches, and general derangement... If there is headache and uneasiness, a few leeches applied to the lips of the generative organs, or to the groin, about the usual time, will afford relief” (84). Ashwell believes that the discontinuance of such an “habitual and necessary” process as the menses will not occur without the need for “the institution of some compensating
drain” (148). He believes that women can have symptoms of plethora that should be treated with purgatives and bleeding, and he notes that setons and issues are no longer considered wise (151). Tilt sees bleeding as “Nature’s own sedative” (34) and also recommends it for a specifically female plethora:

I can answer for women often bearing with benefit very large losses of blood; and as a redundancy of blood of which nature has not yet found means of disposing is one cause of disease at cessation, it follows that bleeding, so often effected by nature at this period of life, should not be neglected by those who pride themselves on understanding and on imitating her proceedings. (36)

He advises purgatives and the application of leeches behind the ear or on “piles,” but cautions that applying them to the womb is dangerous because that practice can, as Ashwell advises, stimulate more blood flow to the uterus which works against the natural course of menopause (37-8). Because of “the frame being oppressed by an overplus of blood” at menopause, women should also eat less during this period (Tilt 41).

In addition to treating symptoms at a purely physical level by controlling blood and other bodily fluid levels, both disease and emotional disorders were addressed through the use of sedatives and other medicines. Tilt recommends sedatives as the most efficacious method “to moderate central nervous irritability” and he suggests either bromide of potassium or acetate of morphia (34). He advises that ovarian disturbance, which can cause cerebral irritability, should be treated by suppositories of opium, morphia, or belladonna (35).
Menopausal complaints were also treated by procedures focused on producing general physical health. Women were advised to avoid mental and physical over-work and get more rest than usual during menopause. Living in a healthy manner with simple yet sufficient food, regularity in regard to "opening of the bowels," frequent bathing and exercise, yet avoiding putting too attention on the self are a suggested regimen (Webster 50-5). Tilt recommends moderate exercise and good hygiene to keep the body in shape (42-3).

Another method of treating menopausal disorders was through surgical intervention. Though the first abdominal hysterectomies were performed in Manchester in 1843 and 1844, the use of surgery for menopausal treatment was not a common practice (O'Dowd 16). Tilt presents menopausal surgery as a thoroughly American innovation, and discourages it as an "American audacity" (18) not suitable for the sane and sensible British. He comments that "it is difficult for us simple-minded Englishmen to withstand American advocacy of surgical operations" (ii), but while Americans have "dazzled" the British medical community with statistics about the success of ovariotomy and slitting the cervix, upon closer inspection these cases are found to be reported without mention of the "failures, dangers, or of deaths" that occurred (ii). Another new treatment for menopause was hormone replacement therapy, pioneered in 1889 by Brown-Sequard, a French physician working in London, but this also was not a statistically significant treatment in the nineteenth century (O'Dowd 319).

Attempts were made to treat what were believed to be the emotional and psychological manifestations of menopause. Nineteenth-century women negotiated the physical territory of aging and menopause in a culture that foreclosed all possibilities for
the personal fulfillment in work and autonomy given to men, yet accused them of mental instability when boredom set in. The Comtesse de Boigne, a long-time Londoner, comments about “the emptiness of life for older women. Once they have married off their daughters, everything goes downhill” (Thorold 244). In short, with their children raised, women had very little to do. Tilt offers counsel that points to boredom as a common problem of middle-aged women of the middle and upper classes during menopause. He addressed the problem of midlife female ennui by advising traveling to strengthen the nervous system during menopause (43). For those who are lonely and unnerved by the change of life, “the best mode of affording relief, should strength permit, is to discover some kind of occupation capable of engrossing the sufferer’s attention, such as music, gardening, the education of a relative or of an adopted child, or work in a school, or some other charity” (44). These occupations, which relegated women to the female sphere, were represented as sufficient to fill the midlife woman’s life.

Female Menopause As A Golden Age

Menopause become an increasingly significant topic in the nineteenth century because women’s reproductive system and function came to be a paramount part of their identity and social function. As Jalland puts it, reproduction became the most important element in women’s lives and their only possible identities were as “potential mothers, actual mothers, or retired mothers” (5). This totalizing of female reproduction is apparent in Allan’s 1869 definition of woman as “an admirably constructed apparatus for the most mysterious and sublime of nature’s mysteries—the reproductive process”—verbiage which reduces women to pieces of human equipment (23). The classic and misogynistic gender appropriation of the Cartesian mind/body split was applied to
women, as seen in Allan’s assertion in 1869 that “there must be radical, natural, permanent distinctions in the mental and moral conformation, corresponding with those in the physical organisation of the sexes.” While man possess superior powers of reasoning, woman mentally “approaches more closely than man does” the “animal type.” Though she is intellectually inferior to man in Allan’s estimation, however, women have “superior instinct” and a “compensating fit in her marvellous faculty of intuition” (22-3). Women were relegated to the realm of the body, because as West argues, “the generative system plays a more important part in the organism of woman that in that of the man” (2). Women were seen as much more vulnerable than men to the reproductive events of their bodies, because these organs were understood to determine the conduct of every area of their lives. Therefore, the advent of menopause was an event of major significance.

The cessation of the menses carried the threat of stripping a woman’s life of meaning in the nineteenth century, because, as Jalland argues, “If the primary meaning of female life was achieved through maternity, then the woman’s world after reproduction was necessarily characterized by the loss of meaning” (281). But, though nineteenth-century women were seen as suffering under the vicissitudes of their waning and finally extinct fertility, they were also considered to experience an eventual reward. Medical texts worked against the notion of decline, presenting the post-menopausal period as a new golden age of vitality, what Margaret Mead would later call “postmenopausal zest” (Bateson 28). When the depression, headaches, and irritability abate, menopause was understood to be “followed by a fresh renewal of good health and strength” (Weatherly 295). Tilt argues that the “object” of menopause is “to endow a healthy woman with a greater degree of strength than she had previously enjoyed” (8). Proof that post-
menopausal women could achieve a stronger constitution than at any other period of life was found in their greater longevity than men’s, that they are “less liable to sudden death” and that they have “a general immunity from disease” (9).

It was believed that, for most women, menopause “ceases without any inconvenience whatever, and better health may be enjoyed than at any former period of womanhood” (Ryan 289). Even if a woman has been in bad health throughout much of adult life, she can experience “a settling of the constitution” after menopause which brings about better health than she has ever enjoyed (Ashwell 149).

Chevassé presents postmenopausal health as being, to a certain extent, under the control of each woman:

When the “change of life” ends favourably, which, if properly managed, it most likely will do, she may improve in constitution, and may really enjoy better health and spirits, and more comfort, than she has done for many previous years. A lady who has during the whole of her wifehood eschewed fashionable society, and who has lived simply, plainly, and sensibly, and who has taken plenty of out-door exercise, will, during the autumn and winter of life, reap her reward by enjoying what is the greatest earthly blessings—health! (183-4)

Appropriate behavior is the key to experiencing a gain after menopause. Especially important is the concept of proper “management” of menopause as a stage that can be understood and directed.

Post-menopausal women are considered not only to enter an era of improved health but of a new sexual—or more accurately—sexless identity, what Braxton Hicks
describes as a “neutral man-woman state” (283). The equation of postmenopausal women with masculinity is presented in both valorizing and denigrating terms. Some texts point toward physical denigration in a loss of femininity. Webster notes that menopausal women sometimes become “more masculine in appearance, the skin becoming coarser and hairs growing on the chin” (39-40). Ryan depicts postmenopausal women in quite derogatory terms, seemingly stripping them of female gender:

All the characters of puberty and the peculiarities of women cease, the breasts collapse in most cases, the fullness of habit disappears, the skin shrivels, and appears too large, and loses its colour and softness, and many diseases develop, occasionally and rarely, in the womb, ovaries, and breasts, which had lain dormant for years. The cheeks and neck wither, the eyes recede in their sockets, and the countenance often becomes yellow, leaden-coloured, or florid, and the women become corpulent, and lose the mild peculiarities of their sex. (287-8)

This loss of femininity and assumption of masculinity is often presented as a gain, however, the entrance into a healthy and happy androgyny (Featherstone and Hepworth, “History” 251). With their identities no longer anchored in reproductivity, postmenopausal women are finally given access to the intellectual side of the mind/body split, but at the cost of their sexuality. Braxton Hicks states that though at this time women “revert to the neutral man-woman state,” they retain female tendencies because “there remains impressed upon the mind, memory, and nervous system the reflection of the woman.” In addition, by “losing sexuality and its various impulses, she becomes more capable of rendering herself useful,” and because she is free from “sexual activity
and its many demands” she “passes on to old age better than man” (293). In this paradigm, the post-menopausal woman changes from being the sexualized other to becoming the sexless matron or Grandmother who works to uphold the patriarchy in other, younger women. As Roe Sybylla suggests, it is, after all, only the fertile woman who needs to be controlled in order to keep bloodlines and inheritances under the dominance of the male (208).

**Models of Midlife Male Sexuality**

For the majority of the nineteenth century, the dominant model of male sexuality was one of libido and fertility continuing uninterrupted from puberty through old age, as opposed to the vicissitudes of female fertility—a reiteration of the two-sex model that makes men and women completely different. Tilt describes the typical male in whom, at puberty, the “sexual apparatus is, in general, fully effective and all-sufficient to ensure its permanent activity until extreme old age” (8). American and British longevity texts depicted male virility as a prized possession during the nineteenth century, one that it was possible to retain until very late in life. These texts present impotency not as a function of age but of sexual excess (Gullette, “Male Midlife” 62, 70).

An important feature of this theory of male sexual potency was that sexual activity had to be properly moderated. William Acton’s influential text *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age, and in Advanced Life. Considered in their Physiological, Social and Psychological Relations*, published in six editions from 1857 to 1875, maintains the need for male sexual restraint from puberty to the end of life, but puts an emphasis on moderating male sexual activity with age to assure health. His theorizes that
youth does well to husband his sexual powers, and the adult should be
calary of exhausting those desires which nature has given him for the
extension of the species, [and] . . . if a man in advanced life would
preserve his intellectual faculties, health, and vigour, and would enjoy
long life, he ought to look for only moderate indulgence of the sexual
passion. (48)

Male sexuality functions as a force that must be meted out with care. At any age,
limiting sexual activity is believed to retain a man’s strength not only because he
expend less physical energy, but because unejaculated semen was believed to reabsorb
into the body and act as a stimulant to the system (Gullette, “Male Midlife” 66). But
limiting sexual activity was especially important with age. Acton describes physiological
changes that happen at around age fifty that cause sexual virility to weaken. Blood flow
to the testes is lessened, the scrotum becomes “wrinkled and diminished in size, the
testicles atrophy,” and semen becomes less abundant and “has lost its consistence and its
force” (49). He notes the psychological aspect of the change when men notice that “the
generative function” has become weakened: “man, elevated to the sacred character of
paternity, and proud of his virile power, begins to note that power decrease, and does so
almost with a feeling of indignation. The first step towards feebleness announces to him,
unmistakably, that he is no longer the man he was” (49). Acton instructs men who
experience age-related impotence that their powers can be restored only if they practice
moderation and that it is better to remain “invalids” than to regain sexual functioning
only to “kill themselves by inches through fresh fits of excitement” (98).
The Male Menopause

In 1901, with the publication of Sylvanus Stall’s *What A Man of 45 Ought To Know*, a new paradigm for male midlife sexuality emerged that equated men’s experience with women’s and differed from Acton’s presentation of virility remaining inviolate throughout the male life cycle. Although this theory appeared in the last year of Victoria’s reign and therefore was not fully in operation in the nineteenth century, it can be seen as a culmination of nineteenth-century concepts of sexuality. Stalls’s books were widely read and translated into several languages (Gullette 58). *What A Man of 45 Ought To Know*, part of the “Sex and Self Series,” was widely circulated in the U.S. and Great Britain and was well received by physicians and the clergy, probably because Stall himself was a clergyman (Featherstone and Hepworth, “History” 251). Featherstone and Hepworth argue that before Stall’s book, discourse on the change of life only briefly referred to the problems of men (“History” 252). Because the male reproductive organs, unlike the ovaries, were considered to function effectively until the end of life, male sexuality and age seemed to be far less complicated than that experienced by females.

However, though longevity texts of the nineteenth century concentrate on male sexual function lasting into old age (Gullette, “Male Midlife” 62), there was some notion of male midlife decline under the concept of the “climacteric.” Early in the century, the term “climacteric” was used to describe “the period of life (usually between the ages of 45 and 60) at which vital forces begin to decline” (“Climacteric”). In 1813, Henry Halford postulated that the climacteric was “in truth, a disease rather than a mere declension of strength and decay of natural powers” that can occur in females but is observed most often in males (qtd in Lock, “Deconstructing” 48). Stall, however, is the
first to appropriate the term “change of life,” which was strictly associated with menopause, and appropriate it for men.

While Tilt promises virility into old age, even if of a restrained nature, Stall argues for the entire cessation of male sexuality with age, based upon the existence of a male change of life like menopause. He argues that men enter “the youth of old age” at about forty-nine, and between fifty and sixty-five experience the climacteric, when “disintegration and decay begin their slow and, at first, imperceptible change” (24). For Stall, the change has a specifically sexual element or what he calls a “sexual hush in the life of men” (40). He explains that once the “great primal purpose [of reproduction] has been fully accomplished, the inclination and the power to procreate gradually diminishes, and finally wholly disappears” (25). This basis for his argument is the expectation that men and women are not as different as the nineteenth century has claimed—if women lose their ability to reproduce, it is “only reasonable to expect” that men do the same (31). He calls this “harmonious waning” (36), a process that should happen simultaneously for husband and wife who are “like two parts of one and the same machine” (212).

Stall does make a distinction between the sexes, though, when he assigns the majority of the cause of lessened sexual desire to women. He argues that God has designed at a certain point in midlife that “the attractive forces ... [are] ... largely converted into what may be called a repellent force” when sexual congress should not be taking place. And this force resides for the most part with women: “God now makes her less attractive, and her manner and bearing consequently become such as to render her repellent to the sexual approaches of her mate” (207). So, though he brings the genders closer together in a theory of sexual decline for both males and females, he places the
stigma of repugnance on women, keeping them in a more debilitated position. Women’s acquired offensiveness, too, retains female passionlessness and assigns it as the original cause of male’s libido loss.

Stall acknowledges that the cessation of fertility is not so easily seen in men as in women. He points out that semen continues to be produced for several years after the testicles have atrophied or diminished in size, and even old men produce some amount of semen, though the secretion takes place very slowly (152-3). Stall argues that fertility begins to decline in midlife, and sexuality should then begin to be restrained in men. Although “it is not necessary that the sexual inclination should be immolated” entirely in middle age, “all sexual stimulants should be carefully avoided” (95). He warns that if a man “calls his reproductive power into frequent exercise after passing forty years of age” he is “not likely to retain virile powers until he is sixty” (152). According to Stall, after fifty men who indulge in sexual pleasures risk shortening their lives. He employs vivid death imagery to urge the man above fifty to renounce sex, because “Each time that he allows himself this gratification is a pellet of earth thrown upon his coffin” (84). Men who are sexually virile and active in old age, he argues, are not only “exceptional cases,” but are following unhealthy and even evil practices (28).

Stall draws his pattern for male change of life directly from the female menopause model. He notes that the outward signs of the climacteric are “not as pronounced” in men—they, of course, experience no menstrual cessation—but “manifestations of the change” in them can include gray hair, memory lapses, waning sight, dental decay, lessened powers of endurance, diminishment of sexual desire, and enlargement of the prostate (39). There may be a slackening of physical and intellectual energy, and a
feeling of “less pluck and push, less courage in undertaking and pursuing new enterprises” and “nervous anxiety” (65, 70). Especially pertinent is sexual activity, which becomes “generally followed by a period of lassitude or weariness more pronounced and more prolonged than anything he has previously experienced. Nature is thus sounding her warnings and admonishing the individual of the importance of the utmost care in the use of a secretion which can now ill be spared” (78). Stall goes farther than Tilt with the concept of semen as a precious fluid that must be husbanded. After a certain age, it cannot be “spared” at all.

In the same way that nineteenth-century medical discourse sets up insanity as a complication of menopause, Stall associates mental problems with the change of life in men. He keeps the strongest connection between insanity and change of life for women, arguing that the tendency to mental derangement in midlife is greater for women, and lesser for men (117). But, while he argues that during menopause women are more liable to insanity than at any other period of life (276), he also states that “statistics show that between the ages of forty-five to fifty-five, more men become insane than women” (277). He concludes that the male climacteric “affords the occasion” but not the cause for insanity in men (280).

As Tilt and others argue about menopause in women, Stall believes that the way in which men conduct the climacteric will determine their future health: “these years which have been called ‘the youth of old age’ determine what the man is to be throughout the remainder of his life” (176). The most important element, however, is sexual moderation—partial celibacy in midlife and total abstinence in old age—though moderation in all aspects of life is also enjoined (69, 115).
Though he presents the climacteric as the beginning of sexual waning, a decline narrative of aging, Stall concurs with earlier theories for women of compensations in the change of life. He argues that with the complications of reproduction and passion over, men can experience a greater intellectual, emotional, and spiritual superiority than they had previously achieved, displaying greater character, and more utility in society and in serving to help those who are younger. No longer subject to the "stress of passion" as in former years, "the imagination will become more chastened, the heart more refined, the lines of intellectual and spiritual vision lengthened, the sphere of usefulness enlarged."

All in all, a man "becomes superior to himself in his previous years" (66). Provided that a man has conducted himself well in life, then

> with the coming of middle life, he enters into that larger endowment, that clearer insight, that wider outlook, that keener analysis, that more accurate judgment and that larger outgoing of the heart in holy affections which are so greatly to be desired in men to whom both time and experience have opened their largest and richest treasures. (66-7)

He states that the same holds true for women. Though he believes the nervous organization of woman causes her to suffer more acutely at the change of life, he also thinks her constitution allows her to recuperate more speedily from disease (111). He is in agreement with other theorists who argue for improved health after menopause; she "enters upon a period of serenity and repose, and even of health and blessing such as, perchance, she has never before known." Stall adds that if she has performed her "maternal duties" well, she can now "bring to others that intelligence, counsel,
encouragement and help which will crown her declining years with a saintly halo, more
to be desired than any of the pleasures which passion affords” (284).

Featherstone and Hepworth argue that two theories of male sexuality contributed
to the emergence of the twentieth-century concept of male menopause. After the “sexual
hush” theory of Stall, a counter movement developed which denied the necessity for
sexual restraint and promoted the concept that “sexual activity is not only possible but
also desirable long after reproductive function has ceased” (“History” 254). According to
this theory, though the climacteric fosters sexual disinterest in both males and females,
after the change libidinal lassitude passes, and both genders desire to be sexual again.
Featherstone and Hepworth find evidence of this formulation in the late nineteenth
century in French and American texts. It appears in England in the 1920s with Marie
Stopes’s argument that a hormonally induced change of life may produce sexual
disinterest in females and impotency in males, but this will be succeeded by a renewal of
sexual interest with the physical ability present to act on it (Featherstone and Hepworth,
“History” 255).

The sexual restraint or abstinence theory, however, remains the major formulation
of midlife male sexuality in nineteenth-century Britain. By figuring both men and
women as subject to an age-induced change in fertility and sexuality in midlife, this new
paradigm calls into question the nineteenth-century’s theory of complete
incommensurability between the sexes. Though this argument does not reinstall the one-
sex model of Renaissance and early modern times, it does lessen the distance between
male and female sexuality. For most of the nineteenth century, women were considered
to be made of completely different stuff than men, to suffer a troubled and diseased
period of fertility during their adult years that contrasts with the unperturbed fertility enjoyed by men from fertility to death. In giving men a change of life synonymous with that of females, the new theory changed the focus of midlife sexuality from gender to age.
Conclusion
Aging Beyond the Book

This dissertation demonstrates how vital is our need to examine age as a culturally-determined construct. Only by recognizing the constructed nature of age as separate from, though linked to, biological aging, can we begin to interrogate how it scripts human experience. Doing age theory on texts enables us to understand how and when individuals, in texts and in life, make choices based on age ideology, whether consciously or unconsciously. Age is a foundational construct that is very much in play in Victorian texts.

In using both fiction and non-fiction to examine textual constructions of midlife, I have not meant to imply that they are indistinguishable cultural sources. Novelists usually understand themselves to be presenting imagined worlds, though perhaps the portrait they paint is in some ways a "truer" account of lived experience than non-fiction presents. Writers of conduct and medical books, in contrast, often see themselves as establishing facts—or at least wishing to convince their audience that they do so. I view both types of texts as constructions that in turn impinge upon other constructions—novels and conduct books, for example, influencing how their readers perceive their lives, producing responses that affect reality. I have used Victorian texts, therefore, as both reflectors of how Victorians view midlife, as well as sites of new ideology that impact this life stage.

I hope to have demonstrated how important gender is to midlife aging in the Victorian era. In looking at how age and gender interact with each other, I have found marriageability to be one of the primary tools for investigation. Not only is
marriageability an index of physical attractiveness, fertility, and sexual viability for Victorians, but it raises the stakes of age to their highest level within that culture. When midlife is foregrounded by the marriage market, we can better understand how age serves to define many aspects of life, including emotional, sexual, and social opportunities.

The ways in which gender and midlife aging are experienced in nineteenth-century texts look toward developments in the twentieth century. The increasing acceptance by Victorians of age engineering and the impulse to present the body in as youthful a guise as possible was certainly followed in the next century by an ever-increasing search for youth. As we enter the twenty-first century, Great Britain, along with the rest of the technologically-developed world, participates in an intricate system of practices that attempt to slow physical aging. As the human life span continues to lengthen, definitions of what it means to be young, middle-aged, and old continue to be constantly revised. How we understand and experience age is becoming an ever more pertinent aspect of subjectivity to examine.

Specific experiences of gender and age in the Victorian texts discussed here are also fundamental to later twentieth-century ideas in other ways. Women of age and experience are able increasingly in Victorian texts to chose for pleasure and allowed latitude for expression of sensuality and independence. These fictive moments look toward the gains of the feminist movement in the twentieth century. In Victorian medical texts and fiction, assumptions of an always-present male sexual viability are challenged, and men begin to suffer age anxiety, especially at the end of the century. This also looks toward the development in the twentieth century of a male consciousness of being at risk for aging into midlife.
Middle age has not been recognized or explored sufficiently as an important aspect of subjectivity, though it is a concept that permeates literature and culture. Much more work needs to be done on theorizing age, especially in texts from past centuries. I especially would like to see historical and literary treatments of midlife in the eighteenth century, so that we can better understand if the competing discourses of loss and gain in the nineteenth century are a new development or a continuation of something that came before.

Writing this dissertation has added immeasurably to my own understanding of midlife and age construction, as it has also certainly aged me. This is how time works on us mortal creatures—if, as Thoreau puts it, “[t]ime is but the stream [we] go a-fishing in” (839), only by peering into its shadowy depths can we begin to appreciate the surprising effect its current has on how we perceive ourselves and our lives. Only through age studies can we begin to understand how profoundly we are impacted by being creatures of time.
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Walker, Mrs. A. *Female Beauty, As Preserved and Improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress; and Especially by the Adaptation, Colour and Arrangement of Dress, as Variously Influencing the Forms, Complexion, and Expression of Each Individual and Rendering Cosmetic Impositions Unnecessary*. London: Thomas Hurst, 1837.


Appendix A

Nineteenth-Century Sources:

Scientists, Perfumers, and Socialites

Three basic types of nineteenth-century texts address the physical performance of midlife: those by doctors or men and women of science, openly avowed retailers or “perfumers,” and society personages who have some claim to expertise on the topic of appearance.¹ However, these books refuse to stay neatly within their areas of science, retail trade, and social advice. The mixing of these genres demonstrates the polymorphous nature of the age problem—it is simultaneously a medical issue, a factor in how one conducts oneself in society, and a commercial opportunity. The generic blending of arguments and motives from which the texts were written augment the development of midlife age engineering.

An example of generic blending occurs in Popular Physiology; A Practical Treatise of the Means of Ensuring Health, Beauty, and Longevity in Both Sexes (1866), written by Mr. Moore, who styles himself a “member of the Royal College of Surgeons,” would seem to be purely a medical and longevity text. This treatise, however, is also a means of advertising and selling Moore’s products, “the Chalybeate Wine and Pills” as well as several “mechanical and hygienic appliances” which he uses scientific-sounding explanations to claim will assure one’s health and also reverse aging. Another example is the collaborative effort of science and society in Mrs. A. Walker’s Female Beauty, As Preserved and Improved By Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress from 1837. Though

¹ I use all three types of texts, my criteria being that they were published in Great Britain (though some also simultaneously appeared in the United States) and published between 1825 and 1900.
ostensibly a conduct book, the title page of the manuscript informs the reader that the text has been “revised,” with “all that regards regimen and health being furnished by medical friends.” The prestigious title of her chief advisor, “Sir Anthony Carlisle, F.R.S., Vice President of the College of Surgeons,” confers respected medical authority on a conduct book. Medically-based treatises may include advice on beauty and cosmetics, and texts by perfumers and ladies and gentlemen of society sometimes contain very scientific-sounding explanations about how and why their products and techniques are efficacious.

Medical and longevity treatises address the science of youthfulness through a rhetoric of health. A representative text is Nathaniel Davies’s *Aids To Long Life: A Medical Dietetic, and General Guide In Middle and Old Age* (1885). Davies’s authority is established on the title page where he is listed as “licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, London; member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, licentiate in midwifery and the diseases of women and children, medical officer of health,” and author of *One Thousand Medical Maxims* and *Nursery Hints*. This book is designed as a guide to increased longevity and health, and though it does discuss both genders, the prototypical human in its pages is male and women are treated as a special case, a common practice in Victorian medical texts. Davies argues that aging is inevitable but that we can arrest its progress through diligently following the practices that he recommends, which focus on moderation in all things. Davies also spends many pages on a taxonomic description of the advance of age on all parts of the body with scientific explanations of changes that occur. This text does not purport to sell anything, but of course it does—the text itself is a retail commodity bought for its explanations and recommendations.
In contrast, a medical text that is also a beauty book is Anna Kingsford’s *Health, Beauty, and the Toilet: Letters to Ladies from a Lady Doctor* (1886). Kingsford is styled as both a medical professional with the degree “M.D. (Paris),” as well as the author of *The Perfect Way in Diet.* Kingsford introduces her book as a unique medical and beauty text by stating that her name and medical diploma “will constitute a sufficient guarantee of the good faith and serious intent with which the book is put forth” and claims this to be the first text in which a woman of “scientific qualification” writes on the “cosmetic arts” (iii). Kingsford’s advice about skin and hair care blends science with social conduct advice—she states, for example, that a woman’s “duty” is to be beautiful, but she also describes the subcutaneous “pulp” of the skin as the basis for wrinkles. Although she sells no products herself, advertisements for commodities such as Pear’s Soap are appended to the book, as well as announcements of Kingsford’s other books. This text, though based on medical authority and language, is less a medical treatise than Davies’s and has much more in common with the books written for women by ladies of society.

Texts by perfumers seek to sell advice and products for retaining youthfulness by creating a beauty products market. A good example of a perfumer’s book is *Hints on Dress, and on the Arrangement of the Hair, A Practical Essay, Suited to Either Sex* (1861) by Alex Ross, who styles himself simply a “perfumer.” It is no surprise that as a purveyor of toiletries, Ross argues for the duty of all people to “make their exterior as prepossessing as possible” (3) and he defends the expenditure of money on products like his own as necessary for propriety and good taste. He describes various physical conditions and recommends that they be altered through the use of dyes and cosmetics. He then offers his own products for sale via mail order or in his shop, with assurances of
their effectiveness. Though a twenty-first century reader may wonder how efficacious his "cantharides oil" was at restoring "lost hair," Ross's claims seem reasonable, and his products sound fairly straightforward.

An example of what Victorians would call "puffery" or inflated advertising is found in the book *Beautiful For Ever!* (1863), by "Madame Rachel," who at one time was the most famous cosmetics retailer in England (Whitlock 33). Her book sells her products by post and also recommends treatments in her London shop on New Bond Street. In her book, which serves as an elaborate advertising vehicle, Rachel Leveison, or the self-styled "Madame Rachel," claims to have the sole rights of importation for the "Magnetic Dew Water of Sahara" and "Arabian medicated bath," products that purportedly restore gray hair, remove wrinkles and blemishes, and "confer the appearance of youth and beauty" (21-2). Madame Rachel became widely known as an imposter when she was involved in several law suits accusing her of defrauding women of their money by promising them fraudulent marriages with peers. Though the trials were not about her beauty methods, her treatments were brought before public scrutiny and negatively judged. At the second trial in 1878 her expensive face washes that had been advertised as exotic elixirs were proven to be "carbonate of lead, starch, fuller's earth, hydrochloric acid, and distilled water" and her celebrated Arabian bath to be nothing but bran and water (Whitlock 45). Her name became a byword associated with puffery and extravagant promises of youth and beauty used to gull the rich and naïve, as can be seen in Figure 12, a Punch cartoon from July 12, 1862. That Madame Rachel's products are advertised by women wearing sandwich boards equate her with puffery and the "cheapness" of lower class trades people. The women themselves, with faces half old
and wrinkled but also half young and beautiful, mock the ridiculousness of her claims. In fact, the third figure’s face has light skin on one side and dark on the other,

![Madame Rachel takes a Hint from the Cheap Tailors and Picture Cleaners.](image)

Fig. 13. Punch cartoon lampooning Madame Rachel’s products. *Punch, or the London Charivari*. 12 July 1862: 18.

implying that Madame Rachel’s treatments can even change one’s skin color. This racial joke would have seemed a hyperbolic and hilarious claim to Caucasian Victorians whose skin tones guaranteed them white privilege.²

Texts by men and women of society advise their readers on appropriate behavior. They claim authority on such basis as membership in the peerage or other affiliations.

² This cartoon is reprinted in Altick’s *The Presence of the Present* (541), but as Whitlock (29) points out, he erroneously describes the figures.
For example, *The Arts of Beauty* (1858) is by “Lola Montez, Countess of Landsfeld,” while *Etiquette: What To Do, And How To Do It* (1885) is by “Lady Constance Howard.” In addition to their high class associations, both women base their beauty and social expertise on their experience as authors—Montez styles herself “authoress of *Autobiography and Lectures,*” a woman of learning and letters. Howard’s title page makes her out to be a successful novelist, including a list of several sentimental-sounding books attributed to her; she is “author of *Sweetheart and Wife, Mollie Darling, Only a Village Maiden and Mated With a Clown.*” Mrs. Merrifield, author of *Dress As A Fine Art* (1854), who is an “honorary member of the Academy of Fine Arts at Bolgna” as well as the author of two other books, *Ancient Practice of Painting* and *Art of Fresco Painting,* bases her authority on her association both with Europe and with art.

Sometimes a pen name describes the author’s social position, such as *Etiquette of the Toilette-Table* (1859) by “An Officer’s Widow,” *The Glass of Fashion* by “The Lounger in Society” (1881), and *Beauty and How To Keep It* (1889) by “A Professional Beauty.” These books contain the standard beauty book formulation—reasons why one should attend to beauty, as well as recommendations for how to avoid aging and promote youthfulness through various products and practices. Some of them contain advertisements for commercially sold products, but they often contain recipes for homemade remedies as well. The main product that is being sold here, however, as in the case of medical texts, is the text itself.