AGE-DISPARATE MARRIAGE AND THE PROBLEM OF DESIRE IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

By

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To John
& in Memory of Thomas L. Bleakney
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AGE-DISPARATE MARRIAGE AND THE PROBLEM OF DESIRE IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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This project considers the problematic intersections of aging, masculinity, and desire in fictional portrayals of age-disparate courtship and marriage. It examines how the novelists featured in this project—Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Anthony Trollope, and Charlotte Mary Yonge—use age as a narrative device to body forth or resist the problem of desire within the context of age-disparate marriage. While not necessarily a key point of plot in the novels examined, age is central to how the older male characters are cued as inappropriate love interests. As almost every novel examined in this project affirms, marriage to aging male characters cannot fulfill the bodily and emotional desires of the young female characters. This project situates the oft-unhappy experience of the young female characters amongst a variety of social and cultural factors that sought to validate women’s rights to pursue their desires. Further, as this project illustrates, age was shown to create barriers to romance in part due to the influence of Victorian medical and science writing, which consistently pathologizes the desires of aging men and presents aging as devastating to a man’s claims to masculinity and vigor. Linking together aging and masculinity studies, as this project does, demonstrates their
interconnected nature, one that reveals the vulnerabilities inherent in Victorian conceptions of masculinity – vulnerabilities highlighted by the impact of age. This project considers the norms these fictional couplings trouble and how the novels problematize the desires of aging men – or, ultimately, what happens to male characters as they age that changes them from a good catch to a joke.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Early in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, in reflecting on the almost immediate signs of the Casaubons’ marital unhappiness, the narrator asks: “but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?” (242). Indeed, most readers have a strong degree of sympathy for the marital plight of Dorothea, who on her honeymoon discovers that her girlish optimism for a life of intellectual development assisting a great scholar has been dashed by her much older husband’s lack of both scholarly greatness and emotional warmth. In response, the narrator lodges a “protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble,” as the bloom will fade for them someday as well (Eliot 242). Despite “our”—a word that includes Eliot’s other characters as well as her readers—tittering over Casaubon’s lack of vitality and handsomeness, the narrator reminds us, “He had done nothing exceptional in marrying—nothing but what society sanctions, and considers an occasion for wreaths and bouquets” (Eliot 242). The points that the narrator teases out are key ones: the disgust that the changes of aging can inspire; the seeming incongruity of age-disparate love (her blooming, fresh beauty coupled with his balding pallor punctuated by white moles); the truth that we only really care about the plight of the Dorotheas of fictional age-disparate relationships; and, finally, the fact that while these older male characters are only following the cues of society in seeking marriage, that the “sanctions” to marry no longer apply to them due to the impact of age. This project works through each of these points to shed light and deepen our understanding of the plight of the Casaubons
of Victorian literature to consider the problematic intersections of aging, masculinity, and desire.

This project draws upon texts by both male and female writers—Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Anthony Trollope, and Charlotte Mary Yonge—from a variety of novelistic sub-genres of the 1850s through the 1890s. Selecting literature from throughout the nineteenth century illustrates the pervasiveness of the themes connected to age-disparate marriage, while also revealing patterns. This project defines a marriage as age-disparate if it is between a young woman in her late teens and early- to mid-20s and a man who is 30 or more years older, i.e., in his 50s through his 70s. In contrast to these pairings of young women and older men who could be their father (or grandfather or great-grandfather, for that matter), this project also considers the implications of age-matched attraction—or that between a young woman and a man in his 20s to very early 30s—as a contrast to the more age-disparate variety. The predominance of portrayals of age-disparate attraction and marriage within the literature of the era (it is difficult to read a work that doesn’t include some aspect, however peripheral) illustrates that such representations reflect a larger effort to make sense of the intersections of desire and aging masculinity. As should be clear, this project is not exclusively about aging. Rather, it examines how the novelists featured in this project use age as a narrative device to body forth or resist the problem of desire within the context of age-disparate marriage. Tracing how desire, in all its permutations, operates within each text—whether it leads to contentment, misery, or modulates into a warm paternal interest—demands an examination of not just how but why age-disparate desire, and in turn, marriage, is problematized. Readers
may not be able to understand the common problematization of the desires of aging men – after all, some of the authors examined were themselves aging men. In addition, though hostility towards aging men was often built into literature, such attitudes largely did not fully reflect reality, as within Victorian society such marriages were seen as acceptable or even good matches. In contrast, the fictional age-disparate marriages featured in this project are presented as, at the very least, unconvincingly motivated by mutual love, if not thoroughly disastrous. While no uniformity exists as to how age-disparate marriages operate within a text—a very few are successful, some are oppressive, and others are bitterly disappointing—the texts examined in this project somehow make commentary on the disparity in the ages of the couple, and in often humorous, grotesque, or otherwise detailed description, on the age of the man.

While the desires of aging men and their fictional counterparts were largely problematized, as this project demonstrates, the desires of the young women they fall for are held in much higher esteem. Part of the reason Victorians often problematized age-disparate pairings can be rooted in the idea that a man who is ostensibly in a state of decline and degeneracy (to use the language of the era) is paired with a nubile young beauty; from this perspective, she cannot possibly truly love her older husband, calling into question the motivations behind their marriage. In contrast, within these novels, age-disparate marriage “outs” the desires of those getting married as inappropriate in the face of the widely-embraced middle-class ideal of marriage that dictated they should be love matches. The fact that the man’s interest is often perversely accompanied by a lack of love on the woman’s part often leaves the reader to wonder what aside from lust (for him) and financial need (for her) could the inspiration for such couplings. As almost
every novel examined in this project affirms, marriage to aging male characters cannot
fulfill the desires of each novelist’s young female characters, whether the desires are
bodily or emotional. We can see the void in happiness that age-disparate marriage
creates, for example, in Chapters 3 and 4, where both Dorothea and Louisa have an
“inward fire” (a description used by both Eliot and Dickens) for fulfillment – a desire to
fulfill their natures that are quashed though horrible marriages to much older men. In
addition, Chapters 5-7 feature young female characters who struggle to balance their
sense of duty and financial needs with their romantic desires for more age-matched love
interests. This project situates the oft-unhappy experience of the young female
characters amongst a variety of social and cultural factors—including Darwin’s theories
of sexual selection and the rise of feminism—which sought to validate women’s rights to
pursue their desires.

While not necessarily a key point of plot in the novels examined, age is central to
how the older male characters are cued as inappropriate love interests; and, truly, some
of these characters are indeed horrible husbands: uncaring, cold, and irrationally
unforgiving. These characterizations of aging suitors as problematic are not surprising
considering how mid- to late-century medical writing consistently pathologizes the
desires of aging men. Linking together aging and masculinity studies, as this project
does, demonstrates their interconnected nature, one that reveals the vulnerabilities
inherent in Victorian conceptions of masculinity – vulnerabilities highlighted by the
impact of age. As this introduction and the chapters that follow—which situate the era’s
attitudes towards aging masculinity within a particular cultural and social context, such
as class, feminism, or spirituality, amongst others—illustrate, age was shown to create
barriers to romance in part due to the influence of Victorian medical and science writing, which presented aging as devastating to a man’s claims to masculinity and vigor. Many Victorians believed aging would lead men to become physically and socially irresponsible and unbalanced – leading to the very misery, unhappiness, and trauma detailed in the novels explored in this project. While male desire was considered by writers on masculinity and late-nineteenth-century feminists as something a man should possess but also needed to control, aging was argued to erode a man’s self control, putting his desires and sense of social responsibility out of balance. Worse yet, that balance could never be restored, at a great cost to an aging man’s physical and mental vitality.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore canonical novels that feature thoroughly miserable marriages where the aging male characters are shown to be absurd choices and the young woman is the emotional and spiritual heart of the text – a scenario that warmly engages our sympathies for the plight of these female characters. Chapters 5, 6, and 7, which feature more obscure texts (though some by canonical authors), illustrate the era’s evolution in thinking with respect to attitudes towards desire, and make the desires of the aging men more central. In fact, the aging male characters are the protagonists rather than merely bystanders to (or, rather, victims of) the main plot. In effect, the authors shift in focus from considering obstacles to female desire (Chapters 3 and 4) to that of male desire (Chapters 5, 6, and 7), with the latter chapters featuring good men who are destroyed by their desires (Chapter 5), or men who are not destroyed but still strongly diminished in their pursuit of marriage to much younger women (Chapters 6 and 7). The rationale for pursuing marriage evolves from the aging man’s selfishness to
his inability to contain his desires, and tracing how desire is treated in Victorian novels illustrates the perceived bodily impact of aging – one that exacted an increasingly high cost on aging men.

**Intervention and Scope**

The study of representations of aging (even beyond the specialized area of Victorian studies) still remains a nascent area of literary criticism. Anne M. Wyatt-Brown argues this gap is pervasive and “aging is a missing category in current literary theory” (1). Fortunately, this oversight has begun to be addressed through the development of aging studies, which seeks to reverse the “erasure of the cultural in the sphere of age and aging” (Gullette “Aged” 102). Aging studies (a merging of humanistic gerontology and cultural studies) was developed by Margaret Morganroth Gullette, who argues, in *Declining to Decline*, “everything we know of a culture in the broadest sense – is saturated with concepts of age and aging” (3). Gullette’s assertion that “human beings are aged by culture first of all” (3) disputes the notion that conceptions of aging are solely influenced by the physical changes associated with growing older (changes that the Victorians were just beginning to trace and measure within their aging population). In fact, aging studies asks critics to “contemplate age with the same thoughtfulness that marks studies of other aspects of identity, such as race and gender” (Mangum “Literary” 63). Further, aging studies disputes the idea that “age classes were utterly separate from one another and age was separable from any of our other identities” (Gullette “Aged” 27), and it is this notion of the inseparability of age and “other identities,” including gender and class, that drives this project. As such, this project examines the myriad of social and cultural factors that problematize aging and age-disparate marriage. For instance, both the era’s increase in class mobility and the emergence of
medical writing and specializations made other differences, such as that of age, more resonant. This project draws upon these and other aspects of Victorian culture to contextualize and begin to explain the era’s attitudes towards age-disparate marriage. Doing so illustrates how age interfaces with and amplifies these issues, for as Gullette argues, though we re aged by our culture, age does not operate alone.

Relatively little criticism is specifically concerned with the aging in studies of Victorian history, culture, and literature – though articles and chapters by critics, such as those by Teresa Mangum in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* and the *Handbook of Humanities and the Aging*, have been influential and important. Only in the past few years have critics made inroads in examining the era’s “diverse and often contradictory representations of old age” (Mangum “Growing” 97), though even they acknowledge that considerations of Victorian conceptions of aging and how those conceptions are portrayed in literature and the visual arts are still in the early stages. Pat Thane, for example, who has explored representations and experiences of aging in Britain ranging from that of the Middle Ages to current day, identifies the current stage of aging studies as at an “exciting, if incomplete, stage of assembling both small and large stories about different times and places in the search for a more complete history of old age” (“Social” 93). Karen Chase identifies this area of criticism as a “fast-ripening area of research” (“The Coming” 128). In addition, Devoney Looser claims that the “study of ageing – and old age in particular, as arguably still the least remarked upon life stage – is at a threshold” (“Old Age” 132), and Mangum argues, “Studies of late life as a cultural construct rooted in particular literary and historical moments have blossomed in recent years” (“Literary” 123). Helen Small prompts readers to consider in her
introduction to an April 2011 roundtable in the *Journal of Victorian Culture* that examined Chase’s *The Victorians and Old Age* and Looser’s *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750-1850*, “Does the appearance of these two [2009] books indicate, as Beauvoir’s translated title runs, a ‘coming of age’ for Victorian age studies? Or are more modest claims requisite for a field where so much practical and conceptual work has still to be done?” (“Introduction” 113).¹ Both critics (along with the others mentioned) have indeed facilitated our developing understanding of the nuances of portrayals of the aging in Victorian culture, beginning the commendable effort of moving aging Victorians from the critical periphery. This project contributes to aging studies’ current stage of discovery and interpretation, building upon previous efforts and extending the analysis of Victorian representations of aging to include an examination of how they intersect with the era’s conceptions of gender, class, and religion, as well as medical and science writing.

While work on age-disparate pairings in Victorian literature exists, the field is not extensive. Esther Godfrey and Kay Heath—who both published books in 2009, *The January-May Marriage in Nineteenth Century British Literature* and *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian England*, respectively—are the sole contributors to efforts in understanding how the era’s ideas about and representations of aging are impacted by romance. Heath examines visual culture (e.g., advertisements and cartoons), as well as novels and medical writing, to argue that over the course of the

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¹ While Looser focuses on authors and texts that predate my dissertation, Chase’s text analyzes novels, paintings, and representation of historical figures like Queen Victoria, to examine “threshold moments and landmark events,” such as the Poor Laws and Old Age Pensions Act, that “both defined and reflected the aging experience in Britain” (1). As Chase argues, the Victorian era marks the emergence of old age as an “established ‘category’ of scientific and political discourse” (1).
Victorian era, a man’s forties or early fifties transitioned from being the peak of a man’s life to the start of his decline. Heath writes about both female and male aging (while my project only considers the latter) and primarily focuses on mid-life constructions, asserting that “it is essential to make a distinction between midlife and old age instead of conflating the two under ‘aging,’” as it “elides the middle years” (11). She argues that liminality is an essential “distinguishing characteristic” (1) of Victorian conceptions of the middle aged, though as my project makes clear, the liminality of the aging male was represented as persisting well into a character’s seventies. Godfrey focuses on what she calls “January-May” marriages (a pairing between a young woman and man who is at least fifteen years older, presumably fewer years than the May-December variety) in novels and art, examining how that gap in age impacts “gender and power” (1-2). She asserts that while such marriages can lead to “horror and misery” (and, as such, are often associated with deviancy) that the young wife is not necessarily a victim of such pairing. Instead, she argues, “these marriages often reveal complex systems of control, and age marks one way that authors redistribute authority between husbands and wives” (5). These recent efforts indeed enrich our understanding of how Victorians conceived of aging and its impact of fictional representations of marriage between older male and young female characters. However, this project fills an important void left by recent criticism. With its focus on how the era’s texts and novels represent the desires of aging men and its focus on characters beyond mid-life, in addition to its exploration of the intersections of masculinity and science/medical writing, this project covers new, and rich, ground with respect to fictional portrayals of age-disparate marriage.
First, while work has explored and defined middleclass masculinities or issues around homosexuality and homosociality (to mention a few areas that have received significant attention), gaps still remain. Aging masculinities, for example, has only received cursory attention in Victorian studies. This oversight should not suggest, of course, that such studies are unnecessary. In fact, aging masculinities continues to be an active topic in the social sciences and popular news, illustrating the relevancy of this project to life, and more importantly for my purposes the fiction, beyond the nineteenth century. This project—which builds upon Gullette's examination of twentieth-century conceptions of aging, using them to examine how Victorian literature reveals deep concerns regarding the impact of age upon masculinity—thus fills a portion of the existing hole in literary criticism with respect to age-disparate marriage, desire, and aging masculinity. In addition, as this project features male characters who range in age from their 50s to their 70s, it also explores how flexible Victorian notions of aging could be. This project also considers what signaled a man as aged for Victorians—whether a visual marker, something about his character, or perhaps his level of perceived vitality, as aging was not necessarily a product of chronological age—in order to understand how attitudes towards aging as delineated in the era's medical and science writing may have influenced fictional portrayals. In addition, this project considers the norms these fictional couplings trouble and how the novels problematize the desires of aging men—or, ultimately, what happens to male characters as they age that changes them from a good catch to a joke.

By examining fictional couplings, this project seeks to locate the era's implicit and explicit attitudes towards both desire (whether held by the wife and husband) and an
aging man’s claims to masculinity. Not only are the stories are rarely told from the aging male character’s point of view—making the interests of these characters peripheral to each novel’s narrative—but writers use the responses of often unsympathetic narrators and other characters to directly comment on aging masculinity and age-disparate marriage. As such, literature offers a glimpse into not only the attitudes of a time but also reflects how Victorians saw or wanted to see themselves and the people around them, making that lack of sympathy important to trace and consider. Literature is the focus of this study also due to issues of form and genre. The oft-vexed intersections of desire and age-disparate marriage illuminates the novel as a form, and this project explores novels (as opposed to diaries or other non-fiction) not only because they are the dominant genre of the period, but also because desire is one of the main engines of narratives. Further, courtship was a major means for the era’s authors to explore sexual desire—which comes to stand in for a broader range of desires, such as for self-actualization, relevance, youth, and power—and demands investigation of where aging men fit into the narration of such marital efforts.

Part of the reason the problematization of aging male desire emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century is due to the rise of the novel. The novel offered greater diversity of subject matter to a wider audience, and in turn, the novel became inclusive beyond its previous forms: the Gothic and novel of manners. This project primarily focuses on novelistic representations of age-disparate desire, as novels offer a means to explore the interiority of characters. As a result, the unhappy experience of age-disparate marriage is made more apparent and important and is shown in greater depth and detail than was previously available. Indeed, fictional representations offer
glimpses into the minds of characters, revealing what authors imagine are the motivations and outcomes of such pairings. While many of these novels may reflect some degree of the reality of the era’s various attitudes towards age-disparate marriage, they are works driven by the imaginative intentions of their authors. It is, for example, Charlotte Yonge’s choice to have her age-disparate marriage lead to happiness, just as it is George Eliot’s to have her portrayal turn out to be so bitterly disappointing.

Though Nicholas Dames quibbles with the idea that we can be certain “what it might ‘feel’ like to be 50 years old in 1860” (115), we can indeed trace how Victorians imagined it felt to be age 50 and beyond through the era’s fiction. Examining Victorian novels that feature aging characters within the impact of age-disparate attraction and marriage is a key element in revealing how Victorians imagined the impact of aging. As this project explores, aging characters are rarely central, either in terms of narrative or romance, leaving them very much observers within each author’s fictional universe. Mangum argues that aging characters (though age is often seen as a “seemingly neutral category”) serve within novels to provide “opposition to youth,” in part because the Victorian novel is so dominated by the “preoccupations of early adulthood – youthful characters, the life events of youth, the represented bodies and settings and systems of metaphor associated with youth,” making youthfulness seem “unremarkable and unmarked” (“Literary” 124). As examples, Mangum prompts readers to “consider the prominence of not only the Bildungroman but also the marriage plot” (“Literary” 124), making clear that the Victorian novel did not consider marriage to be the purview of aging characters. Despite their peripherality, as the novels explored in this project
reveal, aging characters still have an impact. As Chase affirms, “Old people need not be central in order to influence the literature any more than they need be powerful before they generate a powerful effect” (“The Coming” 129). This project explores why aging male characters are pushed to the periphery, as well as the “powerful effect” they have on their young wives and fiancées, along with other characters in the novels.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 2 provides a detailed exploration of Victorian writing that in different ways considered the impact of aging. First, it examines Darwin’s theory of sexual selection to understand how this highly influential concept came to shape ideas of female sexual desire, and, as is argued, influenced the era’s attitudes towards aging. In addition, this chapter delineates how Victorians conceived of the impact of aging in general, as well as how they constructed masculinity in such a way that aging men were vulnerable to being considered less manly, and therefore less entitled to full masculine expression than their younger counterparts. Finally, this chapter looks at how nineteenth-century physicians measured, assessed, and attempted to mitigate the devastation they associated with aging. The prescription for aging men formed through the era’s writing on science, masculinity, and medicine was self-control, which in effect, pathologized aging desire, and in turn, age-disparate marriage – a perspective explored in the chapters that follow.

As Chapter 3 shows in the example of Charles Dickens’s Bounderby, both age and class mediate definitions of masculinity. As such, both demand adaptations from men, which can result in various forms of performance of masculinity. This analysis illuminates both the social pains of aging and its particular impact on an aging man’s claims to classed masculinity – in this case, that of the wealthy middle class with
ostensibly under-class roots. In other words, as shown in the literature of the era, older men (such as Bounderby) marry younger women (like Louisa Gradgrind) to perform masculinity. Through an examination of *Hard Times*’ portrayal of Bounderby and an exploration of Victorian conceptions of classed and aging masculinity via nineteenth-century writers, such as Carlyle and Kingsley, and critics such as John Tosh and Davidoff and Hall, this chapter explores how representations of class interact with those of aging masculinity.

Chapter 4 explores Dorothea Brooke’s struggle to come to terms with her desires—whether for intellectual development, to impact her community, or those that express her sensuality—as highlighted and brought to crisis within her marriage to her much older first husband, Casaubon. This union, while socially acceptable due to his wealth and status, is also repellant to other characters within George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* due to the disparity in their ages. This chapter revises the models of Robert Polhemus and Chase and Levenson by examining how this problematization of age-disparate marriage can be rooted within the Victorian ideals of liberalism and domestic femininity. For, while these ideals are oppositional on choice and personal liberty, both privilege the restraint of the self, speaking to the prevalence and impact of this value and highlighting just how problematic Dorothea’s desires for her much older husband truly are. Though her marriage to her more age-matched second husband is also a source of social derision, Eliot makes it a happy one, affirming the expression of age-matched desire.

Chapter 5 traces the intersections between aging, desire, and madness. To contextualize a reading of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Joshua Haggard’s Daughter*, this
Chapter 6 uses novels by Trollope and Hardy to examine the era’s developing conceptions of the appropriate rationale for marriage. Drawing upon the ideas of writers who argued for changes in Victorian conceptions of marriage—including Mona Caird, Frances Power Cobbe, and Marie Corelli—this chapter details how financial considerations and duty, the very concerns that drive the acceptance of marriage for Trollope and Hardy’s young female characters, were increasingly argued as an unacceptable motivation for marriage. Instead, as was asserted, marriage should be inspired by mutual love, passion, and friendship – ultimately affirming that age-disparate marriages are best avoided due to their potential for personal, domestic, and social disaster. In effect, rather than marrying the young female character himself, the older

chapter draws upon the work of Logan and van Zuylen to explore the association Victorians made between Methodism, madness, and gender (as well as class, since Methodism was a working-class religion, making Haggard part of the lower ranks associated with Bounderby). Since, as this chapter explores, religious mania was most often associated with women, its manifestation reveals much about Haggard’s aging masculinity. Braddon’s portrayal of the intersections of her protagonist’s masculinity and religiosity over the course of the novel show how his inappropriate desire becomes his undoing. Prior to his marriage to the much younger Cynthia, Braddon describes Haggard as manfully strong in body, mind, and spirit. In the pages that follow his age-disparate marriage, however, that strength progressively wanes. In an ostensibly vital and powerful man, Braddon includes a flaw—his sense of spiritual self-importance and entitlement—that finds full expression once he comes to suffer romantic disappointment, making religious mania a way to signify Haggard’s loss of masculinity.
male character should protect her financial and romantic interests, in effect acting as a steward for a future that she will not share with him. Examining these two very different novels together with late-nineteenth century marital writing shows that they are, in fact, part of a larger conversation that idealized mutual passion as an indicator of true marital compatibility.

Chapter 7 considers how three very different novels—Charlotte Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*, Wilkie Collins’ *Man and Wife*, and Thomas Hardy’s *The Hand of Ethelberta*—present age-disparate pairings as rescue narratives, revealing the ways that age-disparate pairings could be justified and made socially acceptable. To do so, it considers writers and critics who detailed an aging men’s supposed increase in spirituality in tandem with those who considered the larger social issues facing women, including marriage laws and the surplus woman problem, which illustrates the ways these novelists sought to rationalize aging desire. However, while these novels do affirm age-disparate marriages as successful (subverting the era’s norms of novelistic representations of such pairings), the justification they offer both rationalize and undermine the older male characters’ desires. As this chapter reveals, reciprocity of affection and marital happiness cannot trump the limitations dictated regarding the impact of aging. Even a loving marriage to a young and beautiful woman cannot erase the damage of age upon a character’s masculinity, revealing just how deeply aging was perceived as exacting a cost upon a man’s sexuality during the Victorian era.
Armed with their developing understanding of physiology and disease, medical writers of the nineteenth century increasingly posited that desire became unsafe for men as they aged. No longer was the main penalty for age-disparate desire the potential loss of dignity – seen by the long-held archetype of the dirty old man, a figure of amusement and derision to this day. Instead, aging men were said to be under the threat of debility and even death. Anthony Trollope’s *The Fixed Period*—published anonymously in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1881-1882—provides a fictional echo of the era’s medical characterizations of aging as a state of decay, debility, and dependency. In Trollope’s novel, the citizens of Britannula have passed the “Fixed Period,” a law dictating that its citizens would be euthanized before their seventh decade, as “in a great majority of cases, life beyond sixty-eight was all vanity and vexation of spirit” (Trollope 52). The novel’s aging protagonist and narrator argues that with aging comes deafness, fading vision, and a querulous voice, with increasing bodily weakness demanding that the aging “should be troubled no longer with labour, and therefore should be troubled no longer with life” (18). He bitterly bemoans that the aging “wastes more than his share of the necessaries of life, and becomes, on the aggregate, an intolerable burden,” and as such, directs us to “read Shakespeare’s description of man in his last stage—‘Second childishness, and mere oblivions, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything’” (193). However, the attempts to protect Britannula from the burden of its aging citizens is undone by the vitality and sharpness of the first man scheduled to be euthanized, Gabriel Crasweller, which eventually leads to the
abolishment of the Fixed Period.\textsuperscript{2} The novel has been previously analyzed by critics as an example of how Victorian writers—whether medical/scientific or fictional—represented aging as debilitating and degenerative – very much a regrettable state of “sans everything.”\textsuperscript{3}

Indeed, Trollope’s narrator and his real-life Victorian-era peers exemplify an attitude identified by the scholar of aging and spirituality, Eugene Bianchi: “in a society where the production of things is paramount, people are easily treated as things, to be discarded when no longer useful” (163). And in fact, part of the way in which the aging are objectified and discarded can be traced by their place in romantic narratives. With few exceptions, older characters are edged out of their romantic pursuits in the face of youthful rivals and their own inadequacies as revealed by and associated with their aging. And \textit{The Fixed Period} upholds that standard, as revealed when Trollope’s aging narrator describes in admiring terms Crasweller’s young daughter, Eva (a moment in the novel that has not yet received critical attention). She is beautiful—“perfect in symmetry, in features, in complexion, and in simplicity of manners”—intelligent, and an accomplished musician, and her appeal makes the narrator reflect on a moment when he “saw her by chance take a kiss from her lover behind the door” and “felt it was a pity indeed that a man should ever become old” (23). Part of the pity in aging, then, goes

\textsuperscript{2} At nearly 67, he “had fewer symptoms of age that any old man” and was “tall, robust, and broad, and there was no beginning even of a stoop about him. He spoke always clearly and audibly” and in fact, it was suggested, “Craswaller should not be deposited because of the beauty of his voice” (Trollope 25-26). Further, “He has got ten years of work in him” and “is in excellent health, and has all his wits about him a great deal better” than younger men (Trollope 27, 56).

\textsuperscript{3} For example, Karen Chase connects her reading of the “instability of age” shown in Trollope’s novels to examine the resurgence of the almshouse movement, which in effect helped define the parameters of old age, by determining the threshold age for occupancy (which was alternatively “50, 55, or 60”), a topic that Trollope works through in \textit{The Fixed Period} (77, 78).
beyond merely a potential decrease in productivity or the pathos of bodily changes. The pity can also be located in the attitude that an aging man cannot desire and romantically pursue a much younger woman.

If, as Melvin A. Kimble writes, “the crisis of old age appears to be a crisis of meaning” (113), then that crisis is one with far reaching personal and social implications. As gerontologist Robert Atchley asserts, “Older people as a social category are set aside; not recruited, wanted, needed, or appreciated by employers or community organizations” (68). The social expulsion of the aging, whether in fiction or real life, is unfortunately one that is not new, as is revealed in a variety of ways in Victorian fiction. As this project affirms, a fictional character cannot cheat the impact of age and its impact upon his ability to pursue and achieve his romantic desires. In fact, one way we can read how old a fictional character is considered in nineteenth-century fiction is to examine how desire operates within a text – doing so shows exactly how these aging men are perceived as too old to be loved and to fully and lastingly love the young women they pursue and marry. Instead, these characters are prompted to rechannel their interests along patriotic, spiritual, or otherwise self-sacrificing lines, indicating just how far aging pushes men towards an increasingly feminine role. Under such precepts, it is unsurprising that aging men’s desire for younger women was often pathologized and seen as not only ludicrous but unnatural. This chapter explores how Victorians developed their conception of aging as debilitating by exploring writing that considers masculinity, along with the era’s science and medical writing, to uncover the emergence of a clear prescription against the desires of aging men.
The Descent and the Aging Man

Published in 1871 as a follow up to his seminal text, The Origin of Species (1859), The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex—which was devoted to “analyzing the origin, function, and character of human social behavior” (Carroll viii)—details Darwin’s theories of how human evolution has been shaped by sexual selection. In discussing the impact of both texts, George Levine argues that they “revolutionized the ways we imagine ourselves within the natural world and have raised fundamental questions about the nature of self, society, history, and religion. Darwin's theory thrust the human into nature and time, and subjected it to the same dispassionate and material investigations hitherto reserved for rocks and stars” (1). Unsurprisingly, such a dispassionate and revolutionary stance was not universally embraced during the Victorian era (or even today, for that matter). Richard A. Kaye points out that the text received “poor reception during Darwin’s day” (87), while Darwin himself acknowledges the negative reaction his theories of sexual selection inspired, though as he states in his Preface to the Second Edition of The Descent of Man, his “conviction of the power of sexual selection remains unshaken.” Darwin’s confidence is affirmed when we consider how influential his ideas remain. Darwin’s work on evolutionary theory and what it has to say about human relationships, romantic or otherwise, has indeed received attention from literary critics. As Joseph Carroll explains, starting in the 1990s, “a small but rapidly growing band of literary scholars, theorists, and critics,” including Levine, Kaye, and Carroll as well as Gillian Beer amongst others, have “been working to integrate literary study with Darwinian social science” (vii). These critics have indeed made inroads in considering how the ideas of Darwin, and those inspired by his writings, have shaped the ideas and literature of the Victorian era. And, while this work has included
considerations of the marriage plot found in so many of the era’s novels (Kaye, for example, has made a noteworthy contribution with *The Flirt’s Tragedy*), no work as yet has considered how Darwin’s writing influences the era’s conceptions of aging male desire. Doing so illuminates how Darwin’s ideas of sexual selection, with its celebration of muscular appeal, leaves as little room for the desires of aging men as the writing of Victorian physicians and moralists explored in the next section do.

*The Descent of Man* devotes much space to detailing those qualities that are distinctive and preferable in men, connecting them to the competition associated with sexual selection. In Chapter 19, “Secondary Sexual Characteristics of Man,” Darwin makes clear that an appearance of rugged muscularity is both closely associated with masculinity and the result of hard won battles for domination. As he explains, in comparison to women, men are “considerably taller, heavier, and stronger . . . with squarer shoulders and more plainly-pronounced muscles”; they are also said to be “more courageous, pugnacious and energetic” with “more inventive genius” (Darwin). Men’s natural tendency towards rippling masculine capability is one they “acquired through the law of battle,” a point Darwin illustrates by comparing man to male monkeys, who are also “bolder and fiercer” than their female counterparts, and “lead the troop, and when there is danger, come to the front.” These qualities, that are “proper to the males, such as size, strength, special weapons, courage and pugnacity” (Darwin), make clear that masculine courage and capability are both closely tied to male’s

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4 Kaye, who writes on Victorian and Edwardian representations of flirtation—which he defines as “the libidinal form of loitering without intent”—examines desire that is “neither completely submerged nor fully expressed but suspended in a series of deferrals,” arguing that “desire frustrates reason and creates havoc” (4, 2). As he explains, “the purpose of desire in Victorian fiction is not necessarily the realization of erotic need but the maintenance of deferral” (Kaye 6). As he makes clear, there is pleasure in the deferral of choice in the process of sexual selection.
physique, and also what is “proper” for him to manifest – an attitude that leaves little room for dignity or love for those who are less pugnaciously robust, whether due to the genetic lottery or to age.

As *The Descent of Man* indeed affirms, a man’s appearance is strongly influential in determining his social and romantic success. Darwin’s text makes clear that it is a great determiner in whether a man can win the attentions and affections of a woman: “brilliant color, a handsome plumage, even the sound of a male animal’s voice, all had to be figured into the intricate calculus of sexual mating” (Kaye 85). Darwin’s focus on the attractiveness of males makes sense when you consider his argument that women, and not men, drive sexual selection. As Darwin explains, sexual selection takes two forms. The first is where males “drive away or kill their rivals,” with the “females remaining passive,” while the second puts women in the dominant position, and the “struggle is likewise between the individuals of the same sex, in order to excite or charm those of the opposite sex, generally the females, which no longer remain passive, but select the more agreeable partners” (Darwin). No longer solely characterized as passive observers on the path to marriage, instead, women “accept only those males which excite or charm them most” (Darwin), a description redolent with seduction and titillation. As Kaye explains, this privileging of the judgment of “male charm and attractiveness” by the “standard-determining female” makes her standards (or desires, really) one of the “defining elements in the evolutionary process” (97), moving Victorian

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5 Kaye observes that this element of his theories of sexual selection rather surprisingly inspired a largely derisive response: “Given the pervasiveness of the flirtatious erotics of ‘female choice’ as a key thematic component in Victorian fictional narrative well before the appearance of *The Descent of Man*, it is more than a little surprising that Darwin’s suggestions concerning the aesthetics of female choosing should have proven so inimical to the thinking of his contemporaries” (93).
women from the sidelines to the forefront in driving the evolution of humans, both socially and biologically. In fact, as critic Nancy Armstrong argues, the sexual interest that is part of sexual selection has the effect of endowing women with creator-like powers beyond childbearing, for, “in selecting ‘the more agreeable partners,’ the female of the species quite literally creates the male in the image of her desires” (222). Female desire, then, becomes the engine of not only domestic happiness, but also civilization.6

The larger implications of the centrality of female desire are revealed by the literal outcome of women’s choice: their children. As the competition to keep and win a wife ensures that only the most physically capable men marry and reproduce, not only do the most desirable men marry more often, but they also have greater success at passing on their genes. As Darwin argues, the “strongest and most vigorous men” are the ones who could best protect and provide for their families and as such, “succeed in rearing a greater average number of offspring than the weaker and poorer members of the same tribes,” allowing them to pass on their genes more successfully, and to greater advantage to their offspring, than those less desirable (in other words, less masculine appearing) men. In fact, as Darwin asserts, “Both sexes ought to refrain from marriage if they are in any marked degree inferior in body or mind” – making clear that only the strong should both survive and marry. The reader is left unclear what that bodily inferiority entails, though based upon the attitudes of the time it is easy to imagine that

6 One interesting facet of the place of women in Darwin’s evolutionary theory is that they are also argued to have a civilizing influence. This characterization has been commented upon by literary critics who have explored how The Descent of Man scientifically affirms the, as Dowling puts it, “deeply held Victorian conviction that woman was the inspiration and guardian of civilization” (51). As Nancy Armstrong argues, Darwin’s “model of culture” is dependent less on the “competitive prowess of the male as on the female’s ability to domesticate him,” which has the effect of “exempt[ing] women from political relations and detach[ing] domestic life, by definition from the competitive practices that are supposed to characterize men” (224, 40).
aging marks a man as inadequate to the task of winning and keeping a woman, or creating sons who possess the necessarily physique and inner courage to ensure his people’s (i.e., Britain’s) dominance. As such, the stakes of sexual selection are high, as it has a far-reaching impact on future generations. Schopenhauer also supports this perspective on the lasting importance of sexual selection, arguing “the final aim of all love intrigues, be they comic or tragic, is really of more importance than all other ends in human life. What it all turns upon is nothing less than the composition of the next generation . . . It is not the weal or woe of any one individual, but that of the human race to come, which is here at stake” (qtd. in Darwin). Indeed, choice in marital partners is seen as fraught with tremendous responsibility, for, as critic Gillian Beer affirms, “for Darwin love-intrigues and the marriage market involve the future of the human race” (199), while as Kaye observes, the “preordained Darwinian scheme of ‘sexual selection’” is one where “females choose their mates for the siring of offspring” (158).

The predominating importance placed upon the production of offspring as an impetus for marriage is meaningful to consider in part because few fictional age-disparate marriages are shown as resulting in children.

Darwin’s privileging of both men’s ability to physically dominate rivals and women’s roles in selecting those men they find desirable is problematic for aging men. When considering attitudes towards the aging male body as highlighted by the era’s medical writing (as discussed later in this chapter), as a man became older he would no longer be considered to possess the brilliance of plumage, as it were, necessary to attract a young woman. Though *The Descent of Man* does not overtly discuss the age of the male being judged for attractiveness and weighed for sexual selection, the
vulnerability of aging men is subtly suggested when in his discussion of man’s competition to win both dominance and female approval, Darwin draws upon the findings of naturalist Felix de Azara (published in 1809) who in studying the “Guanas of South America” found that the “men rarely marry till twenty years or more, as before that age they cannot conquer their rivals.” In other words, a weak man cannot marry a desirable woman and expect to keep her. This scenario of romantic competition is one that leaves men who are smaller and weaker than the boldest and fiercest of their community little hope to win and secure the women they love in marriage. In addition, it also offers few options for men who may no longer possess the pugnacious energy necessary to best a young rival who is more age-matched with the young woman they desire; in effect, the laws of both battle and love best the desires of aging men. Indeed, as is revealed by the novels examined in this project, while an aging man may be considered attractive by characters within a novel, the young woman he romantically pursues generally does not hold him in that regard. She may revere or respect him, but rarely does she find him physically desirable. As Kaye argues, “The Descent of Man confirmed the prevailing Victorian faith that the ‘courtship plot’ was so universal as to possess a basis in nature” (Kaye 85). As both Darwin and the era’s novelists affirm, the restrictions and valuing conveyed by the courtship plot is one that cannot happily narrate the desires of aging men.

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7 And, indeed, the pressure of the battle to win and keep love is one that is often shown to edge out the desires of aging male characters. As Kaye explains, the pressure of the completion that underlies sexual selection can be too much for some males to bear, with Darwin observing, “certain birds, exhausted by the demands of sexual selection, simply drop out of the courtship process” (Kaye 99). The exhaustion of continually seeking to win the affections of the women they love is too much for some men – and, if we go by the novelistic conventions, those who are aging will dominate those numbers.
Iron, Tin, and Wooden: Victorian Conceptions of Aging

The Victorian era has been characterized as “obsessed with youth, energy, activity, and progress” (Mangum “Growing” 98); as a result, Victorian conceptions of aging were in transition from earlier “intuitive folk ways of defining old age, which took little note of actual birthdates” and instead “gradually gave way to quantitative systems of definition” which sought to “document, quantify, and classify old age” (Mangum “Growing” 98, 104). Over the course of the nineteenth century, physicians writing on aging attempted to define when a person was, in fact, truly old. George E. Day in his 1849 text, *A Practical Treatise on the Domestic Management and Most Important Diseases of Advanced Life*, claimed, “human life is divisible into three great periods—those of Growth, Maturity, and Decline” and further divides the “years of declining life” into three “epochs”: “declining age” which begins before 60 and “advanced age, or incipient old age” which lasts from 60 to 70 (3, 26). In addition, Sir Anthony Carlisle (writer of the 1819 *An Essay on the Disorders of Old Age, and on the Means for Prolonging Human Life*), saw 60 as the “beginning of senility” (Freedman 45), while other writers of the era believed the signs of “old age,” whether gradual or sudden, often emerged “between 50 and 75” (Mangum “Growing” 106) – a window of time, incidentally, that most of the aging male characters featured in this novel fit into.

Further, based upon his research, as revealed in *Legal Responsibility in Old Age Based on Researches in to the Relation of Age to Work* (1874), George Beard characterizes the ages between 30 and 40 as the “golden decade,” with 40 to 50 as “silver,” 50 to 60 as “iron,” 60 to 70 as “tin,” and 70 to 80 as “wooden,” representing a clear and marked
decline in value (7). Both physicians make clear that post-mid life, as the 50 and 60s would be, a man was in decline – iron or tin to a younger man’s gold. To be in one’s 50s or 60s then, as many of the characters featured in this project are, is to have already been tainted, however imperceptibly, by decline, no matter the appearance of youthfulness.

In addition to chronological measures, age and aging was (and still is) defined in a variety of ways. As critic Devoney Looser argues, “what it means to ‘be’ old is by no means straightforward,” as “old age is a fluid category” (“Old Age” 133, 135), while Naomi Tadmor agrees that the conception of age is difficult to define, explaining, “the term ‘old’, most scholars agree, was ‘fluid’ . . . . It is often hard to determine whether it is chronological age, bodily decay, or any other factor that hid behind the epithet ‘old’” (118). And, while for Victorians, chronological age indeed held weight, as Pat Thane argues, “‘functional’ age” or the “degree of capacity to carry out essential tasks” (Thane Old 4) was even more important at establishing when one had become elderly. In addition, while conceptions of age are often seen as “related to biological phenomena”—such as wrinkles, silvering hair, and other markers—the “meanings” of those phenomena are “socially and culturally determined. ‘Social age’ is a relative concept and varies in different cultural contexts” (Hareven 121). The contextual nature of aging—both in terms of culture and also in terms of how we are measured by others—is indeed a key factor in determining the impact of age upon the era’s fictional characters. Further, as geropsychologists James E. Birren and Johannes J. F. Schroots

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8 As Beard explains, providing further evidence of aging as decline, “Seventy per cent of the work of the world is done before 45, and eighty per cent. before 50. . . . The best period of fifteen years is between 30 and 45” (7-8).
observe, “aging [becomes] not only a matter of measurement but also an inner process” over the course of the nineteenth century (17), which makes clear that aging has an impact deeper than physical health and appearance. This “inner process” is one that can create a disparity between the externally imposed evaluations of age—i.e., the chronological, biological, and functional ages—and an individual’s sense of himself. As Helen Small argues, “the age we feel is not necessarily the same as our calendrical age, nor is it the same as how we are perceived, or how we register ourselves being perceived by others” (*The Long*), while Thane also asserts there can be a strong disparity between how a person feels and how they are perceived: “visual, cultural, definitions of old age at all times might conflict, and coexist, with both chronological and functional definitions. People might ‘look old’ but remain vigorous; or they might be old in years, but ‘not look their age’; and subjectively, they might ‘not feel old’ however they appear to others” (Thane *Old*). And indeed, the perceptions of others (and how those perceptions are read by those being judged) carry weight beyond one’s functional age, no matter how seemingly virile and capable one appears – an idea that the aging male characters featured in this project affirm.

In fact, the impact of aging can be revealed surprisingly early in a man’s life – marking a man seemingly in the prime of his life as in actuality verging on aged. Sylvanus Stall, Lutheran minister and author of the “Self and Sex” series that began publication starting in the 1890s, describes 45 as the “youth of old age” and the age “beyond all peradventure” when men undergo their own “change of life” or “climacteric” (5, 56-57), a stage physician Bernard Van Oven puts at a man’s 50s and 60s, and describes as when “those derangements arise which have been called climacteric”
(106) in his 1853 text, *On the 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*. Van Oven’s use of “derangements” suggests that the changes associated with aging are disturbing and upsetting – and as this chapter makes clear, that was indeed a typical Victorian perspective of aging. And, in fact, as critic Devoney Looser explains, the “grand climacteric might be seen as kind of gateway to old age” (9) – a hallmark that one has transitioned past mid-life into decline.\(^9\) However, although these physical and mental “derangements” can be detected on a man’s face or bearing, the slide into agedness can be unsettlingly subtle. As it is explained, “some men glide so insensibly from one stage of life into another, that no line of demarcation can be perceived” (Van Oven 106) and “maturity slowly and insensibly glides into decline, so that the line of demarcation is imperceptible, and the distinction between these epochs entirely arbitrary” (Maclachlan 2). Physicians of the nineteenth century saw aging as a period of decay and decline, a state of being in which a man could be entrenched well before he realized he was no longer golden but instead tending mercilessly towards wooden.

The decline model of aging can be rooted in the Victorian era’s development of medical research and writing. As Pat Thane explains, “cultural representations of old age” are “drawn from philosophical or medical texts, literature, paintings, film, recorded expressions of everyday opinion or any other source” (“Social” 94), all of which

\(^9\) Developmental psychologist Susan Krauss Whitbourne has more recently written on this period, explaining that Victorian attitudes still predominate: “The male climacteric is a target of countless myths, jokes, speculation, and concern. Commonly held views of aging men emphasize the loss of sexual potency and interest that are presumed to occur in later life. Sexuality for the man over sixty-five, as for his female counterpart, has long been regarded as immoral, inappropriate, and a foolish attempt to regain lost youth and vigor” (Whitbourne 45). However, as Whitbourne clarifies, “lowered testosterone does not appear to be an inevitable feature of the aging process” (47), meaning that an aging man has no true biological barriers to sexual expression past mid-life.
simultaneously illustrate and shape attitudes towards aging. And indeed, this project
draws upon medical texts to situate the novels examined. The “biological essentialism”
(Small *The Long 3*) that came to dominate Victorian conceptions of aging was revealed
by the “emergence of geriatric medicine,” which “placed another barrier of exclusion
between the generations, by ‘medicalizing’ and in consequence marginalising old age . . .
Popular and social science discourses have united in representing the history of old
age, up to the present, as a narrative of relentless decline” (Thane *Old 2*). Some critics
have linked the overwhelming negativity with which people conceive of aging to this
medicalization, arguing, “Without positive symbols to give meaning to growing old, it is
understandable why aging is viewed as a ‘medical problem.’ Medical science, itself, has
been guilty of reinforcing this negative view by sometimes treating aging as a disease to
be prevented or cured” (Kimble 114). Further, this medicalization of aging had the effect
of serving to “minimalise traditional (e.g. religious) constructs about the life-death
course,” as Christopher Conrad asserts (134), which further served to evacuate aging of
meaning and significance. The idea of aging as a sign of degeneracy is certainly one
that gained traction over the course of the nineteenth century\(^{10}\) and though Thane
places this “emergence” in the twentieth century, the roots of this perspective can be
located within Victorian medical writing. In fact, as Eugene C. Bianchi, scholar of the
spirituality of aging, affirms, “many contemporary social attitudes toward old age in

\(^{10}\) This attitude is echoed by Thomas R. Cole, who argues, “aging has fallen under the dominion of
scientific management, which is primarily interested in how we age in order to explain and control the
aging process. American culture thrives on the mythology that aging is not a fated aspect of our individual
and social existence but rather one of life’s problems to be solved through willpower, science, medicine,
and the accumulation of wealth” (“On the Possibilities” 27).
America perpetuate negative nineteenth-century views on the elderly” (Bianchi 149), making a study of Victorian conceptions of aging both important and relevant.

Indeed, Victorian medical writers associated the transition from mid-life maturity to aged decline with a multitude of rather grim effects. As Helen Small explains, “if there was a medical narrative of old age,” Victorian physician John Elliotson provided a characteristic reading of “deceleration, arrest, and then decay: impervious to the skills of the doctor, and yet possessing a certain grotesque energy” (“Old” 67), an assertion borne out by the era’s medical writing. For example, Dr. Day devotes pages of his text to outlining in unsparing detail the impact of aging on the liver, respiratory system, circulation, and digestion – the latter inspiring a lengthy explanation of “the best methods of boiling meat” (39). In Man and Woman (1894), British sexologist and physician Havelock Ellis discusses how the weight of the brain experiences “no notable fall until after fifty-five” for men, with a “somewhat rapid decline after this age” (112-113), suggesting that a man in his 50s is well on his way to becoming senile and doddering. Earlier in the century, Dr. Carlisle explains of the apparent bodily submission to the tyranny of time: “after the middle period of life, the creature is supposed to have fulfilled the command of nature for continuing its race, and the bodily fabric then begins to decline. . . . The compactness and vigour of the muscular flesh begin to diminish, and all the inward fittings and adjustments are prone to give way” (9). The grim poetry of Carlisle’s description—with the “bodily fabric” of the aging “creature” unable to contain the “inward fittings and adjustments”—suggests the devastation of aging. Further, the aging man is allowed no dignity to compose himself in the face of his loss of “vigour.” Maclachlan explains the impact of aging as “slow, though ever progressive . . . long
before he admits it, or is even aware of it himself, the changes wrought on the system by advancing years, as well as the altered character of his attitude, gait, and movements, are palpable to others" (4). If an aging man manages to ignore his own developing decrepitude, the manner in which he responds to others and moves through the world reveals all, affirming that aging is not only related to the weight of one’s brain or the firmness of one’s liver, but in how “palpable” those changes are to others.

As a result of the rise of the measurement, assessment, and medicalization of aging, Victorians increasingly came to see age as a sign of debility rather than an indicator of wisdom, maturity, and the reward for a life well lived. As social historian Tamara K. Hareven argues, over the course of the nineteenth century, people began conceiving of aging as “distinct period of life characterized by decline, weakness, and obsolescence,” rather than a “natural process” (Hareven 120). “Advanced old age, which had earlier been regarded as a manifestation of the survival of the fittest, was now denigrated as a condition of dependence and deterioration. . . . Writers began to identify advancing years with physical decline and mental deterioration” (Hareven 120). Further, as gerontologist Henry C. Simmons explains, the physical changes associated with aging are often read as indicating that those past mid-life are in a state of physical degeneracy: “Frequently our culture portrays older adults as tottering, forgetful, slow-witted and helpless – images which focus on physical decline” (154). Aging moves from being a testament to a life well lived—in a cruel affirmation of how Darwin’s theories of

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11 As Hareven explains, prior the rise of industrialization, “Adulthood flowed into old age without institutionalized disruptions” (126). After its rise, however, a “gradual differentiation in age groups and a greater specialization in age-related functions began to emerge” (Hareven 127), providing an avenue for the aging to be increasingly excluded.
“survival of the fittest” were expanded upon—to a sign that one deserved to have his claims to social and physical fitness revoked. As Looser points out, the idea that the elderly “were once treated with universal reverence” is very much an example of false nostalgia (8). Victorian physician George Beard directly (and with dark humor) comments on the declining reverence towards the aging espoused by many of the era: “At the present time we must go among the savages to find age truly reverenced and influential; but the barbarian who never enters the presence of his father without bending his knee, will greedily eat that father when he has grown too feeble to resist, or will leave him alone in the forest to die” (21).

Youthful Muscularity and Normative Masculinity: Problematic Intersections of Aging and Masculinity

As the previous section suggested, an exploration of the representations and realities of aging would not be complete if it did not include a consideration of how age is impacted by gender. As both Pat Thane and Paul Johnson posit, the aging “are not and have never been a single, simple category” (Thane “An Untiring” 236 and Johnson 15), and one clear influence on one’s experience of aging is gender. As gerontologist Jon Hendricks argues, “gender is the public meaning, the politicization if you will, of one’s chromosomes. . . . It is the presumption and attachment of attitudes, behaviors, and other human attributes based upon biology. . . . We may be hiding behind biology those arrangements that seem socially created” (Hendricks 1).12 The seams of the social construction of gender can be revealed in the way in which it is influenced by age

12 Further, as Beth S. Hess argues, “Gender is a sociocultural construction rather than an individual trait: it is a property of the social structures within which women and men forge identities and through which they realize their life changes. Gender is less a reflection of immutable differences than a means of dividing people into distinct categories” (64).
– in fact, as Jay Ginn explains, “gender and ageing are inextricably intertwined in social life; each can only be fully understood with reference to the other” (1). According to Julie MacMullin, “if age and gender are organizing dimensions of the social world, then separating these systems makes no sense. Older people are not just old, they are either men or women” (37); further, they are also men or women of a certain class, race, or another social marker. Much of the work on the intersections of aging and gender relate to women’s experiences of aging, leaving opportunity to shed new light on the experience and implications of aging masculinity. In fact, doing this work is necessary and important, for as Anne M. Wyatt-Brown argues, “To add age to the study of women and not of men furthers the myth that men are exempt from the influence of aging” (1). This myth is further reinforced within masculinities studies, where older men have “hitherto been invisible in studies on gender, and theories of masculinity have primarily conceptualized the meaning of manhood as it applies to younger men” (Arber 4). Work has been done on Victorian conceptions of masculinity—including, for example, that of John Tosh, James Eli Adams, David Rosen, Arlene Young, and Herbert Sussman—but these have left largely unexplored how those conceptions relate to aging men.

During the nineteenth century, as has been seen was also the case with aging, masculinity was fraught and contested territory. The “terms ‘manly’ and ‘manliness’

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13 This concern is shared within a range of disciplines. As the editors of *Gender and Ageing* affirm, “older men have been largely neglected” (2) in studies of the experience of aging. Frances Cleaver argues, “older men and their concerns are notably absent from both policy and academic literature” (Cleaver 7). Further, “for the most part, gender has not been a concern among sociologists of ageing . . . . We need to explore the ways in which age relationships shape masculinities, leading to lower status (and even invisibility) for older men” (Calasanti 17, 19).

14 This oversight is affirmed by Pat Thane, who claims, “while historians of age have discussed gender” making such connections “has been rare” (“An Untiring” 235), illustrating the need for projects of this scope and focus.
were part of everyday vocabulary during the Victorian and Edwardian periods,” however, “by the end of the nineteenth century an idealized version of masculinity – encompassing physicality, virility, morality and civility – had emerged to some prominence . . . there was no one clear and absolute definition of what being a man meant” (Whitehead 14-15). In addition, the erosion of seemingly fixed notions of manliness “about what is a manly man” (Rosen 21) can also be linked to the “varied and multiform” nature of masculinity (Sussman 14). The “variability of masculinity” (Whitehead 16) meant that while it appeared fixed and unvarying (just as a man’s nature was meant to), it was, in fact, not. The era’s attempt to determine that which was “manly” was, in part, a means to work through “problems of the social authority of men” (Rosen 21), an authority that was contested by men’s social destabilization. Of course, the instability of masculinity demanded attempts at rebalancing, a role that writers of the era, such as Carlyle and Kingsley, as well as novelists, attempted to fill through their writing. Evolving standards of masculinity became rooted in the “fabled Victorian attribute” of “self-discipline” (Adams 5), perhaps as an antidote to the flux that had worryingly become associated with masculinity. As Sussman points out, however, “Carlyle presents a particularly fragile and unstable model of the male psyche always on the edge of eruption, of dissolution, of madness” (19). The threat of an “eruption” of manliness required “the most rigid control” (Sussman 31) – a control that would have been seen as increasingly undermined by the impact of aging. 

In order to reclaim and wield the authority undermined by the destabilizing of masculinity, writers, such as Carlyle, developed a “notion of manliness . . . that detache[d] itself from surface behavior” (Rosen 22). This separation of the manly from
surface attributes, meant that Carlyle was able to create a “category of ‘manliness’ that one cannot enter simply by behaving in a ‘manly’ fashion. . . . No particular behavior but something in men makes them ‘manly.’ ‘Masculinity’ became the expression and perfection of this something” (Rosen 22). The nebulosity of the language used here is telling (it is unclear just what the “something” in men is that makes them manly), revealing that masculinity cannot be entirely fixed (making it no wonder it is so easily destabilized). In fact, fortification of manliness requires a peculiar sort of conceptual configuration, as outlined in the writing of Charles Kingsley. As Rosen explains, the “malleability of Kingsley’s concept of masculinity arises from the positing of a deep structure rather than from the suggestion that particular behaviors and traits might serve as a masculine code” (38). Not that the concept of a “deep structure” means that masculinity is then necessarily a stable force. For, to quote Kingsley, masculinity was also rooted in “the idea of some deep, dark, central force, some ‘heart’ or ‘appetite,’ some inner source from which manly action flows. . . . Manliness can only be achieved by allowing this primal force to flow” (qtd. in Rosen 30). What is of interest for this inquiry, however, is whether the lava flow of manliness that emerges from its “deep, dark, central force” can be exhausted (i.e., such as with the idea of spermatorrheic economy). If a Victorian male does not personify what men “ought to be”—“strong,”

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15 Robert Darby’s article, “Pathologizing Male Sexuality: Lalleman, atorrhea, and the Rise of Circumcision,” provides an excellent accounting of both Victorian conceptions of spermatorrhea and the myriad of grim and damaging treatments designed to manage what was seen as a “most terrible moral and physical disease,” according to physician Marris Wilson in 1856 (qtd. in Darby 283). Spermatorrhea, which created “deep anxiety” amongst the male public and medical professions, included a variety of symptoms—such as “nocturnal emissions, premature ejaculation, diurnal emissions, yet also impotence”—which were all ascribed to the damaging effect of excessive seminal emissions, particularly through masturbation (Darby 283). See also Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk. “Body Doubles: The Spermatorrhea Panic.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12:3 (July 2003): 365-399.
and full of “impulse, force, nature, and sexuality” (Rosen 36)—then what is he? The malleability of such a conception of masculinity means that men who had once been assured that they possessed masculine authority and privilege could find it had shifted and slipped away, leaving them something other than truly manly.

The development of the “deep structure” mode of masculinity makes it less widely accessible, not something that one can acquire or be bestowed, but something that one just is. Manliness, then, is not an inherent quality, “not an essence”—though like an essence, it is subtly discerned and mystified—for all who possess the correct equipment; manliness, instead, is “but a process, the achievement and the maintenance of tense psychic equilibrium. This manliness or achieved manhood is consistently represented through the figure of balanced opposition, as constrained power” (Sussman 28). The process designed to balance and constrain the power of manliness, is of course only noteworthy if there is something to repress. As Sussman explains, of the hero of Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, “It is the very power of Samson’s male desire that makes his celibacy heroic, that makes the achievement of control a noble struggle” (32). As a “model of governing,” to use Carlyle’s language, Abbott Samson’s unexpressed but potent desire is affirmed, in contrast to his Biblical namesake, by his ability to keep his power under control (Sussman 32). So, then, as manliness requires “the creation of a psychic ‘governor’ to regulate the natural energy of maleness” (Sussman 34), it appears unlikely that one can be manly if one is believed to have less to govern (due to the perceived decline in virility).\(^\text{16}\) And, further, if one did have it, the older Victorian

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\(^{16}\) The celebration of self-government can also be tied to the era’s endorsement of upward mobility through diligence and hard work. “This ideal required tight inner control over the ‘passions’ in order to harness the body for work and restrain the excesses of individual competition. To discipline his desire for
male body was argued to be debilitated in such a way that it would likely not be strong enough to control the eruption of this chaos. Amidst the “anxieties” regarding the “male body” (Adams 84) were concerns that have a particular impact on the potential for masculinity for older men: physical virility (though clearly this virility was meant to be restrained). In fact, physicality becomes an important indicator of masculinity. As Adams explains, there was a “crucial shift in Victorian conceptions of masculinity, through which an earlier paradigm of spiritual discipline gave way to a celebration of unreflective bodily vigor” (17). Unfortunately, however, such privileging of “bodily vigor” negatively impacts those (ostensibly) in the decline of their life. If the changing values of masculinity mean one has to visibly possess qualities associated with virility in order to be considered truly manly, then it is possible to argue that a man who is older may not also be truly masculine.

The need for masculine restraint was also reinforced by Victorian standards of femininity that encouraged a paternal role for husbands. As outlined in *Family Fortunes*, a woman of the era was generally limited within the domestic sphere, needing first her father (or other member of her extended kinship network) and then her husband to keep her ensconced within its bustling safety (see Chapter 4 for more on those standards). This dependence was enhanced by “the young, dependent, almost child-like wife” that “was portrayed as the ideal in fiction. . . . Such an image of fragility and helplessness enhanced the potency of the man who was to support and protect her” (Davidoff and

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material wealth, calm the persistent anxieties in his lonely struggle for advancement, and anchor his identity, the would-be self-made man was to follow a strict regimen of industry, self-denial, and restraint” (Thompson 122).
Patricia Menon has described the figure of husband as protector of “fragility and helplessness” as the “mentor-lover” who merges the interests of a lover with the “attributes of the mentor – power, judgment and moral authority” (1). Often inspired by older men’s desire to “custom-educate his bride-to-be” (Menon 10), such men sought to exercise their “power” and “authority” by molding their “child-like” wives to their own preferences and tastes (a topic more fully detailed in Chapter 3). Rather than being seen as the interests of the peculiar or marginal, Tosh argues, “men who approached marriage in this way were in effect strongly reaffirming their middle-class masculine identity . . . here was Victorian patriarchy at its most literal: to the right and powers of the husband was added the authority of the father” (Tosh Manful 54-55). What is of interest for this project is how fictional portrayals of age-disparate relationships are shown to problematize or subvert the very middle-class masculine identity they were meant to affirm, and further, how such relationships are so often presented in such negative lights.

The negativity towards such relationships in fiction is particularly noteworthy as Victorian age-disparate relationships were, in fact, relatively common. In his exploration of the real life age-disparate marriage of prominent Anglican clergyman and educator Edward White Benson and Mary Sidgwick Benson (she 18 and he 30 when they married), John Tosh suggests that a practical aspect motivated this “not uncommon” marital “age gap”: “given the difficulty many men had in assembling the means to support a wife at the required level of comfort” many had to delay marriage until they

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17 Dickens is a prolific creator of such figures, and Louisa becomes one example amidst “the proliferation of child-wives in his novels” (Carr 164).
were financially stable enough to do so (Tosh, “Domesticity” 54). As such, “according to a recent sample of the 1851 census, 31 percent of upper middle-class husbands were at least five years older than their wives” (Tosh Manful 54). An age-disparity of only “five years” (or even 12, as in the case of the Bensons) is not the focus of this project, however, as such unions do not evoke the complicated and sometimes plainly horrified response from writers, their characters, and readers that pairings that straddle 30 to 50 years’ difference do. Not that such responses were the rule, however. As Marilyn Yalom affirms, “it was not uncommon for men to found families in their fifties and sixties. The virile patriarch-cum-venerable sage offered an idealized archetype for masculine old age” (Yalom 453). Here, then, age-disparate marriage can also be an opportunity to display the persistence of “potency” and masculinity. Of course, something “idealized” is not necessarily common, nor for that matter, does that mean that the era’s literature will affirm that idealization.18

And, in fact, Victorian masculine ideals (beyond Darwin’s theories of sexual selection) were connected to features that were largely youthful in quality. As critic Patricia Anderson explains, “Hard, bulging muscle was both publicly acceptable and distinctively masculine” as it “proclaimed manly strength and implied sexual potency,” implying “strength of character, physical toughness, a capacity for action, and endurance in even the harshest outdoor conditions. . . . Apart from his self-control, sporting prowess, and worldly achievements, the mark of the manly man was his

18 This “archetype” was not, however, available to a sizeable number of Victorian men, as the average life expectancy by the 1870s was only 43 years (Banks 3). Further, as Marilyn Yalom explains, the percent of men and women age 65 and above in 1850 was 4.6%, only rising to 4.7% by 1900 (453), a number close to Pat Thane’s assertion that only 6% of the British lived past seventy (“Social” 95).
handsome physical appearance” (50, 54, 59). Though some of the aging protagonists featured in this project are indeed handsome, they cannot embody these physical ideals with nearly the fidelity of younger male characters – most particularly those who are their rivals in love. With those who are aging so often metaphorically portrayed with negative language that cues their aesthetic devaluing—for example, as “over-the-hill” and “dirty old man”—youth, then, “becomes understood as the time of life which is the most desirable, most sought after, most normative for what is human” (Simmons 155). And indeed, as the writers featured in this project affirm, to be young is to be not only desirable and attractive, but in effect, normal. No wonder, then, that sociologist Jeff Hearn argues, “older men are constructed as pre-death” (101)—with all of its haunting, gothic, and withering associations—rather than a different stage of life that is inevitable for us all.

Indeed, aging was closely associated with loss for many Victorians. In an echo of nineteenth-century notions of masculinity, old age appeared to act against the era’s “primary virtues” of “independence, health, success” that embraced a “new morality of self-control” (Thompson 121). In fact, for many the seemingly “decaying body of old age” was a “constant reminder of the limits of physical self-control” that “came to signify precisely what bourgeois culture hoped to avoid: dependence, disease, failure, and sin” (Thompson 121). In effect, aging is seen as a betrayal, with the decaying devolution of bodies marking the aged as no longer firmly possessing self-control. As such, through

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19 As sociologist Peter Öberg affirms, “When we present ourselves in everyday life, our bodies constitute part of the social information, information which can harmoniously accompany the way in which we wish to present ourselves” (709). However, that harmony can dissipate over time, as through the impact of aging, one can experience “bodily betrayals,” making the body “an unpredictable ally” (Öberg 711).
an erosion of access to the “physical capital” (Thompson 124) of the masculine body, aging men and their fictional counterparts often discovered “if not an outright loss of sexual identity then a lapse into a state akin to helpless femininity” (Mangum “Growing” 99). Sociologist Jeff Hearn also connects aging with an erosion of masculine self-conception, arguing, the “physical breakdown” associated with aging is a “terrifying experience for many men because it connects the masculine body with weakness, dependency and passivity – all the supposedly ‘feminine’ qualities they have spent a lifetime defining and defending themselves against” (106). And indeed, for many Victorians this sense of loss often lead to the characterization of aging males as “asexual” and possessing “genderlessness” (Thompson 13). In effect, the same nineteenth-century values that celebrated “youth, independence, and economic productiveness” meant (and, unfortunately, often still mean) that aging is a “negation” of masculinity – in effect, “‘old men’ are not men at all” (Thompson 13).

One such reason can be found within the association of, to use Mangum’s expression, “helpless femininity” with aging, which is rooted in the conviction that older people had lost access to their sexual identity (an attitude unfortunately often still upheld) – or to be specific to the topic at hand, in the conviction that older men have lost claims to their virility. As Auguste Debay explains in his highly popular French

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20 The “feminizing effects of old age” (Mangum “Growing” 99) were expressed via two models of aging popular during the era. There was the “vitality model,” which “defined old age as the gradual oozing away of limited energy and ability” while the “second theory contended that a ‘grand climacteric’ marked the change of life. Proponents argued that old age emerged suddenly, causing pronounced physical collapse, a loss of sexual identity and desire, and often abrupt mental deterioration” (Mangum “Growing” 106).

21 As Sara Arber, Kate Davidson, and Jay Ginn explain, the “tendency to desexualize ageing is apparent at societal, academic and practice/policy levels” (9). Further, most still see older people as “largely asexual beings . . . even though data indicate that many older persons are sexually active” (Marsiglio 126).
nineteenth-century marriage manual regarding healthy frequency of sexual intimacy, “From twenty to thirty years of age, a married man may exercise his rights two to four times a week. . . . From thirty to forty years, a man should limit himself to twice a week. From forty to fifty, once a week. . . . Continence is a necessity for those over sixty” (qtd. in Hellerstein 175). This attitude, which was certainly not universally held during the era, makes clear that if aging meant the negation of masculinity it could also mean the negation of sexual intimacy. Mangum argues, “Most Victorians found it impossible to believe that normal elderly people could feel something as fundamental to human experience as sexual desire and therefore ruthlessly ridiculed any signs of sensuality” (“Literary” 67). This tendency to ridicule mid- and later-life “sensuality,” and sexuality for that matter, can be seen in the literature of the era; for example, in the characterization of Michael's admiration for “elegant young” Ethelberta as “a vile thing in an old man” in Hardy’s The Hand of Ethelberta (3-4), or as will be explored, in the response to nearly every fictional age-disparate pairing featured in this project. Aging is seen as “being more challenging to male sexual identity,” in part due to the perception of sexuality as being “seen by male participants as a means of expressing both ‘maleness’ and ‘youthfulness’” (Gott 66, 72). Unlike women who can no longer bear children after the hormonal changes associated with mid-life, men largely retain their reproductive potency – though as this project explores, that did not mean that they were necessarily entitled to its expression.

**Managing Passion and Paradoxia: Intersections of Aging, Masculinity, and Medicine**

Reading the novels featured in this project alongside medical writing illustrates that the plight of the authors’ aging male characters was part of a larger nineteenth-century
conversation that was contributed to and shaped by not only science and medical writing, but also that which considered masculinity. As historian Françoise Barret-Ducrocq explains, though Victorians are consistently seen as “the paradigm of sexual hypocrisy,” a “glance at the moralizing literature of the nineteenth century shows that proposals for moral reform were accompanied by demands for ever more open discussion of sex” (1). The continued push for discussion of sex “stems partly from the growing scientific interest in their own bodies being shown by the dominant classes. Doctors, reformers, Christians, educators, developed in a wealth of detail, and often with great freedom of expression, their analysis of sexual behavior considered to be pathological” (Barret-Ducrocq 2). This increasing “scientific interest” had the effect of allowing people to see bodies and sexuality as having the potential to be “pathological,” or diseased and abnormal (and, further, dangerous). Anderson further affirms that this extensive analysis of sexuality meant that sex moved from the realm of the private, and “increasingly attracted the professional attention of legislators, doctors, educators” and others who “sorted and separated it into categories and behaviors” (1). Further, this developing categorization and understanding of sexuality became increasingly common knowledge for all Victorians. As critic Ellen Bayuk Rosenman explains, “with the rise of scientific medicine and the professionalization of surgeons, who treated venereal diseases, the nineteenth century served up corporeal representations as never before” (11). As a result, “articles and illustrations appeared in respectable scientific journals read by lay readers” and “popular medical advice books, quack pamphlets, and medical texts became available in used book stores” (Rosenman 11). This section explores the
content of those books, pamphlets, and texts in an effort to understand how Victorians tried to make sense of the impact of aging upon male sexuality.

While the effect of aging on the body was inevitable, many Victorians believed that control and denial of impulses could mitigate that effect. The 1840s James Baillie illustration, “Life and Age of Man” explains it succinctly, “Strength fails at Fifty, but with wit, fox like” the aging man can “manage it” (Cole and Edwards 261). Such fox-like management can have a crucial impact on the aging man’s long-term health and happiness, as Stall argues, and a man at 45 has it within his power to determine “whether the years which still remain to him shall be years of weakness, decrepitude, devoid of purpose and without energy . . . or whether his years shall be characterized by strength and vigor and energy and usefulness” and “whether he will be a burden to himself or a blessing to the world” (175-176). One way a man can ensure he will age vigorously is to manage his desires. As critics Cole and Edwards explain, “British moralists” believed “health and longevity might be regarded as worldly rewards to proper conduct, while infirmity and old age would represent punishment for intemperance and undesirable behaviour” (255).22 Certainly, Victorian writers often expressed rather stern advice designed to curb what was judged as non-age-appropriate behavior. Van Oven claims, the “duty” of “all persons who have attained the climacteric age” is to “carefully avoid ill excesses and undue exertions” (110-111), while Stall cites the “degree at which one has avoided all forms of excess” as a significant

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22 Cole and Edwards also connect the attitude that the effects of aging could be prevented by temperance with the era’s developing medical knowledge: “As more and more natural states of decay were medicalized by labelling them states of disease instead, at least in theory more and more were also thought to be avoidable and/or open to cure” (244).
factor in the speed and depth with which a man ages (37). And while the writers cite stress, physical exertion, and poor diet as sources of debilitating “excess,” it is easy to imagine they also include sexual relations as an “undue exertion” that can chase an aging man to his grave.

And indeed, even if an older man can still perform sexually after all the derangements of age have taken their toll, the temptation to pursue intimacy to excess (“what else would an older man do with his young wife?” seems to be the underlying assumption) was believed to lead to a decline in his physical health. Van Oven asserts in 1853 that “undue indulgence in venereal pleasure, and, hence, ill-assorted marriages, late in life, often lead to climacteric decay,” which makes clear that the “undue” or excessive sexual “indulgence” that results when a young man marries a younger woman will hasten a man’s aging (109). And in fact, in 1857, William Acton prescribes self-control to aging men who might still be moved by sexual desire. “If the elderly man wishes to preserve his intellectual faculties, health, and vigor, and would enjoy a long life, he must be content with, at most, only a very moderate indulgence of his sexual passion” (Acton 244). This sentiment is echoed by Stall who reflects: “It is important therefore to ask, how is virility prematurely sacrificed? The first and most frequent cause is sexual excess” (Stall 95). The stakes for the “elderly” men not content with “very moderate indulgence,” according to Victorian thinking can be summarized in Acton’s footnoted quote from Cardinal Maury that an aging “man of sense ought to give up the pleasures of love, for every time he indulged in them he threw on his head a handful of earth” (246). This connection between sexual passion and death is the crux of Acton’s argument and he advised his patients in language that connected the physical changes
they experienced to the apparently imminent arrival of death. Acton’s response to the apparently naive wish in men after sixty for sex is to “appeal to their common sense, and gently remind them that their symptoms may be slight warnings of the approach of the enemy; that, as old soldiers, they should begin to exercise a little caution” (Acton 250). According to Acton's medical wisdom, the “enemy” (death) can be held at bay if the aging man understands that the physical changes associated with aging mean that sex is no longer his purview.

In addition to appealing to rationality, sentiment, and a desire to avoid humiliation, Victorian writers made a multitude of scientific claims regarding the bodily dangers of sexual activity for aging men. Acton asserts that aging causes blood to flow to the testes with a fraction of their previous force, that the scrotum shrinks and testicles “atrophy,” and the “complicated vascular tissues which form them become obliterated” (246). Van Oven argues along similar lines, claiming that the “power of procreation” for men “continues to an indefinite period, becoming gradually less and less. The urgency of desire and the power of exertion gradually diminish, until at length they cease altogether; and the genital organs, being no longer required, shrink considerably in size; the testicles become soft and pulpy, and sometimes almost disappear” (47-48). If an older man was not sufficiently dissuaded against sex by the threat that their reproductive organs are in the process of becoming “pulpy” and being “obliterated,” Acton provides anecdotal evidence of “several most observant and intelligent elderly persons,” who claim that late in life the “emission of semen” is accompanied by

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23 Acton claims that once a man made it past his fifth decade, he loses his sexual potency. “The ordinary rule seems to be that sexual power is not retained by the male to any considerable extent after the age of sixty or sixty-five” (Acton 253).
“scalding or burning” pain, and though he cannot guess as to the physiological mechanisms at work, he has no “doubt” that such burning is a “fact,” or actually occurs (247). Acton also argues that other physical consequences can arise from aging sex, including paralysis and softening of the brain (253-254). In addition to altering the function of the body, aging is said to impact the nerves, leaving the aging man (and his potential offspring) further vulnerable to damage arising from sexual activity: “Old age cannot support the drain and the subsequent nervous depression arising from ejaculation” (Acton 247). In essence, the aging man is one who is physically diminished and weakened – the man he once was is in effect reduced to a kind and paternal heart, leaving him unable to satisfy a woman or produce robust offspring.24 According to such thinking, aging is an ever-intensifying illness, one that is aggravated through the expression of passion.

Aging men’s ability to control their apparently dangerous sexual desires is complicated by the nature of desire itself. The exercise of self-control and management of sexual desires was indeed prescribed by the era’s thinkers. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Sexologist and psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing acknowledges sensual love as “animal” but claims that man can resist becoming “slave” to such impulses, channeling such interests into “higher, nobler feelings . . . a world of beauty, sublimity, and morality” (1). This promise of “beauty, sublimity, and morality” is continually under the “danger” that sensuality “may degenerate into powerful passions and develop the grossest vices. Love as an unbridled passion is like a fire that burns and consumes

24 In fact, Acton claims (an idea also supported by Stall and, as has been shown, Darwin) that if an elderly man becomes capable of producing children, due to his enfeeblement (Acton’s term), he will produce children who are nervous and intellectually dull, “not the best specimens of the English race” (248).
everything; like an abyss that swallows all honor, fortune, well-being” (von Krafft-Ebing 2). Van Oven echoes von Krafft-Ebing, explaining, “there is no passion which so much requires the control of reason as the desire for sexual congress, and perhaps none which is more completely under the control of a well-regulated mind. . . . Morality, as well as good sense, strongly inculcate the necessity of controlling the animal desires” (100-101). Both writers make clear that desire is something animalistic, and therefore immoral and undignified, as well as dangerous to a man’s dignity and health. Further, if, as this chapter has illustrated, the aging man was seen as highly vulnerable to the impact of physical and emotional stress, then not only will the pursuit of desire more easily pull him into a dangerous abyss but he will also be more likely to succumb and become slave to his own pursuit for “animal desires.” As Stall puts it, “it has been well said, ‘The weaker the body, the more it commands; the stronger it is, the more it obeys,’” (181) which suggests that the aging man’s ability to manage such impulses is on extremely shaky footing. The weaker aging body, as conceived by Victorians, would likely command the aging man to make imprudent, immoral, and dangerous choices.

Beyond cautioning aging men to avoid sexual expression, Victorian medical writers began to posit that such impulses could be a sign of deeper and permanent degeneracy. von Krafft-Ebing argues that sexual desire in the aged can be seen as a sign of senility, terming this disorder paradoxia.25 He qualifies that the “sexual instinct” in the aging is not necessarily “pathological” but that the “presumption of pathological conditions must necessarily be entertained” when manifested in an elderly individual

25 von Krafft-Ebing defines paradoxia as a cerebral sexual neuroses “occurring independently of the period of the physiological processes in the generative organs” — in other words when one is very young or very old (36).
who is seemingly long past the suitable expression of sexuality – one whose “sexual life has already long become extinct” or should be based upon the standards of the day (von Krafft-Ebing 38-39). And though the aging protagonists of Trollope’s and Hardy’s novels are not yet old enough to be diagnosed with paradoxia, it is certainly telling that age-inappropriate sexuality was pathologized during the decades they were published. Day takes a different tack, suggesting that aging sexuality “often depends on enlarged prostate or hemorrhoids, and occasionally on the presence of a calculus; it may be much alleviated by proper regimen and medical treatment” – in essence, treating the desires of the aging as a side effect of illness (Day 185-186). Rosenman explains, “while endorsing conjugal sex in controlled doses, surgeons pathologized other forms of erotic pleasure,” which makes clear that, since the age of procreation should long be over, aging sex becomes yet another “erotic pleasure” to be “pathologized” (21). With aging sexual desire consistently characterized as a bout of paradoxia or hemorrhoids, it is no wonder that Victorian physicians came to demonize aging sexuality. As Dr. George H. Napheys put it: “What more nauseous and repulsive object than a libidinous and worn-out old man, heating his diseased imagination with dreams and images which his chilled and impotent body can no longer carry into effect?” (qtd. in Stall 82-84). His clear revulsion and characterization of aging desire as a product of “diseased imagination,” makes clear what the aging protagonists featured in the novels examined in this project are up against.

Victorians had a varied perspective on the dangers for aging men associated with marriage. For example, William Acton was a “widely read” (Anderson 87) Victorian gynecologist and medical writer whose 1857 book on sexuality went into numerous
British and American editions (including revisions) well into the 1890s, indicating its lasting popularity and resonance with the era's readers. On the subject of the marriage of older men, Acton admits he used to have a rather severe perspective (as detailed in an earlier edition of The Functions and Disorders). Upon reflection, however, Acton came to revise his position against marriage. Marriage can in fact offer "great advantages" and as such he approved of them if after a "close examination" the patient is shown to be a "hale person with a sound constitution" (253) – one presumably sufficient to withstand the stimulation of a moderate expression of sexual passion. His only remaining reservation relates to the marriage of an older man to a much younger woman. As Acton explains:

I must not be supposed to set my face against even elderly men marrying if they will, but let them select a suitable companion. What I object to is December allying itself with May. Daily do I give my sanction to a man advanced in life ... marrying if he has the wish, and his health is good, and he can select a lady of suitable age. ... It is only against injudicious and ill-assorted marriages and consequently injurious excesses that I set my face.

(248)

The apparent effect of "injudicious and ill-assorted" marriages acts as a warning to other aging men who may contemplate an active sex life. In counseling his elderly male patients against sexual activity, Acton will "beg" the older man to "look around, and consider if their old friends who marry young wives have improved in health, or if they cannot call to mind some very notable instances of the reverse" (250-251). In fact,

26 Possibly gratuitous but irresistible footnote: A blurbed review from the British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review found within the first pages of the 7th American edition of Acton's text, admired Acton for doing a "good service to society by grappling manfully with sexual vice" (emphasis mine).

27 Acton wrote, "I have but one answer to such questions" regarding marriage of the aging: "Do it on your own responsibility; I cannot give you my sanction. If you value life, if you consider your health, if you look for happiness, I advise you to remain as you are. Much as I approve and recommend marriage to the young adult, as strongly would I forbid it to the old man" (253).
according to Acton, even the anticipation of age-disparate sex is enough to disrupt an aging man’s health. 

Stall provides additional argument against the type of marriage Acton “set[s] his face against,” stating that as it is divinely ordained that an aging woman loses her fertility, an aging man—and here Stall presupposes an age-disparate marriage is not the norm—should likewise withdraw from sexual activity (31).

Medical writers also connected age-disparate marriage to domestic unhappiness and other disastrous results. Stall, for example, has a “universal rule against all marriages of men of middle life” when they involve a “great disparity of age, position, culture,” but his concern has more to do with the sexual disparity that will emerge as the man ages (146). As he explains, when the aging man can no longer sexually satisfy his much-younger wife due to the waning of his “virile power” and enters his “period of sexual repose” the resulting “embarrassment and dejection” has “not unfrequently led even to suicide” (Stall 173, 147). In fact, the deeply personal and domestic miseries of impotence are matched by social miseries, as well. As Réveillé-Parise (nineteenth-century writer of a “valuable book on the diseases of aging,” according to Acton, 215) suggests, this private unhappiness will eventually lead to the public misery of gossip. As he argues, when a “young and fresh girl is ‘flesh of the flesh’ of a man used up from age” marries, “Nature avenges herself by spreading scandals—doubts about paternity and domestic troubles” (qtd. in Acton 254). Further, Dr. Dio Lewis (who published from

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28 As Acton explains, “I was lately consulted by a gentleman of nearly seventy yeas of age, who after remaining a widower many years, was captivated by the charms of a young girl. The courtship prospered, the patient was affianced, and all appeared in satisfactory train, when he became alarmed by observing the very frequent recurrence of seminal emissions. . . . I pointed out to him the dangers attending this state of sexual excitement, and assured him that the treatment I proposed would avail little, so long as the excitement under which he was laboring continued, and that I dread the consequences. Circumstances, however, so fell out that the marriage was broken off. My patient soon recovered his health” (252).
the 1860s through the 1880s) characterizes age-disparate marriages as a “violation of natural law, not to say of decency; and although it occasionally involves somewhat of the ‘old man’s darling,’ the case is very rare in which there is not sooner or later, a deep, sore disappointment and dissatisfaction, all around, to say nothing of secret sneers and contempt of outsiders” (qtd. in Stall 165). The inevitable resulting disaster, however, is presented as fitting punishment for the aging man who gave in to temptation.29 In effect, aging passion is a crime—against nature, love, and decency—and one, as the next chapter affirms through the example of *Hard Times*, that leaves no party to a sexually-active, age-disparate marriage unscathed. The next chapter also explores some of the additional factors—including the era’s increased prosperity that allowed for greater social mobility—that were seen as eroding the seemingly fixed notions of manliness, leading to the rupture of Bounderby’s aging and classed masculine persona.

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29 As Réveillé-Parise asks, “Would you know the difference between love in youth and in old men? It is this, ‘of a truth great folly appertaineth to the first love, but great feebleness to the last. . . . Is Nature silent? ’Tis that she would not speak! Would you provoke or excite her? It is crime against her—a crime for which she will some day claim deep revenge” (qtd. in Acton 254).
CHAPTER 3
BOUNDERBY’S “BLUSTERY” PERFORMANCE OF AGING AND CLASSED MASCULINITY IN HARD TIMES

The fourth chapter of Book 1 of Hard Times (1854) opens with the following inquiry: “Who was Mr. Bounderby?” (Dickens 53). The emphasis offered by Dickens’s italicization cues the reader that this character is both significant within the novel and something of an enigma. We begin to learn the nature of Bounderby’s identity in the paragraphs and pages that follow – first through the narrator’s description and then through his own repeated description of himself (featured in every conversation Bounderby has within the novel except two). However, rather than peeling away the layers to present the authentic man beneath, Bounderby instead piles up the details of his persona as if trying to repeatedly convince others of who he is. It is ironic, then, that through much of the novel the information Dickens provides readers does nothing to truly answer the question of “who” this character truly “was” and the mystery of the man beneath the layers of his façade remains intact until the novel’s end. This ambiguity of identity demands inquiry: why is it necessary and what does it offer Bounderby? This chapter uncovers who Bounderby is both within the novel and within the larger Victorian social context in order to consider what his performance of classed aging masculinity means for his claims to that masculinity. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to uncover the answer to Dickens’s question, “who was Mr. Bounderby?”

To answer that question, one must first consider performance, which this chapter defines as the creation and presentation of a persona—a persona that advertises something—and an exaggeration of qualities that one wishes to put forth over others seemingly less desirable. This effort presumes that the performance of this persona offers a benefit or advantage. As can be seen in the example of Bounderby, notions of
classed masculinity (i.e., masculinity associated with a particular class) challenged claims to manliness during the era – opening a place for his blustery self-fashioning. As Chapter 2 has shown, aging men do not clearly fit into the multiformity of Victorian masculinity. In fact, both class and aging demand adaptations from men – adaptations that can result in different forms of performance of masculinity. Much of Dickens’s novel focuses on Thomas Gradgrind’s love of “Facts” and his misguided attempt to live a life guided by them (as opposed to imagination and other forms of “fancy”), as well as his children’s struggle to live under that regime. In addition, *Hard Times* also details how Bounderby constructs and presents a masculine persona over the course of his rise from the gutter that is his ostensible birthplace to wealthy mill owner and banker – a rise he attempts to cement through his marriage to his friend Gradgrind’s much younger daughter, Louisa. However, Bounderby’s denial of his authentic classed self erodes his claims to masculinity, hastened by both his aging and the age-disparate marriage he uses as an attempt to reinforce that performance. Dickens’s character offers a singularly fruitful topic of examination in part because the seams of his self-construction are made clear throughout the novel – seams that we, in fact, get to see torn asunder. Bounderby offers a means to examine the modes by which claims to the privileges of masculinity, and further, classed masculinity, could be contested during the Victorian era.

Masculine bluster can be a way to manage both class and aging, and this mode of performance is both a resistance to the restrictions associated with masculinity associated with different classes, as well as a sign that nineteenth-century Britain had a complex and often vexed attitude towards male aging. An examination of fictional portrayals of Victorian conceptions of the aging male experience, such as that found in
Dickens’s novel, illuminates both the social pains of aging and its particular impact on the aging man’s claims to classed masculinity, including that of marriage. In other words, as shown in the literature of the era, older men (such as Bounderby) marry younger women (like Louisa Gradgrind) to perform masculinity. Recent work on *Hard Times* regarding Bounderby and his marriage to Louisa has nicely situated the novel within its historical and social contexts.\(^{30}\) No work, however, has as yet explored Dickens’s portrayal of Bounderby’s aging and classed masculinity through his age-disparate marriage to Louisa Gradgrind. While their difference in age is not directly responsible for the failure of their marriage, Dickens uses Bounderby’s performance of age and class as a means to highlight his inappropriateness, and their problematic marriage sheds light on both masculine aging and its impact on marital happiness as portrayed in fiction. Critics have claimed that Dickens’s novel reveals little of the internal world of the often-inscrutable Louisa.\(^{31}\) Also true, however, is that all we get about Bounderby is his continued presentation of himself as the ultimate self-made man – a performance that makes his true past just as inscrutable as his much younger wife until his fall from blustery grace. As the writing and literature (including that of Dickens) of the era illustrates, the relationships between aging, class, and masculinity is varied and complex. Through an examination of Dickens’s portrayal of Bounderby and Victorian

\(^{30}\) Exploring Bounderby’s “self-authorship,” Jennifer Gribble considers how he appropriates the parable of the Good Samaritan. Lyn Pykett and Christopher Barnes both investigate how Dickens’s novel illustrates the impact of facts and reason upon “fancy” and imagination. Anne Humphreys sees Louisa as “victim of a terrible fatherly experiment,” one that requires sacrifice to her father (177). Further, Catherine Waters explores how Dickens’s novels, including *Hard Times*, have an “active role in the discursive construction of the family and of gendered identity” (122).

\(^{31}\) For example, Mary Poovey argues that the “anxiety” that underlies the text is in part “generated” by “Dickens’s refusal to tell us what Louisa feels” (163), creating a sense of suspense.
conceptions of classed and aging masculinity via nineteenth century writers and contemporary critics, this chapter explores what it means to age in the Victorian era, and more specifically, what it can mean to be an aging man of a certain class.

**From “Born in a Ditch” to “Rich”: Bounderby’s Performance of Masculinity**

It is a peculiar thing that the first “Fact” Thomas Gradgrind asks his daughter, Louisa, to consider regarding his proposal that she consider marriage to Josiah Bounderby is the large difference in their ages (she barely eighteen, he “in round numbers, fifty”). He admits “there is some disparity in your respective years,” but counters that in their “means and positions there is none; on the contrary, there is a great suitability.” Gradgrind then asks Louisa whether “this one disparity [is] sufficient to operate as a bar to such a marriage,” and explains that he has examined the “statistics of marriage, so far as they have yet been obtained, in England and Wales.” He claims that a “large proportion of these marriages are contracted between parties of very unequal ages” with the “elder” almost always the “bridegroom.” In a further point of evidence, this matrimonial pattern can be traced, Gradgrind elucidates, throughout the globe. As he concludes: “The disparity I have mentioned, therefore, almost ceases to be disparity, and (virtually) all but disappears” (Dickens 131-132). After Louisa contemplates these “Facts,” she agrees to marry Bounderby, pleasing her father, who explains, “Mr Bounderby is a very remarkable man; and what little disparity can be said to exist between you — if any — is more than counterbalanced by the tone your mind has acquired” (Dickens 134-135). What Gradgrind’s catalogue of facts suggests is that he was concerned enough regarding this point of disparity to do rather extensive research to assure himself that based upon statistics the much older age of her
prospective husband should offer no bar to matrimony. And indeed, as Chapter 2
details, Bounderby’s much older age does demand consideration.

We are introduced to Bounderby with a 115-word passage; no other character
receives such extensive, nor lengthy, depiction of appearance and character (and
exploration of the nature of his character as conveyed by appearance), cueing readers
to his textual importance. As Dickens details, Bounderby is a “rich man,” alerting us to
this character’s financial accomplishments and status (53). He is also “made out of
course material,” cueing the reader as to the supposed poverty of the roots and
upbringing of this self-made man, this “Bully of humility” (Dickens 53). In addition,
Bounderby is described as possessing a “metallic laugh” and a “brassy speaking
trumpet of a voice,” allusions to his ties to manufacturing – and ones that emphasize his
lack of warmth and humanity (Dickens 53). He is also a “big, loud man” and his bigness
and loudness are detailed in such grotesquery (here and throughout the novel) that the
reader easily knows he is offensive (Dickens 53). Further, he does not possess a
healthy and productive vigor but one that makes him appear as though he is ready to
burst, as though he is barely contained within the confines of his body; he is not
manfully controlled but explosive. Bounderby is also described as 47 or 48 (ostensibly a
few years younger than Gradgrind) but could easily assumed to be in his mid 50s
“without surprising anybody” (Dickens 53) based upon his balding and aged appearance
– leaving the reader to wonder if he is in actuality older than his stated age. Part of what
makes him appear older is his baldness, which Dickens links to his “windy
boastfulness,” as though Bounderby is aged by his blustery, trumpeting performance of
masculinity (Dickens 53).
Indeed, Bounderby, who is consistently described past the prime of his mid-life, has been clearly marked by the decline often associated with age. In fact, the loss associated with aging can be seen in a variety of characters in Dickens’s novel. Interestingly, aging in *Hard Times* is a particularly masculine affair, for while women may be clearly mature, and though Mrs. Gradgrind dies mid-way through the novel, there is no reason to see this as anything but her final collapse under the crush of “some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her” (Dickens 54), rather than the result of the infirmities of aging. In contrast, Dickens presents Gradgrind as visibly reduced by the shock of learning that his experiment at raising perfectly reasonable children has been so thoroughly unsuccessful. As his daughter, Louisa, observes, the usually aggressively self-assured conversationalist is no more. “His hand, usually steady, trembled in hers . . . he spoke in a subdued and troubled voice, very different from his usual dictatorial manner; and was often at a loss for words” (Dickens 246). Further, this internal transformation from confident and “dictatorial” to “subdued and troubled” is associated with an impact on Gradgrind’s appearance: “his hair had latterly began to change its colour” and he had begun “looking gray and old,” an alteration in appearance that elicits “fear and pity” from Louisa (Dickens 275). And while, by novel’s end, in his aging Gradgrind has the balm of his daughters’ love and wisdom gained (with aging comes wisdom, in a typically rosy conception of senescence), his “bosom friend,” Bounderby, does not – which is, of course, part of what makes Louisa’s much older husband so fruitful to consider. Despite the aforementioned happy ending of sorts, Dickens’s novel

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32 Bounderby even tries to address what he perceives as his own physical decline with a show of masculine posturing. After the robbery he claims that if those who had stolen his bank’s money had “tried to rob me when I was at [Tom’s] time of life” they would have been foiled (Dickens 211).
makes clear that masculine aging offers the potential for loss, with, in the example of
Gradgrind, the visible signs of age eliciting a sense of pity from his daughter – one in
synch with the era’s overwhelmingly negative attitude towards aging.

While James Eli Adams’s *Dandies and Desert Saints* does not focus on aging, his
exploration of the era’s anxious, self-conscious management of masculinity is a useful
means to examine the impact of age and class, as well as the adaptations they inspired.
As Adams makes clear, during the nineteenth century, masculinities and “masculine
identities” were “multiple, complex, and unstable constructions” (3), and, as such, were
socially troubled. In fact, Adams argues, masculinities were a “central problematic in
literary and cultural change” (3). This prioritization reveals both the importance in
defining masculinity, and in turn, the ever-present tensions that underlie its
“problematic” status within Victorian society – which, in the case of *Hard Times*, can be
traced through its portrayal of aging and classed masculinity. Despite, or perhaps
because, of its importance, Adams reveals the perceived “fragility” and instability of
masculine identities (3) – worrying for a concern considered of such central importance
during the Victorian era. The instability of the era’s conceptions of masculinity can be
seen in “strategies of self-presentation” (12) that attempted to affirm one’s masculine
identity. The language Adams uses here, speaking of the development and buttressing
of one’s identity as “strategy,” suggests that such a man has a goal in mind for his
efforts at “self-presentation,” reinforcing the notion of masculinity as performance.
However, unlike the men of Adams’s analysis—who “legitimated their masculinity by
identifying it with that of the gentlemen” (6)—as will be shown, Bounderby chooses to
identify with and perform a very different class of masculinity.
Amidst the era’s perceived instability of masculinity, bluster becomes a way to attempt to manage one’s potentially contested status and, in turn, connection to the rights and privileges of male power. Bounderby’s fulsome claims of self-construction have inspired much writing by critics despite (or because of) his claims to be a “straightforward man” (Dickens 222). Bounderby’s “self-authorship” (Gribble 434) is a means to erase his true past of a perfectly ordinary lower-middle-class upbringing and education in order to fashion a seemingly more formidable masculine persona, that of the utterly self-made man. Bounderby “literalizes the trope” of self-made man “by inventing the story of his birth in a ditch and abandonment by his mother . . . in order to preserve his story of deprivation and isolation” (Waters 132) and make his rise to success all the more stunning. Bounderby’s blustery performance is also cued by language that presents Bounderby as being “ready to start” in various ways throughout the novel—“gusty,” “red and hot,” “blustering,” “swelling with a sense of slight,” “explosive,” “bursting” (Dickens 196, 208, 221, 227, 260) – all descriptions that contribute to the sense that the construction of his masculinity can barely be contained and is on the verge of, to quote Sussman (see Chapter 2), “eruption.” As critic Philip Hobsbaum affirms, we see Bounderby “alone of all the figures” described in Hard Times “in truly sensational detail; usually in terms of a balloon, puffed up, coarse material stretched too tight, and therefore, the inference is, ripe to be deflated” (179). Critic Jennifer Gribble offers a vivid and excellent reading of Bounderby’s appearance—his “puffed head and forehead, his ‘strained skin’ and ‘swelled veins’, the pervading

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33 He has been described as a “fraudulent orphan” (Waters 131) and a “self-proclaimed, self-made man” (Pykett 140).
appearance of him being inflated like a balloon, and ‘ready to start’ (21) represent him as a huge engorged phallus” (434)—that emphasizes his overblown performance of masculinity, one that leaves him vulnerable to rupture and collapse.

As, to use the narrator’s characterization, a “Bully of humility” (53)—a contradictory description that speaks volumes about the multiplicities and tensions of his persona—Bounderby indeed appears to be the ultimate self-made man. Not content to let his accomplishments as “banker, merchant, manufacturer,” convey his social and financial worth, he must also “vaunt,” or perform, the abjectness of his early roots to illustrate the height of his rise, and the effort it took to scale that height, into wealth (Dickens 53). As such, Bounderby is “always proclaiming,” “I was born in a ditch” (Dickens 54), asserting a degree of privation that few within the novel (nor without) can match (or would want to). In fact, Bounderby’s first words of dialogue are to perform his underclass roots—abandoned by his mother, exploited by his drunken grandmother, he fled to become a “young vagabond” (Dickens 55), thereafter grimly but determinedly working his way up to his current financially exalted status. Bounderby also repeatedly outlines his lack of a “refined bringing up,” which meant he was deprived of not only an education but also, apparently, a bed and shoes, amongst other niceties of life available beyond the Victorian underclass (Dickens 57).

However, in Bounderby’s opinion, the wretched brutality of his “bringing up” made his formative years a “real thing” as compared to all other characters in the novel (Dickens 160), whether they are members of the upper class, like Harthouse, or the lower-class circus performers. In fact, he claims the “real” quality of his early years gave him the will to rise. As he explains in his first conversation within the novel, “How I
fought through it, I don’t know . . . I was determined I suppose. I have been a determined character in later life, and I suppose I was then. Here I am, Mr. Gradgrind, anyhow, and nobody to thank for my being here, but myself” (Dickens 54). No matter the reputed pressures to cover his humble roots, he insists, “I pulled through it, though nobody threw me a rope. . . . Josiah Bounderby of Coketown tells you plainly, all right, all correct — he hadn’t such advantages . . . you may force him to swallow boiling fat, but you shall never force him to suppress the facts of his life” (Dickens 55). While Bounderby claims, “I don’t affect to be anybody” (84), his vaunting “boastfulness” is in actuality an attempt to showcase his own determination very much in the vein of a self-made man. Of course, it must be acknowledged (as Bounderby won’t) despite his claims that he has “nobody to thank” for his rise, as readers come to learn, his claims of nobody throwing him a “rope” of assistance are a direct repudiation of the very real help his respectable lower-middle-class parents willingly offered.

Bounderby, who affects to be a product of nothing except his own determination, enhances and illustrates his exceptionally self-made quality by his resistance to the social niceties of the class to which he has risen. In fact, he equates his defiance with the high degree of his success: “‘I never wear gloves,’ it was his custom to say. ‘I didn’t climb up the ladder in them. Shouldn’t be so high if I had’” (Dickens 58). Bounderby, of course, claims—though the novel clearly illustrates that this claim is empty—that he is “not influenced by manners and station” nor, as he states: “that I care for such society” (Dickens 160, 138). Instead, no matter who might be offended by the intensity of his honesty, “I call a spade a spade” (Dickens 70). Rather than illustrate his social fluency by manifesting the manners of his “station” as “banker, merchant, manufacturer,” he
gets to be as bruisingly aggressive as he likes because he supposedly has no delicacy about anything. He never learned how to behave like a gentleman, and now that he is wealthy, he can seemingly afford not to do so. Indeed, he rubs his “coarse” quality in the faces of those whose class he now shares. “It afforded Mr. Bounderby supreme satisfaction to instal himself in this snug little estate, and with demonstrative humility to grow cabbages in the flower-garden. He delighted to live, barrack-fashion, among the elegant furniture, and he bulled the very pictures with his origin” (Dickens 196-197).

Rather than enjoy and luxuriate in the trappings of his success—including his genteel women: first Mrs. Sparsit, and then Louisa—or rub his wealth in other’s faces with an ostentatious display of consumerism, he perversely prefers to exist within his estate in a performance of “demonstrative humility.” What makes his behavior all the more puzzling and telling is that Bounderby is not only out of synch with his class but his time. As Richard Faber explains, “Manners and conduct went far towards making a gentleman . . . The more uncertain the gentility, the more essential it was to behave properly” (131). Bounderby sees no profit in behaving “properly,” as he has no interest in claiming to be a gentleman – instead choosing to perform a particular kind of classed masculinity.

While the middle-class man attempted to attain gentlemanly status “through action, not pedigree” (Blazina 47) and despite the era’s diminishment of regard for the aristocracy, a degree of the “traditional sense of rank” remained, even for Bounderby (Faber 18), which can be traced in his relationship to Mrs. Sparsit. As Richard Faber explains, he “deeply appreciates” Mrs. Sparsit’s “lady-like qualities” (18), and indeed, he “habitually” makes conversational “flourish” that she is “highly connected” and a “lady
Born and bred” (Dickens 80, 79, 137). Bounderby clearly enjoys her show of admiration of and financial dependence upon him, as well as the status her close association with him confers – as the narrator explains, she was “such as an enhancement to his position” (Dickens 83). Bounderby also clearly derives satisfaction from the fact this “lady” has been reduced from such an illustrious “career” in “the lap of luxury” to being compensated one hundred pounds a year for “keeping” his house (Dickens 83). As Dickens’s narrator observes, “Just as it belonged to his boastfulness to depreciate his own extraction, so it belonged to it to exalt Mrs. Sparsit’s. In the measure that he would not allow his youth to have been attended by a single favourable circumstance, he brightened Mrs. Sparsit’s juvenile career with every possible advantage” (80). His continual production of the exaltation of her previous life acts as a counterpoint to the wretchedness of his own past: as she has fallen, he has risen. Her very presence indeed acts to enhance his position of self-made man.

As Robert Baden-Powell—one of the “last great exponents and exemplars of Victorian Christian manliness”—claimed, “God made men to be men” (Bradstock 1); inherent in this assertion is the idea that manliness is somehow fixed and unchanging as well as inevitable (“men” are meant “to be men”); also implied is the notion that gender predominates over factors such as class and age. Carlyle’s conception of a “deep structure” of masculinity can also be read as an affirmation that it can in fact be separated from class. While the era’s notion of manliness was fundamentally middle class, manliness “transcended class” and “stood for those qualities which were

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34 “Without a doubt birth gave the surest title to gentility: there was a mystique about it which nothing could destroy” (Faber 127) – a “mystique” that exists for Bounderby despite (or because of) his noisy proclamations of his humble roots.
respected by men without regard for class – by men as men” (Tosh, Manliness 95, 94).

Amongst those “qualities” was a “commitment to personal industry and progress, to the ideology of self-help” which also “endorsed upward mobility” (Young 57). The upward mobility earned through hard work was one that held real social currency – all that one possessed was a testament to their persistence, determination, and diligence. And, Dickens’s Bounderby attempts to appropriate this idea in his rise to wealthy banker and factory owner. His rise by education and apprenticeship upon the sacrifices of his loving lower-middle-class parents is not enough, however. Instead, he must ascend from a filthy ditch and from people who were the, to use his wording, scum of the earth – cementing his claims of “physical vigour, courage, and independence” (Tosh, Manliness 95) in the face of so much abuse and deprivation. Within Hard Times, nobody challenges Bounderby’s stories of almost literally being born in the gutter, illustrating that to some degree this was not an unbelievable scenario within nineteenth century England. Further, Bounderby’s successful self-made performance (successful, that is, until novel’s end) illustrates the extent to which this seemingly un-classed model of masculinity was embraced.

But, in fact, class matters. “Social life is organized around gender and age relations as well as the relations of class and race” (McMullin 40). That class, in addition gender and age, is one of the “dimensions of difference” (Arber 3) seems clear. As scholar of gender studies Frances Cleaver argues, “There is a need to consider class, race and age when understanding men’s and women’s lives, and the ways in which they relate to each other” (7). Taking both class and age into consideration indeed sheds light on Victorian efforts that “attempted to make masculinity natural and
monolithic” (Roper 1). For as modern critics have illustrated, “any notion of a solid bourgeois masculinity is not tenable” (Tosh, Manliness 39), and it seems obvious that a “solid” masculinity for any stratum of society is equally untenable. Not that Victorians did not attempt to make classed masculinity appear otherwise. For example, critic Arlene Young illustrates how lower-middle-class men were “socially and culturally marginalized throughout the Victorian period” and were (like aging men) consistently feminized by other classes (2, 8). 35 Further, most lower-middle-class men sought to “define themselves against” the working class and generally rejected any affiliation with its culture “in favor of the ideals of individualism and self-help” (Young 10). 36 In contrast, Bounderby embraces association with both the rough lower classes and the autonomy of the middle class. Perhaps, Bounderby then possesses the qualities of another sort of social grouping: that of the “new manufacturing class.” 37 The “vulgarity and brutal insistence of wealth” of men of this sort, according to Richard Faber, was socially repugnant to many, and though such manufacturing men were often seen as ungentlemanly “they did not necessarily care. They lived in their own world, were proud of their own achievements” and looked down on “genteeel values” (31). Whatever the

35 Young largely does not engage with Bounderby in her discussion of depictions of class within Hard Times, aside from the observation that he “betrays himself through his persistent coarseness, his ‘brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice’ and his overbearing manner as ‘the Bully of humility’, and as a consequence he ultimately sinks to an appropriately low social level” (Young 58).

36 Such resistance is unsurprising, for as shown in the era’s literature, “working class characters must be rough in speech and dress” and were “frequently debt-ridden” and “drunk” (Young 48). Lower classes were characterized as “irrational and dangerous” possessing a “strongly animal nature” (Ingham 22, 21). Further, “working-class men were understood to be moved by baser instincts” (McLaren 70).

37 In an 1854 unsigned British Quarterly Review, Bounderby is described as a “great mill owner, who prides himself on having risen from the lowest imaginable condition, and on having made himself the great man he is” (331). The writer admits, “there is a class of men resembling Mr. Bounderby, but he is, in our judgement, an exaggeration of even the worst of his class” (331).
flavor of masculinity Bounderby associates himself with—he claims underclass roots, truly has lower-middle-class roots, has worked his way up to a wealthy version of the manufacturing middle class, and seeks to marry gentility—their very multiplicity affirms the difficulty in creating a monolithic conception of Victorian masculinity.

Bounderby’s first meeting with Harthouse, a “thoroughly well-bred man,” offers further insight into the nature of his posturing of classed masculinity (Dickens 205). Dickens’s introduction of the character of Harthouse provides the opportunity to see Bounderby’s performance for a man he perceives as his social better. As he explains to Harthouse in their initial meeting, “You are a man of family. Don’t deceive yourself by supposing for a moment that I am a man of family. I am a bit of dirty riff-raff, and genuine scrap of tag, rag, and bobtail” (Dickens 158). With this description, Bounderby establishes both that he recognizes but does not value the markers of status and that he himself has no such claims. It is revealing that in this conversation with the upper-class Harthouse, he seeks to validate the “genuine” quality of his performance of underclass roots, as though there is a sort of equal prestige for having risen so far above his supposedly abject beginnings.38 As he affirms, the disparity in their backgrounds, one “well-bred” and the other a “bit of dirty riff-raff,” does not mean they cannot “shake hands on equal terms” (Dickens 158). Bounderby explains that he has in fact earned the claim to “equal terms,” as “although I know what I am, and the exact depths of the gutter I have lifted myself out of, better than any man does, I am as proud as you are. . . .

Having now asserted my independence in a proper manner” (Dickens 158-159). This

38 It is ironic and telling that Harthouse, through his emotional cuckolding of Bounderby, is part of the novelistic machine that dismantles the latter’s carefully constructed performance of classed masculinity.
moment with Harthouse, then, offers an opportunity for Bounderby to assert, and perform, the independence he has earned through his climb out of the gutter.

Bounderby should have had a reasonable claim to masculinity, so it is of interest to consider what makes him so problematic. Indeed, based upon the standards of the middle-class and the self-made man, he should be seen as a more heroic figure. He appears to represent many of the qualities associated with manliness during the time period: prioritization of hard work, success, independence, and a seeming preference for plain speaking (though, of course, the latter is undermined by his lack of truthfulness). However, all these trappings of manliness are but the bluster of one who at heart is, over the course of the novel, revealed to be thoroughly unmanly. As Tosh explains, part of the issue with a show of masculine self-construction is that in the nineteenth century manliness was associated with “authenticity” (Manliness 98). Bounderby lacks authenticity, not because he is not really hardworking and successful (he is), but because he does not present an authentic version of himself to others. Though such bluster was unnecessary, since he really has worked his way up to considerable success, it cannot be ignored for what it says about his character. Despite his “John-Bull pose of frankness . . . Bounderby has projected a fiction which is no more than yet another extension of his personality” (Hobsbaum 179). Dickens’s character possesses an “impulse to make his success even more remarkable than it is” (Hobsbaum 180) by voiding his true history of masculine self-fashioning and replacing it with one of exaggerated pathos, which, in turn, invalidates his access to the privileges of his gender and the middle class he has actually achieved.
Bounderby’s bluster is unseemly and suspicious in the Victorian era because it creates a great show of that Carlylean masculine “something” (as outlined in Chapter 2) that should be conveyed from his inner source or wellspring of manliness and not repeatedly and with great force explained. In fact, Bounderby has few if any conversations without mentioning some aspect of his ostensibly humble past and this persistence in making a show of himself smacks of performance. Dickens’s character’s behavior can be situated in the, as critic James Eli Adams terms it, “anxious conjunction of discipline and performance in middle-class Victorian constructions of masculinity” (10). The ideal of “masculine self-regulation” (Adams 47), as detailed in Chapter 2, was paired with the requirements that a man also consistently and accurately represent his gender, making “normative masculinity” an “unending performance” and, in effect “as much a spectacle as the feminine” (11). The spectacle of masculinity is one that requires scrutiny, with the viewer validating whether a man is truly a man – an idea with great weight for an aging man no matter his class. This idea suggests that Bounderby’s blustery performance—one imbued with the “energies and anxieties of masculine self-legitimation” (Adams 1)—could perhaps be seen as merely in line with the era’s standards for typical male behavior. However, despite the era’s connections between masculinity and performance, Victorians also had “anxieties” regarding masculine “self-fashioning” and “self-display” (Adams 43, 37) – in other words, a man should not project qualities he does not naturally possess, nor should he invite attention to that performance.
He Puts the “Disparity” in Age-Disparate Marriage: Bounderby’s Failed Performance of Masculinity

Exercising masculine self-restraint was necessary within all decisions certainly, but few could have as lasting or crucial importance as spousal selection. Certainly a Victorian should marry for love, but that love must also be paired with the commonality of background and values essential for a companionate marriage. In other words, desire for intimacy should not be the primary inspiration for marriage – an attitude particularly true for aging men (as Chapter 2 makes clear) and one upheld by *Hard Times*. Indeed, according to the thinking of the time, desires can derail the discipline, restraint, and government of self demanded by Victorian standards of masculinity. Such desires have the potential to “overthrow masculine self-regulation,” making it no surprise that “sexual restraint” was also emphasized and valued as an antidote to “anxieties about the male body and its drives” (Adams 47, 5, 84). Bounderby does not, judging by the state of their home, select his wife for her domestic management skills, a concern a man of his position is meant to have. This accomplished man of business instead chooses a young woman he has watched grow (barely) to maturity, suggesting that his interest in her is motivated by something more carnal than mutually respectful

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39 As John Tosh explains, “Companionate marriage stood at the heart of the Victorian ideal of domesticity. Marriage was assumed to be voluntary, not arranged or imposed, and to be for love, whatever secondary motives might be involved” (*A Man’s Place* 27). Further, “the Victorians expected to marry for love” (Tosh *A Man’s* 57-58). Finally, as Richard Faber explains, “Like other Victorian novelists Dickens was highly critical of marriages based on interest, not love” as illustrated by the “heartless Bounderby marriage” though it was “quite conventional Victorian practise” (81), as were, of course, age-disparate marriages.

40 Christopher Barnes sees Louisa’s lack of interest in the domestic realm as a “form of tactical practice in her resistance to the demands of her marriage . . . and from the role of wife assigned to her. Harthouse, for instance, notices she has refused to take any interest in decorating her and Bounderby’s home” (244). This disinterest is problematic as “for the bourgeoisie the home was also the prime means of affirming social status – a medium of displace intended to impress visitors and neighbours” (Tosh *A Man’s Place* 47).
companionship. Further, Bounderby’s desire is not mirrored by his young bride, which makes his interest all the more perverse. Louisa’s “dispassionate” manner at contemplating Bounderby’s offer of marriage reveals that she has no love or regard for the man who becomes her husband – in fact, after her father’s proposal of marriage to Bounderby, Louisa affirms three times that she is not expected to (in effect admitting that she does not) love her future husband (Dickens 130-131). As Christopher Barnes explains, her reaction to their marriage illustrates the “disparity between herself as an object of desire and her own lack of desire . . . emphasizes the fact that he and Bounderby are imposing their wills on her and that this marriage is not her desire, but theirs” (244-245) – suggesting that there is little in Bounderby to inspire desire, and making his desire for Louisa all the more foreboding and mournful.

Prior to the Victorian era, an older man who discovers the transformation of a woman once sweetly winsome into a reluctant and disengaged young wife had largely been the stuff of comedy.41 By the mid-nineteenth century, however, literary representations of pairings of this sort became much more complex, varied, and potentially problematic. No longer could a foolish dalliance with a young lover, or some other youthful wifely error in judgment be laughed off. Instead, as will be shown in this and future chapters, the wandering young wife can be bitterly punished for her transgressions against the sanctity of marriage (no matter how unhappy she and that marriage turns out to be). This alteration is clearly illustrated in *Hard Times* by Bounderby’s rage and Mrs. Sparsit’s triumph at the discovery of Harthouse’s attention to

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41 In Wycherly’s *The Country Wife* (1675), for example, Mr. Pinchwife is twice his wife’s age. His fears that his young and pretty wife will cuckold him are justified but she is unpunished by play’s end, illustrating that this scenario could be treated as comedy prior to the nineteenth century.
Louisa and the threat of elopement it seems to promise. Of course, anxiety around age-disparate marriage is not unique to the Victorian era. However, the era’s writing consistently undermines the possibility for happiness in such pairings, revealing a rather pointed discomfort that can be seen, for example, in how age-disparate marriages are portrayed as rarely producing children or contentment (as is certainly true for the coupling of Bounderby and Louisa). As was detailed in Chapter 2, age-disparate marriage occurred relatively frequently during the Victorian period, suggesting that real-life reaction to such pairings was far less damning. The contradictions between reality and representation regarding the acceptability of age-disparate marriage reveal much about the tensions around aging masculinity.

Part of what makes Bounderby’s relationship with Louisa so discomfiting is, in part, that his brutality in conversation and attitude suggests a thoroughly aggressive nature. As she herself observes to her brother, Tom, “Mr Bounderby thinks as father thinks, and is a great deal rougher, and not half so kind” (Dickens 89). Though she seems capable and appears unruffled by his treatment, her thorough self-repression hints that there may be something unexpressed but real being squashed. As Dickens explains in the first chapters of the novel, “struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow” (Dickens 51). Louisa, particularly her unexpressed “light”-filled inner-self, is not safe with her husband (or father, for most of the novel, for that

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42 Though relatively common, these marriages were not quite as age-disparate as their fictional counterparts. As critic Helena Michie explains, “The average age of marriage for women was twenty-two to twenty-four, while in fiction the age of marriage was younger, probably seventeen or eighteen. Most conduct books, while often romanticizing childish love, recommended delaying marriage until women were fully grown and mature” (144).
matter). Though readers may not take blustery Bounderby seriously, he does have
authority within much of the novel, making him a potent threat. In fact, Bounderby’s
desires drive much of the plot; Louisa’s younger brother, Tom, knows he can
manipulate them, and they impel him to seek marriage with the much younger Louisa,
after watching her development through the course of her childhood. As Gradgrind
affirms to Bounderby long before the latter even proposes marriage, “you are always so
interested in my young people — particularly in Louisa” (Dickens 56), leaving the reader
to wonder how long Bounderby has watched Louisa with marriageable interest before
she became his wife at nineteen.

Indeed, even before they marry, Bounderby’s interest in Louisa garners attention.
She is described as Bounderby’s “little puss,” “his little pet,” and “his favourite” (Dickens
81, 89). When Mrs. Sparsit compliments Bounderby as “quite another father to Louisa,”
he resists this association, only admitting that the description could be applied to
Louisa’s brother, Tom (Dickens 82). In fact, Mrs. Sparsit is aware that Bounderby’s
interest in this “little girl” (as she calls Louisa, page 91) is not fatherly, as revealed when
Stephen Blackpool consults him regarding his interest in obtaining a divorce. When Mrs.
Sparsit learns that Stephen’s marriage was not, in fact, an “an unequal marriage, sir, in
point of years,” she replies, “Indeed, sir? I inferred, from its being so miserable a
marriage, that it was probably an unequal one in years” (Dickens 108). Her response
regarding the association of marital misery with age-disparity is an obvious dig at
Bounderby, one that lets him know that she is aware of his intention to embark on an
“unequal marriage.” Her response is additionally an affirmation that such unions were
thought of as potentially problematic, as was common in the literature of the era.
This tension is also present when Bounderby affirms Mrs. Sparsit’s suspicions, preparing her for the news of his impending nuptials with the following admission: “I am going to astonish you” (Dickens 137). She is, of course, not astonished at all that he is marrying Louisa. Instead she gives him best wishes with “pity” in her voice “concluding in an impressively compassionate manner, ‘I fondly hope that Miss Gradgrind may be all you desire, and deserve!’” In fact, she chooses to see Bounderby as a “Victim” for whom she feels “compassion” due to his “melancholy fate” (Dickens 139) as one embarking on an age-disparate marriage. This raises the question, of course, as to what Bounderby is a “Victim” of, as nothing in Mrs. Sparsit’s manner (before or during their marriage) suggests that she sees Louisa as a conspiring man-trap. Instead, it is easy to imagine that she sees him as “Victim” of his own desire for Louisa, which leads him to initiate this “unequal” and unhappy pairing. Even after the marriage, Mrs. Sparsit continues to call Bounderby’s wife Miss Gradgrind, because it “seemed so natural . . . whereas, to persuade herself that the young lady whom she had had the happiness of knowing from a child could be really and truly Mrs Bounderby, she found almost impossible” (Dickens 214-215). This quote reveals two things: that Mrs. Sparsit had hoped for more from her platonic relationship with Bounderby, and that her selective amnesia is willful, as it is easy to not remember that which you do not want to accept. In effect, Bounderby replaces one high-status female with another and Mrs. Sparsit smarts in the face of that rejection. However, this quote also shows how Dickens consistently directs our notice to the fact that Louisa was so recently a child. This moment also illustrates that Louisa’s pairing with Bounderby is seen as so wholly unacceptable, for Mrs. Sparsit is not the only character in *Hard Times* who finds it so impossible to accept.
When Harthouse arrives, he quizzes Mrs. Sparsit as to whether Mrs. Bounderby is the more age appropriate “Forty! Five-and-thirty?” Expecting Bounderby’s wife to possess a “grim and stony maturity,” he (perhaps also attempting to flatter Mrs. Sparsit) responds to Mrs. Sparsit’s news that Louisa is in fact a “chit” who was “not twenty when she was married” with the admission “that I never was so astonished in my life!” (Dickens 154).

Louisa and Bounderby’s marriage does not, in the end, buck the Victorian literary trend of misery for such unions (as Mrs. Sparsit indeed predicted and is affirmed in nearly every chapter of this project). Certainly the marriage itself has been consistently characterized as unsuccessful. This relationship has been described from Louisa’s perspective as “domestic misery” (Gribble 435), a “bad marriage” (Schor Dickens 72), and a “loveless marriage with a man whom she finds repulsive” (Pykett 141). The lack of ease with which Louisa comports herself in her married life can be linked, amongst other factors, to the “repulsive” quality of her husband. Her physical repugnance for the man who becomes her husband is illustrated in the first chapters of the novel. The oft-quoted scene where a young Louisa offers to let Tom cut out a piece of her cheek where Bounderby has kissed it certainly makes clear she has never welcomed the older man’s attentions or interest.43 Though, of course, such things would not be overtly narratable in the era, it is easy to imagine that part of what makes their marriage so unbearable is that Louisa must be sexually intimate with a man she has always found discomfiting, or to put it more strongly, repellant. Further, this discomfort also reveals

43 Hilary Schor reads Louisa’s reaction as “masochism,” asserting, “the first sign of Louisa's sexual nature came early, when Bounderby demands a kiss from her, and she submits in stony silence – only to rub the area red after he leaves, and tell her brother he could cut it out with a knife, and she wouldn’t cry out” (Dickens 74).
her awareness that there is a “clear sexual desire that motivates” Bounderby to marry her (Humpherys 179). Perhaps Louisa’s willingness to sacrifice her cheek, then, can be read as both a recognition and discomfort with her future husband’s desire as well a means to literally erase all traces of that expression of his desire for her – in effect, her flesh seems tainted by his unwanted attentions.44

While the marriage fails for a variety of reasons, Louisa knows it has failed and can no longer be tolerated when her age-matched attraction for Harthouse helps her realize she possesses desires. These desires are not answered in her pairing with Bounderby nor is he shown as capable of fulfilling them, providing further evidence of both the problematics of age-disparate marriage and Bounderby’s contested masculinity. In part, Louisa finds herself in this unhappy predicament because she was raised to be without the imagination that would foster and recognize such impulses, making her marriage to her bullying and blustering husband all the more poignant. As Louisa asks her father upon their conversation after she has fled Bounderby’s home:

If you had known that there lingered in my breast, sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength, defying all the calculations ever made by man, and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is, — would you have given me to the husband whom I am now sure that I hate? . . . Would you have doomed me, at any time, to the frost and blight that have hardened and spoiled me? (Dickens 241)

44 Anne Humpherys points out that one of the “gaps in the story” is the “configuration of the sexual nature of Louisa’s marriage” (179). Her repugnance and his desire, “suggests that there might be some sexual trouble between them from the start,” though “they do appear to live calmly together, which suggests . . . there has been conjugal sex” (Humpherys 179). “There has been vigorous controversy” (179) as to whether or not the marriage is in fact consummated. Humpherys asks whether this “controversy” does indeed “matter,” (179) and I would agree with her assertion that it does, though in my case I find it illuminating for what it says about our expectations and assumptions on the nature of their age-disparate marriage.
Louisa’s plaintive request for understanding and recognition from her father (which he offers) reveals that something indeed “lingered” in her “breast,” including emotional warmth, sexual desire, and a need for fulfillment. Her grief also makes the horrors of her marriage—which Dickens compares to a “frost and blight” that has “hardened and spoiled” her—clear.⁴⁵

So the question that arises, then, is why mutually beneficial co-habitation with Mrs. Sparsit is not enough to affirm Bounderby’s performance of classed masculinity; or more to the point, why does he marry Louisa? As has been explored, clearly Bounderby is motivated by a long-held desire for “Tom Gradgrind’s daughter” (140).⁴⁶ In addition, their marriage is also likely inspired by the role of marriage in fully establishing masculinity in nineteenth-century Britain. As historian Angus McLaren explains, “The male world was split not only between the working and the middle classes but between the married and unmarried. Although in nineteenth-century male culture bachelorhood was praised . . . the man who remained celibate could be regarded by his peers as not having attained full adult status” (55). The prospect of attaining the fully adult status that being married offers would clearly be a concern for performance-minded Bounderby. This trepidation could also come from a consciousness that he remains unmarried as he proceeds into his fifties. While waiting until the “proper time to marry” (Banks 36) was

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⁴⁵ As Patricia Ingham explains, this recognition has a seemingly direct effect upon Bounderby’s performance. “What she rends and destroys by the germinating power with which her developing sexuality has endowed her, is the Bounderby empire. Her public defection from him is followed by, and therefore appears to cause, a public exposure of his self-aggrandizing lies about his pitiful upbringing. Soon after comes the prediction that his future is to be an ignominious death . . . his reversal of fortune begins with Louisa’s elopement” (Ingham 100).

⁴⁶ A phrase, and one Bounderby uses himself to describe Louisa Gradgrind, that also alludes to the sort of homosocial affiliation that Eve Sedgwick explores in *Between Men.*
indeed encouraged as a means to ensure the economic rise and stability of both the man and his future family,\footnote{In 1828, Nassau William Senior commented that the “hope of rising in the social scale activates mankind.” In his words, “men of more enterprise are induced to postpone marriage, not merely by the fear of sinking but also by the hope that in an encumbered state they may rise” (qtd. in Banks 27).} one could go too far and wait past the point of vitality. The Victorian man who remained unmarried when he had the economic stability to do so in fact put himself on shaky masculine ground. A man should marry in his late thirties or early forties—once his career was established and “optimum income was actually achieved” (Banks 30)—but one could wait too long and the pairing would then have the potential to be seen as grotesque or laughable. The question then arises: why does Bounderby wait so long – was he, perhaps, waiting for Louisa to grow up? While, as has been shown, this possibility is likely, marriage to Louisa also offers Bounderby a means to bolster his performance of a classed masculinity that grows ever more tenuous with the impact of age.

With this need for shoring up in mind, Bounderby unsurprisingly uses his wedding toast as an opportunity for self-congratulation and bluster. Now wedded to his object of desire, he applauds himself to his guests. He admits he feels “a little independent when I look around this table today, and reflect how little I thought of marrying Tom Gradgrind’s daughter when I was a ragged street-boy.” Not to suggest he has in actuality thought “little” about marrying Louisa, for, in his own words, “it has long been my wish to be” married to her (Dickens 140). Dickens then has him explain, “I have watched her bringing-up, and I believe she is worthy of me. At the same time — not to deceive you — I believe I am worthy of her” (140). Again, Dickens suggests that Bounderby has been interested in Louisa long before she was ever marriageable, giving
his desires a predatory (and therefore problematic) quality. Also noteworthy is his pathetically boastful assertion to his wedding guests that despite (or because of) his early years as a ragged urchin, he is “worthy of her.” To return to one of my earlier questions: why does Bounderby marry Louisa? As critic Hilary Schor suggests, Bounderby’s interest in Louisa may not be solely inspired by desire. “Bounderby may not ‘buy’ Louisa . . . but he certainly views her as an acquisition, another sign the he has risen from poverty and can acquire trophies” (Schor Dickens 79). Like Mrs. Sparsit, then, Louisa is meant to act as a signifier of his status as wealthy banker and mill owner. If we read his repeated (three times) use of “independent” in his wedding toast as the assertion of masculine authority then Bounderby sees his “acquisition” of his young bride as a means to shore up this authority – illustrating that their marriage has becomes a way for him to perform masculinity.

Dickens, however, does not allow the blustery Bounderby to enjoy his marital acquisition of Louisa for long – an outcome that heralds the dissolution of his masculine performance. Bounderby’s rather pathetic belief that he is “worthy” of his wife is echoed when he later affirms to Harthouse, “my wife is my junior. I don’t know what she saw in me to marry me, but she saw something in me, I suppose, or she wouldn’t have married me” (Dickens 160). However, whether he truly believes his young wife sees “something” in him is less significant than the fact that he is driven to affirm so to others, in yet another example of his compulsive need to perform his masculinity. Further, he seems to also feel the need to acknowledge their disparity in age as a means to refute the association of such pairings with misery – that in other words, he selected his bride wisely. As the novel progresses, however, Bounderby comes to sense that his wife
does not in actuality see him as worthy of her. For instance, he becomes offended—visibly “swelling with a sense of slight”—when Louisa declines to attend to his breakfast, deferring to Mrs. Sparsit with: “It is of no moment. Why should it be of any importance to me?” (Dickens 221). Of course, his sense of offense is encouraged by Mrs. Sparsit’s efforts to show him just what he had lost when he replaced her with his young wife. Though he merely blusters in response to her cold lack of interest in his offense, clearly he has come to sense that something is amiss in his marriage. As the narrator explains, “Mr. Bounderby went to bed, with a maudlin persuasion that he had been crossed in something tender, though he could not, for his life, have mentioned what it was” (Dickens 216). Bounderby, then, does not just want Louisa, he wants her to be attentively wifely – though as she makes clear, she does not possess the warmth or love necessary to diligently attend to his needs. He indeed married the woman he wanted but in the end did not get the wife he expected. Unsurprisingly, Mrs. Sparsit privately rejoices at this turn of events, saying to his portrait, “Serve you right, you Noodle, and I am glad of it” (Dickens 223).

Even the final confrontation between Gradgrind and Bounderby is further opportunity for performance. The slighted husband blusters that he has not been “dutifully and submissively treated by your daughter, as Josiah Bounderby of Coketown ought to be treated by his wife” (Dickens 262). In response, Louisa’s father explains that he has “reason to doubt whether we have ever quite understood Louisa” and that he thinks she has “qualities . . . which have been harshly neglected, and — and a little perverted. . . . I fear there is at present a general incompatibility between Louisa, and — and — and almost all the relations in which I have placed her” (Dickens 263, 264). Of
course, the incompatibility Gradgrind refers to can be read as her marriage to Bounderby, and this suggestion stings the man into complaint:

Your daughter don’t properly know her husband’s merits, and is not impressed with such a sense as would become her, by George! of the honour of his alliance. . . . I say this, because highly connected females have been astonished to see the way in which your daughter has conducted herself, and to witness her insensitivity. They have wondered how I have suffered it. And I wonder myself now, and I won’t suffer it. (Dickens 265)

Bounderby should easily be seen a man of influence within the novel but is instead a “Noodle” who doesn’t even realize that he is seen as one until after his fall. In fact, Mrs. Sparsit, the lady-like woman of status that he imagines “worships the ground” he walks on (to use Bounderby’s own words), holds him in just as much (or quite possibly more) contempt as everyone else in the novel (Dickens 265).

Bounderby’s little regard for his wife (a person he was meant to assume loving responsibility for) as anything more than a means to bolster his masculine performance is shown by how quickly he washes his hands of her.48 He does not wait to see whether she will come around as Gradgrind requests, perhaps sensing that he possesses few of the qualities that might persuade her. As Louisa does not, unsurprisingly, return home by noon the next day, their separation becomes final and he puts the home meant to be a domestic “country retreat” from the stresses of his multiple business responsibilities on the market “and resumed a bachelor life” (Dickens 267). With the defection of Louisa, Bounderby loses all claims to the class to which he has risen. By novel’s end he has no wife to cement his claims to adulthood, or home to showcase his financial

48 As Gradgrind asks of him within this scene, “Is it asking too much, Bounderby, that you, so far her elder, should aid in trying to set her right? You have accepted a great charge of her; for better for worse” (Dickens 266).
success. In his marriage to Louisa, we see this character in new lights, as it marks his first point of failure regarding the acquisition of male authority. A man who has built his professional persona from so little cannot mirror that success in the realm of domesticity, leaving him with an incomplete construction and performance of classed masculinity.

**Conclusion: the Failure of Bounderby’s Performance of Masculinity**

The moment of revelation regarding the truth of Bounderby’s rather ordinary lower-middle-class roots—accidently revealed by Mrs. Sparsit in front of an audience of the Gradgrinds and others—is key to understanding him as a construction. In an echo of the earlier scene where his interest in Louisa is revealed, Dickens describes the now-exposed Bounderby, having been “detected as the Bully of humility” and the “most ridiculous figure,” as having a “blustering sheepishness,” this time not for his contemplation of a age-disparate marriage, but for being “detected” as one with a “windy reputation” built “upon lies” (Dickens 283-284). In the face of such humiliation, he withdraws his claims to full expression of masculinity and ends his marriage. His legacy becomes not generations of Bounderbys but a group of aging men—described as “five-and-twenty Humbugs, past five-and-fifty years of age, each taking upon himself the name, Josiah Bounderby” (314)—heir to a legacy that has degenerated into “quibble, plunder, false pretences, vile example, little service and much law” (Dickens 314). The replacement of true heirs by a bevy of clones does nothing to reinforce or maintain his aging classed masculinity, for “in most societies that we know of,” particularly that of nineteenth-century Britain, “setting up a new household is the essential qualification for manhood. The man who speaks for familial dependents and who can transmit his name and assets to future generations is fully masculine” (Tosh *Manliness* 36). In the end,
Bounderby is revealed to be so thoroughly self-made as to be fictional, and, in turn, fully un-classed and un-masculine – illustrating Dickens’s lack of tolerance for the machinations of his blustery performance of masculinity. The emptiness of Bounderby’s efforts to create and shore up his masculinity are shown by how easily they are all undone – at novel’s end Dickens has him die of a “fit” on the streets of Coketown, unlikely to be mourned by anyone but his deluded mother.

While, as this project illustrates, aging masculinity can be sufficient to signal an age-disparate marriage as problematic, in the case of *Hard Times*, age is not the whole picture. Further, while issues of class alone could signal Bounderby as questionable, that alone is not enough to make this character—the dishonorable, social-climbing bounder his name suggests—such a figure of derision. Within the novel, class amplifies and underscores the generally unacceptable nature of age-disparate marriage, as both class and aging impact a man’s access to the privileges of masculinity. *Hard Times* demands that class and age be considered together because for Victorians they indeed impacted each other. The physicality of under- and lower-class masculinity may have made it especially vulnerable to the decline often associated with aging. In effect, the class roots that Bounderby affects may ironically make him even more vulnerable to the decline associated with aging. The failure of Bounderby’s performance, then, may in part be rooted in the nature of the persona he chooses to present and perform. In the end, no matter how aggressively and boastfully he presents his façade of bluster, Bounderby is unable to manage his performance of classed and aging masculinity. While Dickens’s rough and blustery Bounderby would seem to have little in common with George Eliot’s upper-class scholar of religion, Casaubon, the two indeed share a
similar fate as aging male characters who are not suited for marriage but marry much younger women anyways. *Middlemarch* offers both a complement and counterpoint to *Hard Times*, as Eliot’s novel gives voice (via her character, Dorothea) to that which the often inscrutable Louisa cannot articulate or pursue: her desires for both self-realization and age-matched love.
“INCONSISTENT” DESIRE: SELF-GOVERNMENT, MARITAL AMBITIONS, AND AGE-DISPARATE MARRIAGE IN MIDDLEMARCH

The first chapter of George Eliot’s Middlemarch (published serially in 1871–72 and as a novel in 1874) has a curious and important moment that evocatively reveals much about Dorothea’s relationship to her own desires. As she and her sister, Celia, sort through their mother’s jewels, Dorothea will not accept any of her mother’s finery, until an emerald bracelet and ring is highlighted by a break in the clouds. Previously guided by her (in Celia’s words) “Puritanic superiority,” she came “under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam” of the jewels themselves. Instead of rejecting them, as her sister expects, Dorothea puts them on, and “all the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colors by merging them in her mystic religious joy.” She rejects her sister’s offer of the “pretty and quiet” agates, and decides she will keep the ring and bracelet, though “Celia thought that her sister was going to renounce the ornaments, as in consistency she ought to do.” Instead, Dorothea “took up her pencil without removing the jewels, and still looking at them. She thought of often having them by her, to feed her eye at these little fountains of pure color,” her “inward fire” flashing in response. The scene ends with Dorothea “questioning the purity of her own feeling and speech” and Celia observing that her sister’s adherence to her own principles and opinions are sometimes “inconsistent.” This inconsistency and the tension between her response to the jewels, her struggle to be at peace with her desire for them, and her sister’s resentment of Dorothea’s lack of consistency (and of her keeping of the emeralds, of course) all speaks of a lack of resolution that belies her “Puritanic” tendencies (Eliot 38-40). Though these jewels never reappear within the novel, what they say about
Dorothea resonates throughout *Middlemarch*, particularly within the context of her unhappy marriage to the much older Casaubon.

Though the focus of this chapter’s analysis is on the age-disparate marriage of Dorothea and Casaubon, as its title suggests, the scope of Eliot’s novel delves into the concerns and tribulations of the townspeople of Middlemarch – the couple’s family, friends, and neighbors. The novel traces this character’s evolution from the privileged but aimless Miss Brooke, to her eager anticipation of marriage to the much older scholar Casaubon, her crushing disappointment when their marriage falls so short of those expectations, and then her very happy age-matched marriage to Ladislaw after Casaubon’s illness and death. Early in her novel, *Middlemarch*, Eliot expresses its fictional community’s discomfort with the “anachronism” of this pairing of a “youthful wife” and her “ancient husband” (Trotter 57) with an almost Gothic intensity: Dorothea and Casaubon’s impending nuptials are objected to with a sense of disgust that her “blooming full-pulsed youth” would be wedded to a seemingly decrepit figure of a man with “one foot in the grave” who is “no better than a mummy” (Eliot 239, 74). Luckily for Casaubon, however, this disdainful attitude does not represent the full spectrum of response within Middlemarch, as on the other hand, it is also admitted (in the words of Mrs. Cadwallader) that he “has money enough; I must do him that justice,” making Dorothea’s a good, though perhaps unlikely, match (Eliot 71). As these examples illustrate, the pairing of a couple marked by disparity in age is one that can been seen as both compelling and repellent, with practical considerations (such as the wealth, status, and stability an older man can offer) coming up against the deeply felt discomfort that such a difference in age elicits. However, Dorothea and Casaubon’s marriage is not
solely problematic because of their age-disparity – as such, this chapter examines the
reasons why the marriage was seen as simultaneously attractive and problematic. An
exploration of these qualities allows for an analysis of those social and cultural
influences—important for what they say about the experience of marriage and its
possibilities as a means for self-expression—that simultaneously guide and offer an
opportunity for the expression of choice by the Victorian woman.49

As a means to investigate that which affirms and troubles pairings of older men
and younger women as expressed within Eliot’s novel, this chapter draws upon recent
criticism,50 including Robert Polhemus’s Lot’s Daughters and The Spectacles of
Intimacy by Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, to explore the underlying social
factors and attitudes regarding age-disparate marriage. This chapter revises the models
of Polhemus and Chase and Levenson by examining how this problematization of age-
disparate marriage can be rooted within the Victorian ideals of liberalism and domestic
femininity. While providing insights into how the disquiet regarding “inconsistent”
expression of desire and older male-younger female pairings fits into the larger social
context of nineteenth-century England, these seemingly incongruent value systems
connect through their overlapping interest in self-government – autonomy of the self and

49 If only Eliot’s novel had been set closer to its date of publishing—or better yet, later in the nineteenth
century—when women’s expression of choice was more clearly affirmed, as can be seen in Chapter 6.

50 Both Selma B. Brody and Deborah Wynne compare Eliot’s novel and its heroine to other nineteenth-
century novels, with the former exploring the similarities between the marital choices and experience of
Dorothea and Henry James’s Isabel Archer, and the latter focusing on “constricting social codes
surrounding marriage and property” as illustrated by Eliot and Dinah Mulock Craik (160). In addition,
Andrew Leng and Joseph Nicholes explore Middlemarch’s connections to Pre-Raphaelite art, while
Kathleen McCormack and James Harrison explore the novel’s presentation of the art of the Vatican
museum and Rome. In his analysis of psychological aspects of Middlemarch, Gordon Hirsch presents the
moments “where emotion, society, and ethical thought intersect” (83). Finally, Ernest Fontana considers
the figure of the gentleman in the novel and considers how characters reflect the standards of “true
gentlemanliness” (1).
restraint of the self, simultaneous power and suppression. And though Dorothea is seen as being capable of self-restraint, what she desires is a life of expression—whether within her community through good works, intellectualism, or choosing a mate—which ultimately, as this chapter shows, puts her at odds with the values of self-government. Further, as the scene with the emeralds reveals, Dorothea cannot fully “renounce” (and barely acknowledges) her “inward fire”—a term that links her both in wording and plight to Dickens’s Louisa, as seen in Chapter 3—and instead leaves such troubling impulses potentially unmastered. Though her decisions are considered objectionable for a woman of her class and status by Victorian standards, the motivations behind her choice to marry her much older first husband (as well as the reality of their married life) highlights just how problematic both her relationship to her own “inconsistent” desires and her attempt to express them through an age-disparate pairing can be. Dorothea, then, does not merely trouble the standards of the Middlemarch community in the 1830s, but those of Eliot’s day: for, while liberalism celebrates choice and personal liberty, and domestic femininity dictates female choice as being determined by strict convention, they both privilege the restraint of the self, speaking to the prevalence and impact of this value. As Eliot demonstrates, Casaubon frustrates Dorothea’s desires on two counts—for emotional and physical intimacy and for intellectual growth—making the disparity between Dorothea and Casaubon’s ages a means to illustrate the disconnection between Dorothea and her desires.

Age-Disparate Marriage as an Avenue to a “Grand Life” Versus the Ideals of Liberalism and Domestic Femininity

The desire to create a life of personal meaning, one that drives Dorothea throughout Middlemarch, finds resonance in many of the ideals and philosophies of the
Victorian era; specifically, this celebration of “personal freedom” and “liberty of the individual” can be located within nineteenth-century British liberal thought and writing (Hobhouse 53, 91). Though much of this writing is concerned with the political and economic expressions of those ideals, of interest for this discussion are those moments that explore the rights of freedom and choice for the individual, as can be found in the writings of Smith, Malthus, and Arnold, and more explicitly within that of L.T. Hobhouse and John Stuart Mill. As the latter suggested, the “principle” of human liberty “requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow: without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong” (On 54-55). The invocation to have the freedom to do “as we like” can be seen as an expression of a key liberal value that was concerned with the influence of not only “the tyranny of political rulers,” but more importantly, “social tyranny” (Mill On 46). Framed as a “struggle between Liberty and Authority” (Mill On 43), this celebration of self-expression in the face of resistance is expressed in works such as On Liberty and Liberalism. Within the context of Eliot’s novel, though her community may see Dorothea’s choice of Casaubon as “foolish, perverse, or wrong,” by the standards of liberalism it should still be hers to make.

The self-expression that seems most powerful (and daring) is not necessarily what is easily imagined: spending and wearing and eating and saying what we like, for example; rather, it is that which drives one in shaping one’s life to reflect one’s most fundamental desires. The right to create a life that suits our tastes (within the confines of safety for others, as the oft-repeated caveat qualifies) is one that suggests both the far-
reaching authority of personal liberty but also the right of individuals to fashion lives of difference. In his chapter titled “Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being,” Mill explains, “to give any fair play to the nature of each, it is essential that different persons should be allowed to lead different lives” (109). A life cannot be our own if it is meant to resemble all others in a difference of sameness. Instead, the liberal embrace of individuality provides the room for a person to become who they hope and intend to be: their true self, in other words. The desire to frame the plan of her life to suit her own character, to paraphrase Mill, is one that drives Dorothea. As critic Jenni Calder explains, Eliot’s character “wants an identity other than that prefigured for her,” one that goes beyond the responsibilities and frivolities of an upper-class woman (149). Disinclined to follow the conventions of her class and gender, she is instead driven towards participation in something far more significant and epic. Eliot expresses this interest early in the novel as Dorothea restlessly searches for her purpose: “For a long while she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she to do?” (51). Dorothea’s desire to make her life productive and meaningful draws her away from the path of conventional domestic femininity and into what she believes (incorrectly, as it turns out) will be far more exalted intellectual and spiritual reaches via her marriage to her older husband.

If the “nineteenth century might be called the age of Liberalism,” in the words of Hobhouse, it was also an age during which the manifestation of opportunity was also influenced by status, class, gender, race, and a myriad of other factors (91). The predominance of ideals supporting the “liberty of the individual” are often checked from
full expression by social influences that also determine what is “prefigured” for that
“individual” (Hobhouse 91). However, despite a myriad of competing values to the
otherwise, liberal thinking indeed incorporates women like Dorothea into the ranks of
those who are empowered to choose. When writing of the need for “Domestic Liberty,”
Hobhouse explains that “the movement of liberation” will also consist “in rendering the
wife a fully responsible individual, capable of holding property, suing and being sued,
conducting business on her own account, and enjoying full personal protection against
her husband” (18). The proposal for women’s economic and social empowerment is in
part due to pragmatic concerns, as the isolation of women within that sphere deprives
society of their intellect and the progress that they may enable, as Hobhouse suggests
in Liberalism.51 Mill would further explore the lot of nineteenth-century women in The
Subjection of Women, in which he objects to the belief that “the natural vocation of a
woman is that of a wife and mother” (26). Rather than being educated in a manner that
will allow their natural talents beyond the domestic sphere to be developed and
expressed for the betterment of society (the very desire that Dorothea possesses),
instead “women are schooled into suppressing them in their most natural and most
healthy direction” (Mill 98). As Mill states, this “relic” of “domestic oppression” makes
“marriage the only actual bondage known to our law” as “the generality of the male sex
cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal” (16, 34, 79, 47). These sentiments
are expressed both within Eliot’s novel and in the writing of the day (see Chapter 6 for

51 As Sherry L. Mitchell explains, “Eliot focuses on the wasted practical potential of talented women like
Dorothea” who “live at a time when the only approved vocation for women is marriage” (33). This
sentiment is an echo of Hobhouse’s lamentation that “the larger wrong done by the repression of women
is not the loss to women themselves who constitute one half of the community, but the impoverishment of
the community as whole, the loss of all the elements in the common stock which the free play of the
women’s mind would contribute” (48).
additional, late-Victorian examples), giving credence to the validity and applicability of Mill’s bluntly stated concerns.\textsuperscript{52} However, while liberalism and its celebration of choice is meant to include women, other aspects of liberalism, as well as those of domestic femininity, provide a counter-balance of influence against its full expression for women in Victorian society.

If a woman is to be a “fully responsible individual” empowered to act in a “self-directing” manner, then expression of this freedom of choice would include those rights listed above, as well as choice in marriage (Hobhouse 53). Though \textit{Middlemarch} does not explicitly propose the advances outlined years later in \textit{Liberalism}, it does make clear that Dorothea has little interest doing anything but what she likes (under the guise of self-sacrifice, of course), to paraphrase Mill, no matter how at odds that puts her with the expectations of custom. In fact, the desire to create and live a life of personal meaning is a common theme in \textit{Middlemarch}. A multitude of characters attempt to express themselves through vocation or social maneuvering as a means of manifesting the life they imagine they are meant to live; the former impulse shown in the example of Lydgate, who intends to create sweeping change in medicine, while the latter is seen in the example of Rosamond Vincy, who intends to live the life of a lady by marrying well. Dorothea Brooke, however, follows neither example: her attempts to create a life of personal meaning challenge expectations of appropriate choice while also transcending both vocational and social concerns. It is not an accident that two of the preceding examples, Rosamond and Dorothea, involve marriage. For women of the Victorian era,

\textsuperscript{52} In fact, this connection is one that has previously been made: as Suzanne Graver affirms, both \textit{The Subjection of Women} and \textit{Middlemarch} “share a common subject matter: the lot of women and relations between men and women in marriage” (55).
marriage offered an opportunity to assert themselves—an idea affirmed in detail by Darwin in his theories of sexual selection (see Chapter 2)—with varying degrees of possibility. In fact, “marriage is the only real site for the exercise of female agency” – however, as becomes clear, this “agency” was limited in ways Dorothea cannot imagine (Nazar 306). For upper-class women like Dorothea, though they are socially and economically privileged, their existence is also prescribed by the strictures of status, making the selection of a husband one of the few areas where they can exercise some degree of will. Motivated by an effort to strive against the “dreary uselessness of a ‘gentlewoman’s oppressive liberty’” (Nicholes 115), Dorothea attempts to circumvent expectations of conventionality and achieve a life that resonates with personal meaning. Dorothea does so, not once but twice within Eliot’s novel, and in differing ways her marriage to Casaubon and then Ladislaw can both be seen as expressions of her aspiration to make life-determining choices expressive of her desires despite meeting with the disapproval of her family and community.

Indeed, Dorothea’s desires would be considered strongly inappropriate by Victorian standards of domestic femininity. If we accept marriage as an avenue for female choice, it is also a means to gain or cement status, class, and financial stability, making it one fraught with social and economic importance. As Maertz put its, “marriage is the medium in which a woman acquires legal status, property, and an identity” (19). In addition to the importance ascribed to savvy selection in marriage, the nature of a woman’s responsibilities within the home was also important within Victorian society. According to critic Nancy Armstrong, to the domestic woman “went authority over the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations” – precisely the limit
in scope that Mill (and Dorothea) bemoaned, no matter how significant that authority ultimately was (3). Further, according to critic Elizabeth Langland, an additional area of responsibility associated with the era’s standards of femininity is related to the family’s status: “The home, often figured as a haven with its attending angel, can be decoded so that we recognize it as a theater for the staging of a family’s position, a staging that depends on a group of prescribed domestic practices” (9). Langland has pointed out that in the example of Dorothea, Eliot shows women’s lives within the domestic realm as being limited and limiting, suggesting that the representation of female experience in Middlemarch should not necessarily be take as characteristic of the era.53 Indeed, as Chapter 3 explores in more detail, the home was seen as a site that confirmed and cemented social status, which would offer Dorothea the opportunity to manage significant domestic authority. However, no matter how independent, active, or key to a family’s status a Victorian woman (whether fictional or living) may have been, with the rise of the middle-class, she was still held to a “specific female ideal,” one that privileged domestic femininity (Armstrong 8). And, as critic Catherine Hall argues, this rise in the “female ideal” was paired with the development of an “ideology of domesticity which increasingly ties women into the home and stresses their role as wife and mother” (68) – a reality that Dorothea chafed against and sought to escape via her marriage to the much older Casaubon.

This privileging of the “theater” of domestic practices is another aspect of conventional domestic femininity that threatens Dorothea’s intentions and desires but

53 In contrast, Langland argues, many writers of the nineteenth century offered portrayals of women that challenged “the historical portrait of Victorian women as the passive, dependent, and idle creatures of prevailing ideology” (11).
for her seeming escape via age-disparate marriage. As Mr. Brooke admits, Dorothea is “not fond of show, a great establishment, balls, dinners, that kind of thing. I can see that Casaubon’s ways might suit you better than Chettam’s” (Eliot 61). In fact, Eliot conveys Dorothea’s disinterest in reigning over the domestic sphere by illustrating little in the way of her domestic management besides a mention or two of having “some memoranda to write for the housekeeper” (499). Further, Dorothea regularly expresses “disregard for the conventionally feminine concerns” of domestic niceties and responsibilities that would have been part and parcel with her upper-middle class domestic sphere (Marotta 407). Marriage to Casaubon seemingly offers relief from these and other distractions from and barriers to the socially significant and impactful life Dorothea desires for herself. Instead, she prefers to direct her energies towards the intellectual realm seemingly promised by association with a scholar like Casaubon. While we indeed see little mention of Dorothea’s exercise of household authority, and this absence perhaps “belittles the life of a lady and evacuates it of significance” (Langland 193), it also indicates that during the period of her life that leads up to and includes her first marriage, Dorothea imagines fulfillment outside that realm. In fact, Eliot’s agenda in writing *Middlemarch* may well have been to explore the very nature of the frustrations that dogged many of the women of her time.54 As critic June Skye Szirotny explains, “many feminists are indignant” that Eliot “did not present models of successful women. . . . But she is wanted to expose the reasons of her suffering, not

54 Barbara Hardy provides an additional perspective on the lack of discernibly feminist sentiment in *Middlemarch*: “Dorothea is embedded in her time, thirty years before the feminist movements and controversies of the eighteen-sixties” – making her more a product of the time the setting of her novel rather than the time of its writing (*Narrators* 104).
celebrate her expensive victory” (25). Tracing the reasons for and results of this suffering indeed illuminates the impact of the limitations created by the era’s standards of domestic femininity.

The expected path for “a Christian young lady of fortune” of the Victorian era—charity, embroidery and other such feminine niceties, conventional marriage, as Eliot suggests (51)—is not for Dorothea. The “amiable and handsome” Sir James Chettam is, in the words of Mr. Brooke “just the sort of man” he imagines “a woman would like,” but handsomeness is not important to his niece (Eliot 36, 60). In addition, it is easy to imagine that as a family alliance that would unite their adjoining properties, their nuptials would have the air of an arranged marriage, which Eliot’s independence-minded Dorothea would have certainly resisted. Instead, as the narrator explains, “the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path” (Eliot 46). In “girlish subjection” to her largely uneducated status, Dorothea instead wishes to submit herself in “spiritual communion” to the calling of an older man whose qualities of intellect and spirituality will allow her association with “the higher inward life” (Eliot 46).

In Casaubon, Dorothea imagines she has found such a guide. As she breathlessly muses to herself: “There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Every-day things with us would mean the greatest things. . . . I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. And then I should know what to do, when I got older: I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here--now--in England” (Eliot 51). Prior to her marriage to Casaubon, Dorothea smarts under the confines of “the
shallows” of the “ladies’ school literature” and “toy-box history of the world” education she received and instead wishes to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to accomplish truly great things that will make an impact on her community (Eliot 47, 94). Though Dorothea is sure that her charitable efforts, including building cottages for the poor, can do some good (if she can just get them built), she does not feel that she possesses the intellectual resources to create a greater, grander impact – a deficiency she seeks to remedy through marriage to Casaubon.

Dorothea’s aspirations for a life that transcends what she sees as conventional trivialities clearly illustrate that her marital ambitions deviate from the era’s norms, whether romantic, pragmatic, or mercenary. They also deviate from that which others imagine of a woman of her class and status. The qualities prefigured for her are to be shaped through education and training, the primary purpose of which is to groom her “for courtship and marriage” (Hall 63). In the words of historian Catherine Hall: “Music, drawing, painting, French, fancy work, gossip and fashion were the stuff of a Victorian girl’s life – all designed to prepare her to catch a man” and to “prepare them in the best possible way for their relative sphere” (64, 89). This preparation, and the person it attempts to shape her into, is one that Dorothea actively resists. This resistance can be seen early in the novel, when Sir James states that “every lady ought to be a perfect horsewoman, that she may accompany her husband,” and Dorothea’s tart reply—“You see how widely we differ, Sir James. I have made up my mind that I ought not to be a perfect horsewoman, and so I should never correspond to your pattern of a lady”—shows her refusal to accept conventional expectations of her behavior (Eliot 45-46). This resistance is further reinforced in Eliot’s novel, when Mr. Brooke suggests that
Dorothea should strive to play nicely on the piano in order to make her intended’s evenings pleasant, and receives the rejoinder that “‘Mr. Casaubon is not fond of the piano, and I am very glad he is not,’ said Dorothea, whose slight regard for domestic music and feminine fine art must be forgiven her, considering the small tinkling and smearing in which they chiefly consisted at that dark period. She smiled and looked up at her betrothed with grateful eyes” (79). In both cases, Casaubon offers Dorothea what appears to be a protective and fatherly escape from these expectations of the performance expected for a woman of her status, shedding further light on his attractiveness for her.

However, Dorothea wants to marry the much older Casaubon to not merely escape the embroidery and social call-laden strictures of the domestic sphere – she also desires a greater intellect. Unfortunately for Dorothea, female education was seen as presenting dangers for women (an attitude that began to shift by the end of the nineteenth century, as Chapter 6 affirms), and was as potentially problematic as the issue of sexual desire. Mr. Brooke expresses this concern when he hears that Dorothea is learning Greek: “Well, but now, Casaubon, such deep studies, classics, mathematics, that kind of thing, are too taxing for a woman--too taxing, you know.” When Casaubon replies, “Dorothea is learning to read the characters simply . . . she had the very considerate thought of saving my eyes,” Mr. Brooke responds: “Ah, well, without understanding, you know--that may not be so bad. But there is a lightness about the feminine mind--a touch and go--music, the fine arts, that kind of thing--they should study those up to a certain point, women should; but in a light way, you know” (78-79). While doing “deep studies,” such as learning the classical language and mathematics, is too
taxing for a woman, being able to parrot phonetic Greek in service to her husband does not threaten a woman’s femininity. However, as should be clear, Dorothea does not desire a life of lightness, which illustrates how marriage to much older Casaubon is a poor vehicle to help her achieve her dreams of intellectual development.

The feminine lightness heralded by Mr. Brooke and Casaubon requires preservation for a reason. As “Mrs Ellis, in her chapter on the training of girls,” states: “a woman, I would humbly suggest, has no business to be so far absorbed in any purely intellectual pursuit, as not to know when water is boiling over on the fire” (Hall 64). The disdain that Mrs. Ellis holds for a woman who does not know her domestic business, so to speak, is one that can be linked to the common fear of that time that education would over-intellectualize women and make them unsuited for their primary purpose of being “faithfully employed in discharging the various duties of a wife and daughter, a mother and friend” (Hall 64). This misdirected focus would instead lead to a “culpable neglect of the most important obligations” as women are instead “daily absorbed by philosophic and literary speculations” (Armstrong 68). The unease that a woman is incapable of incorporating intellectual pursuits with domestic concerns perhaps also implies that while these concerns are ostensibly of paramount importance, they are not as alluring as “philosophic and literary speculations,” which is certainly true for Eliot’s heroine. Critic Hina Nazar’s observation that Dorothea “identifies marriage as the venue for a particular kind of scholarship, an initiation into the mysteries of the Hebrew alphabet rather than the mysteries of conjugal pleasure” (306), suggests that her considerations in selecting her first husband are purely intellectual, making them seem all the more problematic and unnatural by the standards of the day.
In fact, Dorothea’s aspirations depend on her association with another, one who she believes is endowed with the wisdom needed to elevate her to the heights necessary to accomplish what she intends. This limitation in vision exists for a reason, however. As critic Bernard J. Paris suggests, Dorothea’s marital ambitions are not concerned with fortune, status, or name, but in “marrying a great man,” through which she can “live vicariously through,” rather than pursuing her own dreams and desires (due to the limitations imposed by her gender, of course) (243). Though Dorothea does not intend to “live vicariously” through Casaubon but rather to be his active and humble assistant in completing his great life’s work—as she thinks: “what a work to be in any ways present at, to assist in, though only as a lamp-holder” (42)—the suggestion is merited. By attempting to make “Casaubon’s scholarly vocation her own” (Nazar 306), Dorothea attempts to make their marriage a vehicle for vicarious greatness. The barriers towards female intellectual or social achievement present in nineteenth-century Britain are not impassible (as Eliot herself illustrates) but they are far-reaching. This concern with the limitations of the female lot is, in fact, a common theme in George Eliot’s writing. As Calder explains in *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, Eliot’s “profoundest interests lay with women who had hopes and aspirations beyond the conventional, women who wanted to achieve things, however vague, who were impatient of the aims usually attributed to them” (126). In the case of Dorothea, her desire for “more than conventional attitudes would be ready to grant” clearly includes choice in marriage (no matter the age of her husband), as well as an interest in a life of influence beyond the domestic sphere that such a marriage would enable (Calder 126). As Polhemus explains: “the older man of power is present and part of the revelation of
the young woman’s dreams,” meaning, in this fictional example, that Dorothea’s choice of the older Casaubon potentially offers a means to circumvent the social limitations under which she smart (171). Unlikely to realize greatness solely through their own efforts due to the social restrictions of the day, a relationship such as the one shared by Dorothea and Casaubon potentially offers a young woman access to that same power through association, allowing for “the liberation of female aspirations” (Polhemus 4).

In fact, the limitations society dictated for women, and which shaped their ambitions along marital lines, were of explicit concern to Eliot. The second to last paragraph of the first edition (1871-1872) of *Middlemarch* included the following text (deleted for the 1874 edition): “Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighbourhood of Middlemarch that such mistakes could not have happened if the society in which she was born had not smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his age” (qtd. in Hardy *The Novels* 52). With her use of “sickly,” Eliot cues the couple’s disparity in age and health, while also placing the blame squarely upon “society” for smiling upon such an unequal and unkind pairing. This subtext to their marriage is one that can be seen in the novel, with the community’s disapproval of Dorothea and Casaubon’s marriage (due to their disparity in age, amongst other factors) balanced by his “handsome property” and “good” income, elevating their marriage from shocking to acceptably good and affirming its suitability despite the issue of age (60, 62). As Szirotny confirms, “vociferous as are Dorothea’s friends in objecting to her marriage, they do not fundamentally oppose the match. For it satisfies their most deeply rooted concerns that she marry money and social position” (24). This finger-pointing is echoed by critic Bege K. Bowers, who
argues Dorothea “is made to feel useless by a society that offers few outlets for a woman’s creative energy” leaving her with few viable options outside of marriage” (111), while critic Barbara Hardy suggests women like Dorothea—“sympathetic, well-born, intelligent, creative human beings, under-educated, untrained, taught a few superficial accomplishments and manners, dressed and cultivated, with marriage in mind”—only had marriage to look forward to; in fact, “marriage is what is expected of them and is all that is expected of them” (*The Miserable* 70), making a union meant to be driven by romance seem very much like a burdensome inevitability – the burden of which Dorothea unfortunately comes to feel.

**“Now I Wish Her Joy of Her Hair Shirt”: Dorothea’s Desires and Age-Disparate Marriage**

While Dorothea’s desire to marry Casaubon indeed troubles the era’s values of liberalism and domestic femininity, the horror that characters (and readers) feel regarding their pairing is more explicitly rooted in the couple’s perceived extreme disparity in age. This unease is one that is rarely contested in Victorian literature, though as Chase and Levenson explain in their analysis of *The Cricket in the Hearth*, Dickens offers a possible example that seeks to validate age-disparate marriage, in addition to those novels included in Chapter 7.55 And, while Dickens attempts to affirm the marriage of his characters haunted by the problem of disparity in age, and does so

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55 As they argue of young Dot’s embrace of both her wifely role and the domestic sphere, “she long ago learned, and now must say openly, that the match would have been ‘most wretched,’ because there can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose. ‘Sat next to this fatal disparity of temperament, the contrast in age disappears at a stroke’ (98). Dickens chooses to subdue the problematic aspects of his age-disparate couple. As they explain, the now quiet “daughter/wife” of Dickens’s story becomes a fit Victorian spouse though her manifestation and embrace of the values and behaviors of domestic femininity, seemingly offering hope that an age-disparate coupling can be successful and fulfilling (98).
for the most part, Eliot offers no such validation. As Chase and Levenson explain, “the pleasing outcome cannot cancel the uneasiness,” as the threat inherent in these problematic pairings is too resonant (99). “What keeps this seductive arrangement unsettled is the fear that the wife/daughter cannot, and perhaps should not, give herself up” in marriage to a much older man (Chase and Levenson 96). The language they use is revealing: that though a marriage of this sort is unsettling (in ways that are more fully explored in this project), it is also seductive, and expressive of a compelling “dream of female devotion” that such a pairing—between an older man and a spouse both wife and daughter—seems to promise (96). This “dream” is one that inspires the scholarly Casaubon, who has until then devoted himself to his expansive life’s work, “The Key to All Mythologies,” to ask a woman almost thirty years his junior, one in “the early bloom of youth,” to marry him (Eliot 63). Though he had previously not been inclined to take on the distractions and demands of marriage, in meeting Dorothea he realized that he now wanted “cheerful companionship” with a woman whose youth and “devotedness” made her well “adapted to supply aid in graver labours and to cast a charm over vacant hours” (Eliot 49, 62-63). According to Casaubon’s “most agreeable previsions of marriage,” Dorothea would attentively assist him in his intellectual pursuits (those “graver labours”) and provide “the solace of female tendance for his declining years” through her “ardent submissive affection” (Eliot 77-78) – all description that emphasizes his needs. The language Eliot uses for both Casaubon and the narrator makes clear that the alluring charm of Dorothea’s beauty,56 and her youthful but submissive enthusiasm, make her a

56 Regarding Dorothea’s attractiveness, Sally Shuttleworth argues, “Dorothea Brooke is introduced to the read of Middlemarch as a physical presence, whose beauty we are asked both to admire and analyze” (Shuttleworth 425).
compelling match, rather than any real understanding of the type of companion who would be best suited to a man seen by most as an old and dusty scholar. And while this role is one that Dorothea eagerly and earnestly anticipates, this section details the variety of ways Eliot makes clear that Casaubon is simply not the right choice for Dorothea.

Robert Polhemus provides a means to more deeply examine the implications of Casaubon's desires for Dorothea's submissive devotion. As he explains, the "patriarchal culture" of nineteenth-century Britain in many way supports "adult male projections," in both "real and fictional" guises, of the suitability of nubile young wives as companions to older men (a topic touched upon further in Chapter 2) (45, 7, 5). The social sanction of marriage between young women and older men—and the word sanction is useful here as it suggests both authorization and restriction, highlighting the inherently conflicted and contradictory attitude towards age-disparate pairings, an attitude affirmed by the texts' often punishing attitudes towards the older men—are rooted in what Polhemus calls the "Lot complex." The "Lot complex," as he describes it, is a "dynamic configuration of wishes, sexual fantasies, fears, and symbolic imagery that has worked to form generational relationships and structure personality, gender identity, religious faith, and social organization" (4). His inclusion of "wishes" and "sexual fantasies" in the forming of "generational relationships" can be linked to the seductive aspect that Chase and Levenson identified as an element of pairings of this sort. What is "unsettling" (to revisit their terminology) is that the sexual fantasies include those of a "father figure" directed or projected upon his wife/daughter, making them essentially incestuous in association (Greene "Another" 32), which speaks to the prevailing discomfort such
pairings engender (as illustrated throughout the writing and novels featured in this project). This attitude also reinforces the older husband’s perceived incapability of meeting his young wife’s desires – ostensibly leaving her open to temptation to stray from the confines of their marriage bed with an age-matched lover. “This is the dread that lives within the fantasy, the fear that the pattern of busy young wife and placid older husband will come to grief on the shoals of the wife’s desire,” leaving the domestic “charms” the older man had anticipated in choosing his spouse smashed amidst the ruins of their marriage (Chase and Levenson 96-97).57

Casaubon’s proposal letter does nothing to dissuade readers from suspecting that the characters who feel he’s too old in manner, thought, and bearing to keep Dorothea happy are correct. As he explains, commenting on both her beauty and “elevation of thought and a capability of devotedness,” that “in the first hour of meeting you, I had an impression of your eminent and perhaps exclusive fitness to supply my need” for companionship (Eliot 62). Rather than suggesting that their marriage was inspired by a case of love at first sight, or a sense that they share the qualities necessary for a companionate marriage (or any other rationale that would have been palatable for Victorians), for Casaubon it was a case of assessment of suitability for his needs at first sight. Dorothea’s response is strangely effusive considering the distinct lack of romance in his letter: she “trembled while she read this letter; then she fell on her knees, buried

57 Psychological aspects of Dorothea’s sexual dissatisfaction provide credence to the fear that its assumed existence in her marriage to Casaubon will cause marital disaster. Mildred S. Greene observes that “the ‘jagged fragmentariness of the ruins Dorothea encounters in the Vatican museum suggests her sexual frustration in marriage” (“G. Eliot’s” 27), a scenario of “repression” that “is corrected by Dorothea’s sexual expression in her second marriage to Ladislaw (“Another” 31). Ignês Sodré adds, “Dorothea’s Puritanism and contempt for her sister’s femininity hide a fear that sexuality will cause a loss of control and regression to an infant state” (202).
her face, and sobbed” (Eliot 63). As critic Allan C. Christensen observes, “apparently the failure of the letter to even mention love escapes her notice” (64). Indeed as the narrator points out, Dorothea does not find his lack of affection a red flag, as her “whole soul was possessed by the fact that a fuller life was opening before her: she was a neophyte about to enter on a higher grade of initiation” (Eliot 63). In this scene, Eliot makes clear that Dorothea does not regret Casaubon’s lack of love-filled declarations in his proposal letter because she is not at that time looking for such an expression. Her eyes are fixed on the future, that “fuller life” that she imagines was “opening before her,” and she sees Casaubon as a means to achieve that life – a description that makes him sound more priest than husband.58 As Bernard J. Paris vividly clarifies, “what makes the marriage to Casaubon so disgusting to other people—the age difference and his lack of ‘red-blooded manhood’”—is part of his appeal to Dorothea (243). Since she has an idealized image of herself as an “ascetic who scorns worldly pleasures” life with Casaubon appears to be a perfect match (Paris 243). And indeed, Casaubon’s lack of emotional and physical warmth makes his pairing with a self-defined ascetic seem fitting.

No matter a younger woman’s willingness to marry, the male fantasies associated with the “Lot complex” have multiple implications. As Polhemus explains, it also includes “the power of projection” and “the drive for female agency” (9-10). The former is connected to not only male desire for younger women but the “projection and displacement of sexual desire by mature, aging father figures onto young women,” in

58 As the narrator explains, “All Dorothea’s passion was transfused through a mind struggling towards an ideal life; the radiance of her transfigured girlhood fell on the first object that came within its level” (Eliot 63). Casaubon is clearly that “first object” and one not, it turns out, discerningly chosen.
effect making these young women complicit in their own desirability (Polhemus 10). This is not to suggest, however, that fantasy regarding younger women is never matched by a reciprocal interest in older men by younger women. As Polhemus qualifies, though “in the Lot complex, the desires of the father are projected upon the daughters, it doesn’t follow that the daughter’s desire for the father . . . is inauthentic” (10). This suggestion that desire can be reciprocal in age-disparate relationships positions the younger woman not as victim but as an active participant – an idea at odds with characters’ horror at the prospect of the couple’s intimacy and indicating the degree to which this positioning of female desire for her father-figure husband as authentic is discomfiting. This model of choice is supported by the latter feature of the Lot complex, that of its role in the development of female agency, which is achieved, to use the example of Lot and his daughters, through just such a “displacement”: “by projecting upon the daughters the moral onus for incest, the Scripture ironically allows them to become conspiratorial, socially responsible agents. Women move from sacrificial objects to reasoning subjects” (Polhemus 10-11). Through their participation in such a seemingly unequal partnership, one imbued with a potentially erotic fixation by the older man, women can in fact be transformed into reasoning subjects, though it is a transformation that certainly does not end well for Lot’s daughters. This desire for her own development into a reasoning subject is just such an impulse that drives Dorothea in her choice of her first husband. However, with her cuing of Dorothea’s passionate nature, Eliot makes clear that though Casaubon seems to offer his young wife just what she desires, he ultimately cannot meet her needs.
The Middlemarch community’s response to Dorothea and Casaubon’s impending marriage is that it is “horrible” (practical considerations aside), with most flagging their disparity in their age as a problem. In their asking questions along the lines of, “What business has an old bachelor like that to marry?” (Eliot 74), it is easy to imagine that few in the Middlemarch community share or understand Dorothea’s ambitions. In fact, her romantic “peculiarities” were greatly condemned, with, for example, Celia feeling “a sort of shame mingled with a sense of the ludicrous” at the prospect of her sister marrying Casaubon (Eliot 66). The feelings of shame and ludicrousness are indeed rooted in those qualities that make the older man a figure of such contempt and amusement as a romantic partner—such as his fusty and pedantic intellectualism and lack of virility—but also in Dorothea’s intentions for their marriage. As the narrator explains, nobody would have had a sympathetic understanding for the dreams of a girl whose notions about marriage took their color entirely from an exalted enthusiasm about the ends of life, an enthusiasm which was lit chiefly by its own fire, and included neither the niceties of the trousseau, the pattern of plate, nor even the honors and sweet joys of the blooming matron. (Eliot 50)

Dorothea’s “exalted enthusiasm” to seek answers to intellectual and spiritual questions indeed cannot garner other characters’ sympathy – as Mrs. Cadwallader says upon hearing of the impending nuptials, “now I wish her joy of her hair shirt,” a comment that reveals the perception that Dorothea is practicing willful self-denial and mortification of the flesh by marrying the much older Casaubon (Eliot 76). A Victorian woman who denies interest in her wedding clothes, household goods, and future motherhood is one
who is shameful and ludicrous, never mind one with a love interest as seemingly ridiculous as Casaubon.\(^{59}\)

Another aspect, according to Middlemarch community, that marks Casaubon as largely unsuited to marry the much younger Dorothea is his solitary and scholarly nature. He is described by characters as a “little buried in books,” a “dried-up pedant” and an “elaborator of small explanations,” and “dismal and learned” (a pairing that suggests the two are somehow connected) (Eliot 59, 189, 628). In addition, when Sir James asks with “disgust,” “Why does he not bring out his book, instead of marrying,” Mrs. Cadwallader responds, “Oh, he dreams footnotes, and they run away with all his brains. They say, when he was a little boy, he made an abstract of ‘Hop o’ my Thumb,’ and he has been making abstracts ever since. Ugh!” (Eliot 83). All characters (except for Dorothea, of course) see his intellectual pursuits as a sign that he is hopelessly lost in and devoted to his intellectual pursuits, making him poor romantic fodder. Critics agree with these assessments, with Selma Brody describing Casaubon as “a middle-aged benedict full of learning but of cold temperament” (63), and J. Hillis Miller describing him as a “self-righteous and cold, a prig” (“A Conclusion” 143). This reading of Casaubon as learned but also monkish and cold is echoed by critic Alice Christoff who describes him as “sequestered away in the library, lost in a labyrinth of research” and “shrink[ing] from any real human contact” (Christoff 139). Description of Casaubon as learned could indicate he can help Dorothea achieve her desire for intellectual

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\(^{59}\) That doubt was expressed in Eliot’s time. For example, Victorian reviewer R.H. Hutton wrote, “It seems to us somewhat unnatural that a girl of Dorothea Brooke’s depth and enthusiasm of nature should fall in love with a man of so little vital warmth of character as Mr. Casaubon inspire of the twenty-seven years' difference in age, without any apparent reason beyond her thirst for an intellectual and moral teacher” (qtd. in Menon 157).
growth, however, that idea is undermined by his monkish and priggish nature – all suggesting a tendency to shrink from intimacy and partnership.

Casaubon’s monk-like scholarly tendencies are further reinforced by his lack of emotional warmth. Christoff summarizes a common attitude of both characters and readers towards Casaubon, describing him as “outwardly unsympathetic,” and admitting, “without a doubt, it is difficult to like” him (150, 145). Part of his apparent lack of likability is his emotional coldness and lack of ability to evince if not passion then warmth and regard for his beautiful and devoted young wife. For example, even with their marriage drawing near, Casaubon “did not find his spirits rising . . . there was nothing external by which he could account for a certain blankness of sensibility which came over him just when his expectant gladness should have been most lively” (Eliot 94). The “blankness” that has come to stand in for liveliness becomes clear to Dorothea, who senses a “vague instantaneous sense of aloofness on his part” even before their marriage (Eliot 96). As the narrator later intones, “There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy” (Eliot 182), emphasizing both the couple’s disparity in age and feeling. Eliot provides additional evidence of Casaubon’s emotional blankness when she has Sir James ask of Casaubon, “Has he got any heart?” and he receives the not very reassuring reply: “Well, yes. I don’t mean of the melting sort, but a sound kernel, that you may be sure of” (Eliot 83). Unfortunately, while Casaubon may literally have a heart (though, interestingly, not a healthy one), his emotional heart is very much kernel-like and hard. His coldness is also shown by his verbal interactions, as in one of the few times in the novel that he
calls her “my love,” it is with “irritation” and “still more biting emphasis” (Eliot 186, 313). In fact, as the narrator explains: “he always said 'my love' when his manner was the coldest,” suggesting that he possesses a degree of emotional cruelty (Eliot 204).

Casaubon’s tendency to shrink from intimacy is further underscored by characters who explicitly link his devotion to scholarly pursuits and coldness to a lack of bodily virility. For example, Sir James asserts that Casaubon “has got no good red blood in his body,” while Mrs. Cadwallader suggests that his blood is actually “all semicolons and parentheses,” and Ladislaw calls him a “cursed white-blooded pedantic coxcomb” (Eliot 83, 198) – all descriptions that emphasize the older man’s lack of vital physicality. In addition, the “comic disgust” Ladislaw feels for the marriage is expressed in vaguely sexual terms, with him wondering how Casaubon “having first got this adorable young creature to marry him” then passes “his honeymoon away from her, groping after his mouldy futilities” (Eliot 189) – rather than, the suggestion is clear, “groping” after his beautiful, much younger wife. In fact, Casaubon’s “mouldy futilities,” or his it-turns-out empty life’s work, is alluded to in various ways that suggest his many years of solitary intellectual pursuits and “white-blooded” nature have made him unsuited for marriage to a blooming young woman. Casaubon is, for example, surprised to discover that though he was “determined to abandon himself to the stream of feeling” through the intimacy of marriage, he was “surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was,” discovering that “sprinkling was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream would afford him; and he concluded that the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion”

60 Alan Shelston suggests that “Casaubon is “the tragic hero of the first half” of Eliot’s novel, as he is an example of a character who fails in using “language” as “an effective instrument of communication whether in writing or speaking” (21, 26).
The shallow quality of his passion makes clear that though Casaubon is only in his mid 50s, he is devoid of the virility necessary to bridge the couple’s disparity in age. Unsurprisingly, as Marina van Zuylen points out, Casaubon “bears no resemblance to any fictional ideal. It is as though Dorothea has read all the recipes for romantic love and has decided to replace them with punitive alternatives” (101-102).

Indeed, critics have questioned whether the marriage is consummated at all (Godfrey 195, Hardy “The Miserable” 70, Kurnick, Heath 58), with Esther Godfrey arguing, “Casaubon does not seem driven by sexual desire for Dorothea” (107). And while Dorothea is not conscious enough of her own needs to be aware of the consequences of his lack of desire, this coldness is not the only one she will suffer during their marriage.

Eliot expertly conveys the negative conception of age-disparate marriage with characters’ vivid and almost Gothic description of Dorothea and Casaubon’s marriage. Ladislaw, not a disinterested observer to be sure, bemoans that once Dorothea returns from her Roman honeymoon she will "be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick: you will be buried alive" (Eliot 200) – a description that suggests that she is in peril (an idea literally explored by Collins in Chapter 7). As Ladislaw further clarifies, “Casaubon had done a wrong to Dorothea in marrying her . . . if he chose to grow grey crunching bones

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61 As the narrator explains, “To know intense joy without a strong bodily frame, one must have an enthusiastic soul. Mr. Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame, and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic: it was too languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight; it went on fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying” (Eliot 243).

62 In Gillian Beer’s analysis of *Middlemarch*—which primarily focuses on Lydgate and the novel’s portrayal of science and use of scientific language—she points out, “One of the fairy-tale elements in George Eliot’s own practice as a novelist is the way in which her women in unhappy marriages rarely have children: Romola, Dorothea, Gwendolen all remain childless despite the evident potency of Tito and Grandcourt. They are absolved from taking part in the pattern of descent” (209). Casaubon’s “potency” does not rate mention.
in a cavern, he had no business to be luring a girl into his companionship. 'It is the most horrible of virgin-sacrifices’” (Eliot 302). In addition, the language Casaubon himself uses to describe his life confirms the community’s (and reader’s) anxiety in an evocatively dreadful manner: “I live too much with the dead. My mind is something like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be, in spite of ruin and confusing changes” (Eliot 42). Eliot nicely conveys the horror that characters feel that a vibrantly attractive (and, as her “blooming full-pulsed” qualities suggest, sexual) young woman like Dorothea will be cozying up to the crumbling bones (or, worse, ghost-like presence) of Casaubon in their marital bed.

Casaubon appears to be so sexually desiccated by his continual proximity “with the dead” that his mind is not filled with appropriately conjugal interests but the “ghosts” of the ancient cultures he studies. Esther Godfrey suggests the prospect of intimacy between Casaubon’s “aging body and Dorothea’s youthful flesh connotes sexual deviancy to Middlemarch society” (104). As Chase and Levenson say of the age-disparate marriage, the “reader is taught to fear” that “youth will turn back to youth and the stable settlement of home will be devastated by the return of suppressed desires,” echoing Casaubon’s own jealousy of the friendship between Dorothea and Ladislaw (97). By tying the anxiety regarding age-disparate pairings to fears of inappropriate expression of female desire and agency, rather than the lust of the aging male, Chase and Levenson reveal the fear that the young wife will not be able to govern her unmet desires—desires that cannot be fully expressed within such a pairing—and be tempted to be led astray by an age-matched lover. In other words, true self-restraint is not
possible within such a context, and certainly not for a nature as passionate as
Dorothea’s.

“Where Your Husband Was a Sort of Father”: Dorothea’s Ambitions and the
Marital Reality

While Dorothea’s decision to marry Casaubon has been shown to be problematic
as it exposes her desires and ambitions as inappropriate, their relationship offers other
social dangers – also relating to their disparity in age. Part of what makes such pairings
so often problematic for Victorians is that they can be seen as troubling values that
celebrate marriage as an expression of deeply felt attachment. As Sybil Wolfram
explains, “the proper marriage in England was and is a ‘love match,’” one motivated by
true and reciprocal feelings between husband and wife (70) in contrast to the arranged
marriage that was commonly found in the Victorian period. As the attitudes of the time
dictated, in addition to the usual considerations of compatibility that would ensure such
a match, with respect to the issue of age, “ideally, a husband and wife are more or less
of an age, with the husband perhaps a little older” (Wolfram 70). Though the “marriage
of a much older man with a much younger woman was readily tolerated” it was “thought
of as unlikely to be a love match on the woman’s side” (Wolfram 70). Interestingly, the
wary eye regarding such a marriage was said to be more commonly directed towards
the female half of this pairing, implying that an unnatural or troubling aspect underlies
her acceptance. This sentiment is echoed within Eliot’s novel when Ladislaw comes to
understand that through her role as his wife, Dorothea had intended to assist Casaubon
in his life’s work, giving him “a new light, but still a mysterious light” in understanding
what called her to marry his cousin (Eliot 191). Though he had earlier assumed she
must be somehow “disagreeable” to have consented to become Mrs. Casaubon, he
comes to realize, “she must have made some original romance for herself in this marriage” (Eliot 191), one driven by Dorothea’s desires for intellectual growth.

Eliot nicely cues readers of Dorothea’s desires for greatness through marriage early in the novel, alerting us that her intentions in seeking marriage are problematic. The narrator explains that despite “her eagerness to know the truths of life,” she still “retained very childlike ideas about marriage,” with proof of that childishness that Dorothea would have married Hooker or John Milton, “or any of the other great men whose odd habits it would have been glorious piety to endure,” with her believing that the “really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it” (Eliot 36). Knowing Dorothea’s eventual marital fate with her first much older husband, disaster looms in Eliot’s wording, with “endures” conveying foreboding associations of painful duty. Her conception that marriage to a father-like husband would be delightful is not borne out by the narrative – for, if your husband is Casaubon, he will not really teach you Hebrew (only to phonetically read it) and he, it turns out, does not really care what you wish. As she discovers, serving an ostensibly “great” man “whose odd habits” she imagined “it would have been glorious piety to endure” is wholly unsatisfying (Eliot 36). As the narrator explains, while she “had thought that she could have been patient with John Milton” that she had “never imagined him behaving in this way; and for a moment Mr. Casaubon seemed to be stupidly undiscerning and odiously unjust” (Eliot 245). Upon

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63 And in fact, as Polhemus explains, Dorothea’s fantasies were apt if confused, for Milton forced his daughters “to read by rote material in languages they did not know and could not understand. They did this hour by hour, day by day, to tedium and exhaustion”; They were not truly participants in the creation of his greatness, as their father treated them like “a superior pair of mynah birds,” called upon to read aloud what they could not understand, a role Dorothea herself comes to perform (109). Milton’s daughters

124
her return to Lowick the narrator reflects that “marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman’s oppressive liberty”; nor had it “even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of unchecked tenderness” – instead, the “ideas and hopes which were living in her mind” prior to their marriage “were present now only as memories: she judged them as we judge transient and departed things” (239-240). Dorothea’s ardent and hopeful visions of her life with Casaubon are reduced to ghostly memories. The gap between the imagined and real man revealed through the proximity of marriage speaks to Dorothea’s inability to answer her desires through her much older first husband.

Though part of Dorothea’s disappointment clearly relates to the lack of intimacy in her life with Casaubon, her sense of loss also relates to the incomplete manifestation of the role she had imagined for herself. As has been explored, Dorothea imagines that her assistance of a great scholar, as she supposes Casaubon to be, will give her the knowledge and understanding necessary to do great things (which, as Polhemus suggests, is a key element in the attraction older men can hold for young women). Casaubon, unfortunately, is a weak vessel for such desires. Her too-late realization that Casaubon’s life’s work is not worthy of such slavish support is a jarring moment of disconnect between possibility and reality, and one that poignantly reveals the thorough folly of her choice. Though she is surprised and saddened that the “unchecked tenderness,” or physical affection, of their marriage has not been expressed as

were expected to live in “ignorant” service to “his imagination” – making it all the more fascinating that while Dorothea first sees them as “naughty” for their resistance to this role, in the end she finds herself refusing to perform just such a dispiriting role with “total dedication” within her marriage to Casaubon (Eliot 36).
expected, more disquieting is Ladislaw’s sharing that the grounds on which “The Key” has been constructed have been thoroughly disproved by other scholars (188-191). Indeed, Casaubon has been described as a “failure as a scholar” (Hardy “The Miserable” 72), and it has been argued that the “sagacity which had attracted Dorothea [is] revealed as empty pedantry” (Heath 58). The source of Dorothea’s distress appears to be rooted both in the “piteousness” that “the labour of her husband’s life might be void,” but also that his work is inherently flawed and limited in scope, and therefore unlikely to provide her with the intellectual elevation she had been eagerly anticipating (Eliot 191). As critic Monica L. Feinberg explains, “Dorothea herself marries Mr. Casaubon’s text as much as she marries Mr. Casaubon’s person. . . . It is not surprising that Eliot articulates Dorothea’s disillusionment with her marriage in a lament for her loss of faith in Mr. Casaubon’s text” (19). Her disillusioned realization that his “voluminous notes” are “nothing but dryasdust pedantry” turn her devotion to Casaubon and his text into the very kind of joyless duty she had thought she was avoiding in her unconventional choice of husband (Szırotny 23). However, even “if Causabon had been working on something valuable and life-giving” (Menon 159), his project had not been a failure, and he was not her “faux Milton” (Nardo 134), he would not have been the right husband for Dorothea. As critic Jill Matus argues, “Had Casaubon been a learned man who also kept some sexual and emotional oil, Dorothea’s ardour may have been happily fueled in both spheres” (219). Unfortunately, however, Eliot makes clear Casaubon cannot fully meet Dorothea’s intellectual, emotional, and sexual desires.

With Dorothea’s desires for a “grand life” of being useful to work she believes is important foiled, her marriage to Casaubon becomes predominated by the repressive
weight of duty. As the narrator admits, during the Victorian era, “Women were expected to have weak opinions” (Eliot 35). As is clear by description that emphasizes her willfulness and desire to go her own way, Dorothea seemingly evinces little of that feminine weakness. However, she comes to consistently set aside her own desires for the sake of her much older husband’s. This subsuming of Dorothea’s interests and passions are reflected in Eliot’s consistent use “duty” when describing their marriage. For example, when Celia critiques how she “used to submit to Mr. Casaubon quite shamefully: I think you would have given up ever coming to see me if he had asked you,” Dorothea responds tearfully, “Of course I submitted to him, because it was my duty; it was my feeling for him” (Eliot 570). Rather than revealing that Dorothea was driven by love (or another softer feeling) in her marriage, instead, duty (a word and idea that is considered in more detail in Chapter 6) comes to stand in for her feelings for her much older husband. Her desire for intellectual growth via age-disparate marriage becomes an avenue not for satisfaction and happiness but rather something far grimmer and dispiriting. As she bitterly reflects: “Had she not been repressing everything in herself except the desire to enter into some fellowship with her husband's chief interests?” (Eliot 186). The word “desire” here is not associated with sensuality or

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64 The novel provides additional examples. As the narrator explains, “She had married the man of her choice, and with the advantage over most girls that she had contemplated her marriage chiefly as the beginning of new duties” (Eliot 179). In addition, as she asserts to her uncle when contemplating Casaubon’s proposal: “I know that I must expect trials, uncle. Marriage is a state of higher duties. I never thought of it as mere personal ease” (Eliot 61).

65 That duty is one she refuses to carry after Casaubon’s death. “One little act of hers may perhaps be smiled at as superstitious. The Synoptical Tabulation for the use of Mrs. Casaubon, she carefully enclosed and sealed, writing within the envelope, ‘I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in—Dorothea?’ Then she deposited the paper in her own desk” (Eliot 430).
pleasure or the like, but a sense of dutiful purpose, and one in which Casaubon’s “chief
interests” come to trump hers.

Not that, sadly, her dutiful sacrifice ensures marital happiness. Casaubon himself
observes that Dorothea is indeed “as virtuous and lovely a young lady as he could have
obtained for a wife,” but despite her comeliness had “turned out to be something more
troublesome than he had conceived” (Eliot 344). As Selma B. Brody explains,
Casaubon “turns bitter and unloving, expecting only a passive female adorer, he finds
that the wife of his bosom observes and judges him, and has ideas” (64). Casaubon
indeed resents Dorothea’s transformation from “the young creature who had
worshipped him with perfect trust . . . into the critical wife,” violating his fantasies of how
their age-disparate marriage would be manifested (Eliot 344). Though on paper, as it
were, Dorothea is demurely beautiful and both attentive to and anticipatory of his
needs—making her very much the picture of wifely virtue for the era—Casaubon reads
her devotion as a sign that she judges him and finds him wanting. This gap leaves
Dorothea without the “fuller sort of companionship” that she was “hungering for” in
marriage (Eliot 385) – leaving her giving much and receiving little whether intellectually,
emotionally, or physically. Unsurprisingly readers have responded to Dorothea’s pain
and disappointment. As Hardy argues, “Dorothea is tragically married to Casaubon. . . .
What happens to her, in her young hope and brilliance, is horrible, terrible, and
miserable”; and, this tragic quality is enhanced by her “young, attractive, blooming, and

66 Esther Godfrey reads his failure to maintain Dorothea’s worshipping as a sign that his older age has
made him vulnerable. As she argues, “His plan for maintaining power backfires, and because of the age
discrepancy in the marriage, Casaubon does not find what he had expected” and is instead “himself in a
weakened position” (Godfrey 106).
physically active” qualities, suggesting she possesses a vigor that is unseemly to match up with a man of Casaubon’s age, condition, and temperament (The Miserable 66-67). Other readers have been similarly moved by her plight, with critic David Kurnick calling her the “most poignant of Eliot’s failed heroines” and Barbara Bodichon, in her 1871 letter to Eliot, commenting on the “terrible foreshadowing of inevitable misery” Dorothea suffers when married to Casaubon (qtd. in Hardy “The Miserable” 66). The unhappy difference that Casaubon makes in the life of Dorothea is only brought to a close by Eliot’s choice to “mercifully widow” Dorothea (Brody 65) and end her “suffering” within a “loveless marriage” (Hardy “The Miserable” 67, 65).

Conclusion: Resolving the “Tension between Epic Ambitions and Domestic Responsibilities”

While some modern readers may applaud Dorothea’s gumption, particularly in light of her unhappy marriage to much older Casaubon, her imperfectly controlled passions would have been seen as dangerous to many Victorians. Lest we shirk from fully considering the impact of willfully passionate behavior, as T.R. Malthus warns in An Essay on the Principle of Population, “an implicit obedience to the impulses of our natural passions would lead us into the wildest and most fatal extravagancies” (209). He acknowledges that while we cannot extinguish our “natural passions,” in order to secure “the greatest sum of human happiness” we must look to “regulation” (213). In Malthus’s discussions of the responsibilities of the individual to bring about a more perfect society (i.e., one not burdened with the misery of overpopulation), significant pressure falls upon the individual. And, while his prescription to regulate sexual appetite is trying, he admits, it should not be impossible, as man’s “considerations of his own interest and happiness will dictate to him the strong obligation to moral restraint. However powerful
may be the impulses of passion, they are generally to some degree modified by reason” (227). I rather enjoy the qualifying “generally to some degree” Malthus uses, as it acknowledges he is on slippery territory in attempting to use reason as a shield against “the impulses of passion.” However, ultimately his Darwinian message remains constant: the poor need to be “undeceived with respect to the principal cause of their past poverty, and taught to know that their future happiness or misery must depend chiefly upon themselves” (242). According to Malthus, it is incumbent upon each of us to practice “moral restraint” in order to ensure our “own interest and happiness.” While Dorothea is clearly not a poor mother with a brood of starving children, the message found here is still worth considering. The only factor that protects one from the misery of poorly conceived and passion-driven judgment is reason and the exercise of moral restraint; Malthus does not pretend that such passions are not natural but insists we must seek to regulate them. Unfortunately, as we see over the course of Middlemarch, Eliot’s heroine practices an imperfect application of socially necessary self-regulation, making hers a “life . . . not ideally beautiful” but instead one rich with experience (640). However, her unhappiness in marriage to Casaubon is a reflection of her inability to find a means to express her passions within the confines of age-disparate marriage, a topic this section analyzes further.

Dorothea’s problematic regulation of her desires becomes further troubling when we consider another aspect of the context of the novel’s publishing, one that tied a celebration of self-control to larger social concerns. As Mary Poovey outlines in Making a Social Body, while the liberal ideals of the Victorian era celebrated “individual happiness,” they also demanded participation in the diligent support of an orderly and
productive society (24). As Poovey explains, a liberal "society was 'free' in the sense that government interfered with the economic not at all and ostensibly with the social as little as possible. It was 'free,' in other words, in the sense that its members constituted individualized instances of a single self-regulating subject" (24). Just as Malthus encourages the restraint of "natural passions" in order to enjoy both the "happiness" promised by a well-regulated life and the advantages of that restraint on the overall society, the ideas expressed by Poovey privilege the needs of the society over that of the ostensibly free individual, demanding regulation in order to preserve the smooth running machine of Victorian society. That social body is comprised of individuals who take responsibility for regulation upon themselves, rather than surrendering that responsibility to a regulating agent or institution. This "self-government" was a crucial aspect, and again (as with Malthus) we see the individual as responsible for the smooth and upward progress of society. And, as Poovey also explains, this call for "self-government" (or, to put it another way, "restraint") was seen as natural (26). According to Adam Smith, "the human capacity for self-government both derived from and underwrote the sociality of human nature" (qtd. in Poovey 33). Not only is self-governing behavior prudent then, but also in keeping with human nature, implying that to do otherwise is somehow perverse or abnormal, highlighting how problematic (and dangerous, really) a lack of self-government was seen to be.

As Dorothea’s choice in Casaubon brands her as being motivated by desires other than conventional romance, and her interests are not class- or gender-appropriate, she becomes a particularly problematic and evocative example of the perils of a lack of self-government and expressing one’s desires inappropriately. Though liberalism embraces
Dorothea’s right to express herself though choice, this freedom is paired with an emphasis on exercising it mindfully. Indeed, this valuing of self-restraint can be seen in *On Liberty*, where Mill explores the idea that extreme self-control and extreme passion are two sides of the same coin: “The same strong susceptibilities which make the personal impulses vivid and powerful, are also the source from whence are generated the most passionate love of virtue, and the sternest self-control” (106). Mill's language seems to suggest that a person of deep passion is also capable of “the sternest self-control,” that the two extremes spring from the same “source,” which offers the promise that self-expression does not have to equal unmanageable behavior. However, it also leaves open the unsettling possibility that a firmly self-controlled person is hiding a heretofore-unimagined depth of unexpressed passion, suggesting that it could only be a matter of time before they swing to the other end of the behavioral spectrum. Though Dorothea has successfully quashed her passions by choosing to “repress her physical joy, for example, in horseback riding” (Greene “G. Eliot’s” 27), her response to her mother’s emeralds refutes the completeness of that repression. Additionally, further putting into doubt her ability to practice “the sternest self-control,” Dorothea also resists the demands and strictures of her class and gender in order to first express and develop herself intellectually through an age-disparate marriage, and later through her second age-matched marriage for love (in an acceptable expression of her desire) despite the condemnation of her community.

And in fact, through most of the novel, Dorothea is shown to be both highly emotional and at times incapable of self-mastery. Despite Ladislaw’s initial observation, “There could be no sort of passion in a girl who would marry Casaubon” (Eliot 90), Eliot
makes clear that Dorothea is in fact highly passionate. However, as her marriage to Casaubon makes clear, Dorothea is also very much in denial of her passions. She is described as having “reverential gratitude” at the idea that Casaubon wants to marry her and imagines she can have “some spiritual communion” with him through marriage, which is both impossible and an incomplete vision for what she needs to be truly happy (Eliot 50, 46). Further, the narrator describes her “powerful, feminine, maternal hands” that she held “up in propitiation for her passionate desire to know and to think” (Eliot 59), wording that illustrates her tendency to only honor her spiritual and intellectual desires, and not her physical ones. Such privileging of her spirituality is at odds with Dorothea’s unexpressed but strongly passionate nature, as she is described as being full of “youthful passion,” having “colored with pleasure,” and being filled with “trembling hope,” while the narrator mentions the “bright full eyes” and “nerves and blood that fed her action” – all of which makes clear that as Ladislaw observes, she was indeed “full of feeling” (Eliot 51, 46, 50, 95, 191). However, as the description of Dorothea’s “nerves and blood” makes clear, her passion cannot be fully managed. During her miserable honeymoon, Eliot details that “she was humiliated to find herself a mere victim of feeling, as if she could know nothing except through that medium: all her strength was scattered in fits of agitation, of struggle, of despondency, and then again in visions of more complete renunciation, transforming all hard conditions into duty” (184-185).

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67 J. Hillis Miller points out that the narrator provides crucial insight into the depth of her emotions: “Dorothea is never, however, shown as able to articulate her understanding as clearly as the narrator does. The narrator must speak for her more or less inarticulate intuitions and feelings” (“A Conclusion” 141).
Dorothea’s sense of humiliation and victimization illustrates her resistance to her emotional nature.

However, though Dorothea is shown as being aware of her emotions, she is unsuccessful at managing them. As Eliot puts it: “She tried to master herself” (611); however, as the description of Dorothea’s thoroughly passionate nature makes clear, such mastery is impossible. This truth is shown near the end of the novel when despite her fears that Rosamond has usurped Will’s affections, Dorothea goes to encourage the other woman to support Lydgate though he is mired in scandal. Eliot makes clear that Dorothea cannot in fact master her inner turmoil: “Dorothea, who had taken off her gloves, from an impulse which she could never resist when she wanted a sense of freedom,” soon discovers that she had “counted a little too much on her own strength: the clearness and intensity of her mental action this morning were the continuance of a nervous exaltation which made her frame as dangerously responsive as a bit of finest Venetian crystal” (609). In fact, Dorothea does not show signs of embodying such self-control until her more age-matched marriage to Ladislaw.

Dorothea’s first step towards achieving a more fully realized and passionate life occurs after her first husband’s death. Not only does Casaubon’s death release her from her life of drudgery and caretaking—one very different from the intellectual and spiritual growth she had envisioned for herself in accepting his proposal—but learning of the codicil of his will further liberates her. The “shocking” codicil of Casaubon’s will, which bars her from keeping her inherited fortune if she chooses to marry Ladislaw, is a scandal to both Dorothea and the Middlemarch community (Eliot 399). After Dorothea learns of the codicil, her feelings towards Casaubon undergo a further transformation. In
effect, this codicil reveals the very thing he wished to keep secret during his lifetime: his self-doubts (ones that Eliot's narrator makes readers privy to). However, the codicil offers tangible proof of those doubts and fully reveals his fears regarding Dorothea's enduring love and fidelity for everyone to see. As Godfrey argues, Casaubon's codicil is inspired by "jealousy and sexual anxiety," which makes his "legacy" in his community "that of the threatened patriarch who must invoke legal and economic means to enforce a loyalty that he alone could not inspire" (105) – a move that fully undermines her tenuous regard for him. His naked lack of trust puts him in a new light, creating a reaction in Dorothea so strong it felt like "sin," leaving her with a "violent shock of repulsion from her departed husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she said and did" (Eliot 396). Freed from the bonds of her pity-bound duty by the codicil, Dorothea begins to direct her energies outward and searches for ways to use her now considerable fortune to benefit her community (Eliot 399).

After she discovers Casaubon's jealousy, Dorothea's feelings for her now-dead husband are laid bare, revealing how devoid of love and affection her marriage to Casaubon was. As the narrator explains, "But now her judgment, instead of being controlled by duteous devotion, was made active by the imbittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion. The living, suffering man was no longer before her to awaken her pity: there remained only the retrospect of painful subjection" (Eliot 399). Eliot makes clear that while she may have been girlishly hopeful and filled with reverence at the outset of their marriage, by the end of her husband's life, the overriding emotion is that of "pity," a word that emphasizes how low in her esteem he became. And, with that pity swept away by his
death, she is only left with the pain of her duty and subjection. Esther Godfrey has argued against dismissing the idea that Dorothea loved Casaubon before and during their marriage, as though their marriage “fails to bring Dorothea any sexual, emotional, or intellectual satisfaction, it does not follow that Dorothea does not love her husband. *Middlemarch* makes the point of the irrationality of love, which can be seen through various other matches” (Godfrey 195). However, as Eliot’s novel makes clear, Dorothea is not inspired by love in marrying her husband – rather, Eliot describes duty as the “restraining compelling motive in her life with him” (430). Her respect and desire to assist him in his life’s work predominates, and those motivations are ground into a sort of dusty sense of duty and deep feeling of pity, leaving one unsure that love ever existed.

With the transformation in perspective Dorothea’s marriage has afforded her, she unsurprisingly finds herself “interested now in all who had slipped below their own intention,” as she herself has clearly done (Eliot 400). However, though she would seem to at last have “the freedom and power to carry out her long-cherished plans,” the hopes Dorothea has in making an impact once she is liberated from her life of duty to Casaubon are unmet by reality (Nicholes 118). Even as a widowed woman of fortune, she finds herself constrained: “Dorothea is prevented from engaging in any kind of sustained useful activity which would give her a sense of purpose and direct accomplishment” (Mitchell 35). The “sense of purpose” she craves is meant to be an antidote to her post-Casaubon life of “motiveless ease—motiveless, if her own energy could not seek out reasons for ardent action” (Eliot 431). The source of the constraint of her “ardent action” is veiled as brotherly guidance designed to protect her fortune from
unnecessary risk, once again preventing her from exercising her liberally supported free expression of interests and concerns. As her sister, Celia, explains of her husband’s council to Dorothea: “Now, Dodo, do listen to what James says . . . else you will be getting into a scrape. You always did, and you always will, when you set about doing as you please” (Eliot 570). As we again see, the liberal espousal of choice does not necessarily in practice apply to a woman in Dorothea’s position. Though choices must always be mindful as well as socially responsible, and Dorothea’s impulse to do good for her community would seem to qualify, it apparently does not. Instead, Celia is relieved that Dorothea now has “James to think for you. He lets you have your plans. . . . A husband would not let you have your plans” (Eliot 570). Merely “having” her plans, and someone else to do her thinking for her, is of little comfort, however – what Dorothea desires is to “have something good to do with my money: I should like to make other people’s lives better to them” (Eliot 590). With “nothing” needed “to be done in the village,” nor sufficient resources “for any great scheme of the sort I like best,” Dorothea has little means to make a truly significant and meaningful difference in her community, as she has hoped to accomplish throughout Eliot’s novel (Eliot 617, 589). Despite her significant resources, she is unable to manifest her desired goal of making the lives of other people better.

Despite Dorothea’s disappointment regarding the continued quashing of her ambitions, she soon develops a consoling awareness: her love and passion for Will Ladislaw. In fact, the codicil itself alters her thoughts of him. The crisis of realizing Causabon held such suspicions puts her “world” into a “state of convulsive change,” one that “made her tremulous” (Eliot 397). Beyond a shift in her regard for her much older
husband, the codicil inspires another outcome: though it “had never before entered her mind that [Ladislaw] could, under any circumstances, be her love,” she comes to recognize a “sudden strange yearning of heart towards” him (Eliot 397). In fact, other characters observe that through the codicil, Casaubon brought about the union that he so feared, with his jealousy creating “the most charming romance” for Dorothea (Eliot 474). Miller argues that Dorothea’s second “marriage is her choice for the expression of her ardor over her need for theoretical satisfaction” (“A Conclusion” 147). And, indeed, Dorothea discovers that not only does she indeed possess passions, but that she must honor them. She finally admits her feelings for Ladislaw—“Oh, I did love him!” she cries—and in doing so, “discovered her passion to herself in the unshrinking utterance of despair” of her fears that he is illicitly pursuing Rosamond (Eliot 604, 605). In their final conversation before their engagement, Eliot describes her “heart” as so “full” that if she does not speak her love for him, it will “break” (Eliot 622). Rather than pursuing vicarious intellectual greatness, and letting that stand in for domestic warmth and passions, Dorothea recognizes that she is filled with “longing” for Ladislaw, a word that makes clear she has finally recognized and embraced her passionate nature (Eliot 430). By novel’s end, Dorothea comes to not only recognize her own need for ardor, but to seek a man who matches hers.

68 The full quote: “It is really the most charming romance: Mr. Casaubon jealous, and foreseeing that there was no one else whom Mrs. Casaubon would so much like to marry, and no one who would so much like to marry her as a certain gentleman” (Eliot 474). And again, later in the novel: “Mr. Casaubon had prepared all this as beautifully as possible. . . . It’s the way to make any trumpery tempting, to ticket it at a high price in that way” (Eliot 626). As Allan C. Christensen explains, “The codicil signals the precise possibility of what it seeks to prevent” and “proposes an alternative and more loving marriage” (68).

69 Kurnick argues that Dorothea’s “willingness to forsake her intellectual ambitions in return for a satisfied sexual desire” demonstrates the “incompatibility of desire and knowledge” (Kurnick). While his point may
In fact, as Eliot makes clear, Dorothea has indeed found a partner who returns her intensity of feelings. In one of their final conversations in the novel prior to their engagement, Eliot characterizes Will as having the “unspeakable content in his soul of feeling that he was in the presence of a creature worthy to be perfectly loved,” which suggests that this time Dorothea will not be the only one seeking connection and communion in this union – that she will be truly and “perfectly loved” (Eliot 304). Unlike the at-best tepid and at-worst cold language associated with Casaubon, Will’s declaration that when he feared she doubted his devotion—“I didn't care about anything that was left. I thought it was all over with me, and there was nothing to try for--only things to endure”—makes clear that her love is absolutely reciprocated (Eliot 620). In fact, his expressiveness—he is described as “willful, impulsive, motivated by emotion”—is “part of his attraction for Dorothea” (Miller “A Conclusion” 140) now that she has come to accept and express her passionate nature. In addition, this age-matched couple is presented in complementary language – further highlighting their suitability for each other. For example, in comparison to the pairing of dewy and dusty, as Dorothea and her first much older husband are presented, Eliot describes them as looking “at the other as if they had been two flowers which had opened then and there” (Eliot 304). As he explains of Dorothea, making his devotion to her clear, “I never had a preference for her, any more than I have a preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman’s living” (599), affirming their mutual attraction and fitness for each other – which be true, we have no indication Dorothea actually could realize her desire for intellectual development, whether or not she pursued satisfaction of her sexual desires.
it must be observed after her marital trials with the much older Casaubon, is further supported by their nearness in age (which, in turn, offers the possibility that theirs is a love match).

Dorothea’s peace with the evolving events in her life brings her story to a close. Her eventual happiness depends on her choosing a life partner for her whole self, not just the portions of herself that she upholds as superior (such as her intellect over corporeal sensuality). Her life with Ladislaw suggests that marriage offers the possibility for satisfaction and fulfillment, if only one exercises one’s power of choice appropriately and heeds, and in turn manages, one’s desires. Though Karen Chase suggests, “it would be hasty to claim that Middlemarch at the last overcomes the tension between epic ambitions and domestic responsibilities” as, in the face of not attaining these “ambitions,” Dorothea regards her life as a disappointment, there is no indication that she indeed regrets where her decisions have lead her (Eros 185). As Miller argues of the ending, the “tonality” of the novel “invites the reader to see Dorothea positively. We are asked to see her as having, somewhat blindly, made the right choice at last. She has done the best that can be done with her life within the lamentable circumstances of nineteenth-century England” (“A Conclusion” 145). Indeed, though Celia points out that she has now lost her ability to bring her plans to life, Dorothea replies, “On the contrary, dear... I never could do anything that I liked. I have never carried out any plan yet” (Eliot 628). On one hand, Dorothea’s choice should be acceptable by standards of domestic femininity since she is reinscribed into the domestic sphere, and better yet,
one that is middle-class, and not marked by disparity in age; on the other, however, since it ignores the standards of her community her choice is seen as problematic.70

Ultimately, despite the widely-shared feeling that it was a “pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother,” we have no reason to believe that her marriage is anything but happy (Eliot 638). As the narrator intones, Dorothea
never repented that she had given up position and fortune to marry Will Ladislaw. . . . They were bound to each other by a love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it. No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion, and she had now a life filled also with a beneficent activity which she had not the doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself. (Eliot 638)

Eliot makes clear that not only is the couple’s love both mutual and strong, but that Dorothea has fully embraced her need to live a life of passions and emotions. In addition, Dorothea’s ability to support her husband once he “became an ardent public man” gives her life the beneficent quality she sought to achieve in her first marriage (Eliot 638). Here, at last, she is able to direct her energies to something that is personally fulfilling as well as impactful to the community, just as she had hoped throughout Eliot’s novel. The tensions underlying Middlemarch regarding Casaubon’s fears of Dorothea’s romantic defection for his much younger rival, Ladislaw, resonate throughout the novel analyzed in the next chapter. However, while Eliot honors Dorothea’s desires, Braddon’s Joshua Haggard’s Daughter is driven by the impulses and motivations of the much older husband, revealing this project’s shift from the plight

70 Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert describe their marriage “the most subversive act available to her within the context defined by the author, since it is the only act prohibited by the stipulations of the dead man, and by her family and friends” (qtd. in Bowers 115). By joining herself to someone who is, in the words of Sir James, “not a man we can take into the family,” Dorothea removes herself from the influence and disapproval of her family and community (Eliot 626).
of the unhappy married young wife (though she is a feature of the next chapter, as well), to the concerns, motivations, and desires of aging male characters seeking to marry much younger women.
Joshua Haggard’s deathbed admission that he had been a “slave of passion” (Braddon Vol. 2 298) would seem surprising to most other characters in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novel, *Joshua Haggard’s Daughter* (1877). Haggard—a successful and respected businessman, Primitive Methodist minister, and widowed father of grown children in his 50s—is venerated within his community. Further, his admission that he has been a slave makes clear that he has not been the master of himself, and has instead been dominated and controlled, a notion that undermines his masculine independence. His confession reveals much about the era’s perceptions of aging male desire – that it is unstable and ungovernable, and therefore worthy of derision, amusement, or suspicion, as is shown throughout this project. Braddon’s novel affirms that the desire of an aging man for a much younger woman is both inappropriate and dangerous. And, in fact, Haggard’s desire and the mania that ensues leads to three premature deaths and multiple broken hearts. However, Braddon’s novel offers a difference. As opposed to the fictional older men’s desire for their young brides included in previous chapters, Haggard desires a woman who is childishly innocent and barely beyond her girlhood. Cynthia’s youth highlights the couple’s disparity in not only age but also sentiment – revealing a common pattern of the era’s novels: a troubling lack of reciprocity of desire.

Joshua Haggard’s troubles begin after he marries his much younger wife, Cynthia. As this chapter shows, prior to their union, Braddon describes Haggard as manfully strong in body, mind, and spirit. In the pages that follow his age-disparate marriage, however, that strength progressively wanes. Driven by sexual jealousy, he disconnects
from his business interests, family, and community, receding into a fury that takes on increasingly religious overtones. Haggard finally kills his rival in love (who is also his daughter’s fiancé) and cruelly banishes his young wife from his home and their community, which leads to her dying of a broken heart. After discovering her death, and thoroughly weakened by the weight of his debilitating jealousy, Haggard also dies. As this outcome illustrates, while Haggard may have appeared balanced and vital until he marries his much younger wife, beneath his seemingly masterful and masterly appearance roil vulnerabilities. In an ostensibly vital and powerful man, Braddon includes a flaw: his sense of spiritual self-importance and entitlement. Haggard’s need for positive affirmation of his masculinity is an extension of his need to feel recognized for his devotion to God. He believes his relationship with Cynthia affirms both his spiritual ascendancy and sexual desirability – she is simultaneously a gift from God to reenergize and sweeten his later years and a young and beautiful woman who desires him. Haggard’s flaw finds full expression once he comes to suffer disappointment; the wife he plucked from the roadside and planted within his home discovers her passions lie elsewhere. And though she never follows through on her attraction to that age-matched man beyond a chaste kiss, her desire for him leads to the rupture of Haggard’s carefully constructed sense of self as her object of desire. Feeling desired by his beautiful and innocent young wife energizes Haggard, while losing that assurance deranges him, revealing the vulnerabilities associated with aging.

Religion offers Haggard a means to justify his marriage to Cynthia, and once his ego and spiritual pride is wounded, he uses religion to justify cruelty and violence. In effect, religious mania offers a way for Braddon to signify Haggard’s loss of masculinity.
Haggard’s narrative of masculinity is created by his ability to both overcome obstacles and to lead others to steadiness and faith. As Braddon’s novel illustrates, Haggard possesses what appears to be an authentic and natural masculinity. However, his aging is a challenge he cannot overcome, leading to a myriad of disastrous results. By presenting his rather typical fears of female sexuality as abnormal or diseased—the reader knows that Cynthia is not in fact the “fair devil” that Haggard believes her to be (Braddon Vol. 2 204)—Braddon uses religious mania to condemn age-disparate desire as dangerous and the very thing to lead an otherwise energetic and desirable man to an early grave. In addition, by making Haggard a Methodist minister, she exploits the common middle-class Victorian conception that Methodism unbalanced followers, making it an effective vehicle for religious mania. Further, by making Haggard and his mania religious (an affliction most commonly associated with women during the Victorian era), Braddon is able to make his breakdown a feminizing experience, which serves to illustrate how completely Haggard’s masculinity is undermined by his choice to marry Cynthia and then spurn her. The age-disparate marriage and ensuing religious mania shown in *Joshua Haggard’s Daughter* illustrate the predominant Victorian perception of the aging male experience – that it is one of loss and that the associated physical, mental, and spiritual changes reveal vulnerabilities that could previously be held in check, as detailed in Chapter 2. With the impact of age, a good man who has devoted his life to God can come to be a “slave of passion.”

To contextualize this discussion of Braddon’s portrayal of religious mania, this chapter defines religious mania, and explores the association Victorians made between Methodism and madness and between madness and gender. Since, religious mania
was most often associated with women—quite likely an aging woman suffering from
disappointments of love, according to the era’s thinking—this chapter also considers
what its manifestation says about Haggard’s aging masculinity. Finally, this chapter
examines Braddon’s portrayal of the intersections of Haggard's masculinity and
religiosity over the course of the novel to show how his inappropriate desire becomes
his undoing. While, as has been discussed in previous chapters, Victorians saw aging
as effeminizing, this novel affirms that model works for men even as seemingly still
manly and desirable in midlife as Haggard. Though, in the novels of the era, an aging
man can desire and acquire a young wife, as Joshua Haggard’s Daughter shows, he
cannot necessarily inspire her desire in return. For, in the case of Haggard, he chooses
a woman who sees him as a fatherly mentor, which leaves an insurmountable (and, it
turns out, perilous) gap between his motivation for their pairing and hers. Or, as
Haggard’s sister explains of his attraction for Cynthia, “A man of his years can’t set his
heart upon a wax doll without paying the penalty” (Braddon Vol. 2 217).

“Defect of Rationality”: Defining and Locating the Roots of Religious Mania

By the mid-nineteenth century, the “idea” of monomania came to be “well
accepted” (Davis 67) to the extent that it “took hold of the nineteenth-century literary
imagination (van Zuylen 3). In fact, Braddon used the term and the commonly
understood symbolism of monomania in an earlier novel, Lady Audley’s Secret.
However, unlike Robert Audley, Joshua Haggard never wonders if he is, to use
Braddon’s phrasing in Lady Audley’s Secret, motivated by either “monition or a
monomania” (qtd. in Mangham 87) – instead he is sure he is justified in all he does by
divine approval. Over the course of the nineteenth century, monomania emerged as a
way to describe the condition of psychological fixation in an otherwise sensible person.
J.E.D. Esquirol, who was chief physician at an asylum through the mid-1800s and coined the term “homicidal monomania,” defined monomania “as a form of insanity where the sufferer is violently motivated towards one object or subject only” (Mangham 53). Monomania was seen as a “product of some vague combination of ideas and ‘nerves,’” as though focus on a “single idea, passion, or train of thought” could in effect rewire the brain, creating a “defect of rationality” (Davis 69-70). In turn, the frazzled interplay of thoughts and nerves not only affects the brain, but also the body. As critic Lennard J. Davis explains, “physical symptoms like sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and lack of attention to the details of life come out of the idée fixe” (72). Certainly, Haggard displays the signs of monomania. He indeed experiences sleeplessness and disconnects from the “details of life” that once occupied his focus—his business, his home, and his family including his young wife—in order to wander about the countryside preaching and proselytizing.

Though religious mania is in fact a subset of monomania, this chapter’s analysis of Joshua Haggard’s Daughter must also include a definition of religious mania. Throughout this chapter, the term monomania has been simplified to religious mania, a choice supported by Victorian psychiatrist John Conolly’s use of the term in his writing (Logan “Imitations”). Monomania and fanaticism has indeed been overtly connected to religion: “The monomaniacal mindset is uncannily close to that of the fanatic,” whether “political, racial, or religious fanaticism” (van Zuylen 7). Further, monomania was held to be one of the “eight major branches of lunacy recognized by the Association of Asylum Superintendents,” with “religious monomania” as one type (Schwieso 163). In religious mania, that fanatical singularity of focus—with its states of grandiosity and euphoria—
has religious associations. And, while religious mania can potentially present a challenge in diagnosis because manifestations of religiosity can seem extreme to non-believers, this fanatical thinking and behavior present an aberration within an otherwise orderly existence. As critic Simon During suggests, outside of their “object or subject,” to use critic Andrew Mangham’s term, monomaniacs appear rational and sane, which means that “unlike delirium or mania it could be revealed in a single bizarre act disrupting a superficially ordinary life. . . . No causal nexus, no narrative could explain acts emerging from monomania” (86, 87). However, despite the seemingly “bizarre” and anomalous quality of the different forms of monomania, those who cared for the mentally ill believed that its roots could be located within a patient’s history. As Mangham explains, some Victorian scientists felt that though this form of insanity was so “deceptive and elusive” it could escape notice until it reaches a point of crisis, examining a “homicidal monomaniac’s history, prior to a murderous act, would reveal signs of mental impairment” (54). As will next be explored in detail, Haggard’s well-ordered and productive history does not appear to support his later breakdown, with the exception of his sense of spiritual self-importance. His self-importance, which is framed in religious terms, is the flaw in his otherwise formidable appearance – a flaw that eventually finds expression as full-blown religious mania.

_Joshua Haggard’s Daughter_ opens not with a description of Joshua Haggard or his daughter but rather of the sight of skies tinted by a foreboding gloom. To observers in the novel, the darkness suggests an eclipse or perhaps Biblical judgment upon those who had overcharged for bread the previous Christmas. The “metallic” and “strange bluish blackness” that creates a “sudden twilight at noon” (Braddon Vol. 1 9) does not
turn out to be cosmological or divine in nature, however. The words of gossiping fishermen who foretell disaster are interrupted by the arrival of Joshua Haggard. Described as a “striking” man who “commanded the general attention” with his “tall, broad-shouldered” appearance, in contrast to the roughness of his yeoman’s clothes, he has a noble head composed of “penetrating black eyes” and the “throat of a gladiator” (Braddon Vol. 1 11). His “boldly cut features,” “square lower jaw,” and “strongly marked brow” all signal “intellect and power” (Braddon Vol. 1 12). As critic Pamela K. Gilbert describes him, Haggard is the “very type of the powerful masculine body” (187). Further, his vigorous and powerful physique and features are matched by his social position. As a well-regarded and successful businessman, Haggard is a “potent” and “strong influence” within the town. His “influence” is also reinforced by his role as founder and preacher of the Primitive Methodist chapel, making him “chief custodian of the souls of its inhabitants” (Braddon Vol. 1 12). Haggard’s influence is particularly strong on Combhaven’s “womankind” (Braddon Vol. 1 12), suggesting he possesses an enviable and potent virility. Further, the professional and spiritual accomplishments of one so “powerful in mind and body” are mirrored within his home, which was “always the pink of neatness” (Braddon Vol. 1 76, 15). In fact, Haggard’s “life altogether was so wisely ordered, so temperate, regular, and honourable, that he himself seemed the highest example of that sober Christian life he preached” not only to his flock but himself (Braddon Vol. 1 15). As Chapter 3 explored, domesticity was key to reinforcing masculinity – providing another layer of affirmation that Haggard does appear to be masterfully masculine in all respects. And, indeed, in the first one hundred pages of the novel, Haggard appears to be the very picture of order and propriety.
In addition, Haggard’s bodily and spiritual strength appear to have allowed him to forestall the effect of age. Though his sister chides him for not changing his wet clothes after his daring ocean rescue—“If you’re not in for the rheumatics after this, I shall be surprised. A man had need be careful when he has seen the last of his five-and-fortieth birthday” (Braddon Vol. 1 33)—he does not suffer any ill effects from doing so. As his daughter says, “O, no; father is very strong. I never remember his being ill” (Braddon Vol. 1 76). So far, Haggard’s vibrantly strong masculinity allows him to resist the effects of aging, despite the fact that he is beyond mid-life. In addition, Haggard’s bodily strength is matched by his mental and spiritual fortitude. Though at the open of the novel he spends time in his garden in meditation on Sundays, “there was not much to search for in the minister’s heart—no lurking evil to be thrust out of it. In singleness of purpose, in directness of aim, in simplicity of life, he came as near perfection as it is given to erring man to come” (Braddon Vol. 1 85). However, while the narrator describes Haggard as “clear-brained and definite” (Braddon Vol. 1 110), he does not retain such clarity throughout the novel. In fact, his equanimity and sense of purpose has never been properly tested, and though there may be “no lurking evil” within him, he is certainly more vulnerable and flawed than the description of Haggard prior to his marriage to Cynthia would suggest. In fact, the narrator’s suggestion that Haggard possesses a “singleness of purpose” echoes the monofocus associated with religious mania, making his breakdown unsurprising. Indeed, despite his seemingly formidable masculinity, Braddon provides clues that her protagonist possesses a rather substantial flaw. She takes care to balance the narrator’s praise with a suggestion that Haggard is dangerously prideful. He possesses “loftier aspirations” (Braddon Vol. 1 14) inspired not
just by an acceptance of his natural superiority and spiritual grace but pride. As she explains, “A man of superior mind, stranded for life in such a place as Combhaven, might naturally think himself a king” (Braddon Vol. 1 12). And, for much of his life he indeed lives a kingly existence, revered and respected within that rural, seaside community. However, while Haggard preached with "pious unction" and a “triumphant sense of superiority” in his own ability to resist “temptation” (Braddon Vol. 1 15), a man who would “think himself a king” is indeed vulnerable.

The rupture of Haggard’s masculinity is facilitated by the expression and realization of his desire for the teenaged orphan, Cynthia, whom he rescues and later marries. Indeed, as the “blackness” of the skies at the opening of the novel suggests, his desire for the much younger woman who becomes his wife is indeed dangerous. Upon seeing her a year after their first meeting, Haggard asks himself, “Had she grown lovelier in the year that was gone, or had she always been thus supremely lovely? . . . It seemed to him that he had never beheld anything so beautiful as that innocent face lifted up to him in tenderest regard, those frank eyes, that rosy smiling mouth, a complexion as of blush-roses” (Braddon Vol. 1 200). Haggard’s observations of Cynthia’s beauty focuses on her innocence and rosy, youthful beauty, which in turn inspires a transformation in his own feelings. He is pleased to hear how Cynthia has excelled in her new role as servant to his parishioners, the sisters Priscilla and Deborah Webling, “and the unwonted glow upon his dark cheek told that the pleasure was very

71 Haggard’s “creed of temperance and sobriety meant a complete renunciation of the pleasures of the table” (Vol. 1 48). To have sensual desires was “an indulgence in the fleshly lusts” and he instead “gratified his self-denial” (Vol. 1 49) – a tendency that indicates an excessive, and therefore dangerous, tendency, a characterization affirmed by Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss.
real” (Braddon Vol. 1 205). Braddon’s use of “desire” and “pleasure,” and his notice of her supreme loveliness, illustrate that his interest in her is no longer as that of her spiritual benefactor or surrogate parent. That night in bed, Haggard begins to sense the truth of his feelings for Cynthia. His desire for her is a “strange feeling, too sweet for pain, too thrilling for happiness,” one like “rapture” or a “trance” (Braddon Vol. 1 217). Tellingly, however, Haggard admits that he “dared not question his own thoughts” (Braddon Vol. 1 217), which suggests that Haggard’s feelings, though described as a blessing from God, are not entirely welcome or voluntary – offering a hint that there is something not entirely acceptable or sane about his feelings for the “poor child” he found in the woods.

Haggard’s flaw of pride is further revealed early in his courtship of his young wife. As he becomes increasingly aware of his desires for Cynthia, he also considers whether she reciprocates his romantic interest. While Haggard wonders if she felt something “warmer than regard, something deeper than gratitude” for him (Vol. 1 233), Braddon shares his inner dialogue as he tries to decide what her feelings might be. Perhaps conscious of their gulf in years (and though he denies its importance, prescient of the condemnation of those in his community), Haggard asks her if she “could love me well

72 Braddon’s early description of the couple emphasizes Haggard’s initial role as Cynthia’s spiritual benefactor and parental figure. He calls her “poor child” and “my poor lost lamb,” and indeed, she obeys him “as meekly as a lamb” (Vol. 1 114, 132). His attitude of “help and protection” for Cynthia continues upon his return home, and, in a move that blurs his masculinity, he selects a number of fine fabrics to be made into dresses and mails them to her. “He experienced a mild thrill of happiness after doing this, such as a loving mother feels when she has sent some gift to a child at school” (Vol. 1 152). Haggard’s interest in Cynthia is seemingly so desexualized that the narrator describes his feelings as that of “loving mother” – a characterization seemingly incongruous in a man seemingly so virile and formidable.

73 Braddon characterizes Haggard’s goodbye kiss after his proposal as “fatherly in its protecting gentleness, lover-like in its suppressed passion” (Vol. 1 245). While Haggard’s description of his love for Cynthia emphasizes his desire to protect and nurture his young wife, his “passion” for her belies such placidity of feeling.
enough” to marry him (Braddon Vol. 1 124). Ignoring her desire to instead be his servant as she says she is not “good enough to sit by [his] side, to be called by [his] name,” he cries “O Lord, let me have something that shall be all my own! I have tasted but little of the temporal joys . . . let me have something on which to pour forth my treasure of earthly love” (Braddon Vol. 1 236, 234-235). As Braddon makes clear, Haggard is conscious that though he is still a “strong man,” his “age creeps on” (Vol. 1 234-235). Marriage to the “child” Cynthia offers him a way of reclaiming and expressing his aging masculinity. In addition, marriage to this girlish treasure who will be his “own” will reveal that he is chosen and blessed by God – a construct that requires Cynthia’s enduring affection and reciprocity of affection. Such vulnerable dependency further establishes that Haggard’s masculinity and sanity are on shaky ground.

Braddon uses other characters’ reaction to Haggard’s desire to marry Cynthia as a means to illustrate that his behavior is anomalous and bizarre for the normally staid and sensible man, suggesting impaired thinking. All are potential signs of incipient monomania, according to the thinking of the time, which further signals the flaws that lurk between his otherwise superbly masculine appearance. For example, when Haggard tells the Webling sisters that he intends to marry Cynthia he is greeted with disapprobation: “You are going to marry that child! . . . You, a sober serious man of forty and upwards, a chit younger than your daughter!” (Braddon Vol. 1 240).74 Here we can see the gulf between how others perceive Haggard and his emotional reality; though he

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74 Cynthia is indeed younger than his own daughter, who by the time Haggard returns to Penmoyle, has herself become engaged to marry. Certainly, part of his attraction to the much younger woman is that Cynthia’s adoration is a substitute for his daughter’s. A more suitable wife—one closer in age and greater in life experience—would not offer him the same boost. In fact, Cynthia’s chaste adoration of Haggard makes her daughter-like, which suggests that the title Joshua Haggard’s Daughter can be interpreted as a pun regarding the relation of both women to him.
may appear soberly serious to other characters, beneath that stolidity lies an overwhelming desire. In addition, in the sisters’ reaction to his announcement, Braddon provides us with further evidence that his choice is problematic. Though he replies, “If I am not too old to find a place in her heart, I care not how young she is. It will be all the sweeter duty to protect her,” this assertion is met with a ten minutes of a “stifled shriek” of “agony,” “vehement hysterics,” and “gurgling and choking, with occasional bursts of shrill laughter” (Braddon Vol. 1 240). As Priscilla explains of her emotionally violent reaction, “I thought you’d never marry again . . . or that if you did, it would be some one of a suitable age, and with a mind fit to mate with yours” (Braddon Vol. 1 241). The issue for others then, is not solely one of surprise that he is changing his focus from his considerable family, business, and church duties, but that his intended is not of a “suitable” age, education, and life experience. Of course (and in an echo of Chapter 3’s Mrs. Sparsit), Priscilla’s reaction is in part due to her disappointment that she is not the one he is marrying. As she tells herself, “His mind—too much given to spiritual things to be acute upon earthly matters—has been caught by the surface beauty of a foolish child. It is for you to pity rather than resent an error for which he will doubtless pay dearly” as he will experience the sting of domestic disorder at the hands of “so young a wife” (Braddon Vol. 1 242). Though he may seem to be above the mundane everyday of

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75 Further reaction from the sisters reveals how his desires for her is perceived dangerous and dangerous: “This was an intoxication of mind which seemed to the Miss Weblings fraught with peril” and Deborah “could not forgive Mr. Haggard for his absurd choice” (Braddon Vol. 1 244, 245).
marriage, he is in fact not too spiritual to desire Cynthia nor hope to “find a place in her heart.”

When Haggard introduces his young bride to his family and his community, their reaction illustrates that his marriage is not the blessing he sees it as, but an act that fully undermines his reputation. His family is struck “dumb” and stare at him with “wonder-stricken countenances, pallid with horror” that he had married a “wandering beggar-girl” who is two years younger than his own daughter (Braddon Vol. 1 272, 281). They wonder if he has “gone out of his mind; that he must be talking distractedly under the spell of demonic possession” (Braddon Vol. 1 272). That their first reaction is not only disbelief, but also an assumption that Haggard is either insane or possessed, illustrates how shocking his choice is to marry Cynthia. It also marks the first, though not last, moment that his behavior is thought of as insane. In part, his family’s reaction is due to their suspicion that someone so young cannot be a suitable “companion” – as Haggard’s daughter, Naomi, explains, “I wish she were only a little older. She has such a childish look” (Braddon Vol. 1 284). Their reaction to Haggard’s “girl-wife” is echoed by the reaction of others in the community (Braddon Vol. 1 279, 295). Haggard’s “congregation did not contemplate his second marriage with entire approval. . . . There was a general and growing conviction that Joshua had acted foolishly, if not wickedly, in

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76 His devoted sister’s only criticism is that she “always wondered what Joshua could see to admire in” his departed wife, “but the more mind a man has the easier his fancy is satisfied, and one doll’s face seems to do as well as another, if it’s only pink and white enough” (Vol. 1 39).

77 Critics have similarly characterized the reactions to Haggard and Cynthia’s marriage. “Everyone is thunderstruck” (Wolff 271) and they see it as a “stunningly inappropriate choice” (Gilbert 191).

78 As Haggard’s daughter, Naomi, explains to Cynthia of her shock, “You are so young—so much fitter to be his daughter than his wife” (Vol. 1 278).
marrying this strange young woman” (Braddon Vol. 1 299, 301). Further, when the
Haggard family’s maid, Sally, hears of Haggard’s marriage she assumes it is to the well-
to-do tanner’s widow who is fifteen years his senior. His sister’s reply illustrates part of
the source for the negative reaction to the marriage. “No . . . it isn’t Mrs. Trimly. That
would have been a sensible marriage, if you like. But when men of my brother’s age
marry they don’t think of pleasing sensible people. They marry to please their eye, Sally.
Your new mistress has got flaxen hair and blue eyes, Sally. That’s enough for my
brother” (Braddon Vol. 1 276-277). The man that many saw as a personification of the
temperance and rectitude he preached revealed himself to be just an ordinary man, and
one who makes the suspect and superficial choice to marry to “please [his] eye.”

Haggard’s reaction to his family and community’s response to his marriage to
Cynthia further reveals the prideful flaws that lead to his breakdown. In a telling
moment, for example, he decides he is in “no hurry” to tell his sister or daughter of his
future plans to marry the waif he rescued from the riverbank. “No one had any right to
question his choice or doubt his wisdom” of the “startling and wondrous change which
had made him a new man” (Braddon Vol. 1 248). Haggard’s love for Cynthia is one that
perhaps cannot bear further scrutiny. In addition, when he asks the Webling sisters, “I
hope you do not think my choice foolish or blameworthy,” this moment serves to

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79 As Braddon’s narrator warns, though the “minister felt that he had conquered” his family’s resistance to
his new wife, “these household victories sometimes leave behind them the seed of future warfare” (Vol. 1
275).

80 As he tells himself, “Her youth, her beauty, were blessings which heaven had bestowed upon him with
the free gift of her love. . . . She had spanned the gulf of years that yawned between them. . . . Had any
one else the right to count his years, or see unfitness in this union of youth and maturity, if she had not
done so?” (Vol. 1 272-273).
highlight that Haggard is aware that his “choice” to marry Cynthia may be problematic (Braddon Vol. 1 243). However, he then optimistically states,

I know she loves me. It is the rich reward of all my days of care and toil. I have no foolish pride in my work; but the sum of it has perhaps been pleasing in the sight of Heaven, and this reward has been granted to me—love and renewed youth, a life that seems beginning again from the starting point of twenty years. I feel as young as the day I first preached in Penmoyle. (Braddon Vol. 1 243)

Again, Haggard characterizes his relationship with Cynthia as a “rich reward” for his Godly efforts, as though a Christian God would offer a beautiful young woman as remuneration for a lifetime of service. Haggard’s love for Cynthia offers him not just a loving companion, but also an opportunity to experience “renewed youth,” making him a “new man.” Though he is characterized as vibrantly masculine, having his affection returned by a much younger and comely woman makes him feel “twenty years” younger. This response suggests that though Haggard has been consistently presented as still very much a virile and masculine man, he feels the pain of aging. In addition, he most certainly does have a “foolish pride in [his] work,” one that leads him to believe he deserves to marry Cynthia. As the narrator explains of his reaction to his congregation’s reaction to his marriage: “Joshua saw the change in his flock, and his hard rebelled against their hardness. Pride sustained him—a manly and honest pride, and a spiritual pride, which told him that he was better than the best of those who presumed to sit in judgment upon him” (Braddon Vol. 1 302). As Braddon illustrates, not only does Haggard have a “manly and honest pride” but a “spiritual” one — and it is this pride that leads to his downfall.

81 Priscilla replies, “Cynthia is a good girl, as girls go . . . but there’s a wide difference between a servant-girl and a minister’s wife, and a great deal will be expected of her in that position” (Vol. 1 243).
Era’s Connections between Methodism and Madness: or, Why Methodism?

As the previous section has shown, Braddon skilfully lays the seeds of Haggard’s mania within his initial, pride-inspired attraction for Cynthia. And, by drawing upon the association Victorian readers often made between Dissenting religion and madness, she further establishes his mental instability. By the 1840s, many saw the Methodist church as “respectable” (Childers 128), and indeed by that time it had found followers amongst all strata of Victorian society. In addition, by the time *Joshua Haggard’s Daughter* was written in 1876, Methodism was in the “sober years of ascending respectability of social status” (Hempton “The Religion” 4). Despite its redeemed reputation, however, many Victorians continued to link Methodism and other forms of evangelical Protestantism with insanity, harking back to the previous century’s connection between this denomination and mental illness. For example, during the eighteenth-century rise of evangelical Protestantism, the upper classes began to associate such beliefs with “delusion, obsession, madness,” which meant that “enthusiasm itself was ‘nothing but the effect of mere madness, and arose from the strong impulses of a warm brain’” (Scull 178). In fact, Methodism was seen as “one of the prime producers of candidates for the madhouse” (Scull 178). To the critics of Methodism, the enthusiasm it engenders in believers is a sign of insanity, as well as a cause.

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82 Of course, it is impossible to ignore the patronizing quality of much of this criticism, since many of the early followers of Methodism were amongst those of the lower classes, who were considered more likely to be overcome by such “enthusiasm.” Further, early critic Halévy and others have often associated the “eruption” of Methodism with times of “industrial” and financial “crisis” (Semmel 7), which further problematizes Methodism.
The early leader of Methodism, John Wesley (1703-1791) was himself aware of the connection that many made between Methodism and madness. In his sermons and writing, according to theological historian E. Brooks Holifield, Wesley discussed “insanity, emotional pain, and madness” because he “constantly had to counter charges that his own revivalist activities drove people mad” (65). He was aware that when Christians of other denominations “thought about Methodists, their first thought was that ‘much religion hath made them mad.’” Wesley himself even “agreed that certain forms of religious ‘enthusiasm’ could properly be construed as a species of madness, arising from fantasies of divine inspiration” (Holifield 65-66). Wesley also believed that insanity could have a biological basis, either from “sickness of the body” or “irregular passions,” the latter of which he believed “could damage the nerves (Holifield 66). He also accepted what was by then a “no longer fashionable” notion that madness “resulted from the agency of demonic powers” (though, as will be shown, characters in Braddon’s novel certainly upheld the belief in the connection between demonic possession and madness) (Holifield 66). Wesley’s consciousness that many saw Methodism as a sure route to the “madhouse” affirms that this criticism was commonly and strongly held. To an observer of an early Methodist revival meeting in Yorkshire, such displays of enthusiasm were indeed troubling: “They had gone beyond all bounds of decency, such screaming and bawling I never heard. Divided into small companies in different parts of the chapel, some singing, others praising, clapping of hands, etc., all was confusion and uproar. I was struck with amazement and consternation” (Hempton “The Religion” 12). The observer’s amazed concern can easily be extended to assumptions that such fervid and expressive displays of passionate devotion would indeed “warm” the brain.
The association of religious devotion and insanity continued well into the mid-nineteenth century. In the years after the initial conception that “deviant religious beliefs,” such as Methodism, could lead to insanity, many came to disregard such connections. However, as historian of psychology Joshua John Schwieso explains, “some psychiatric texts of the 1830s and 1840s still held that religious excitement could cause insanity, an updated version of the demonic possession model” (170). Further, despite Victorian psychiatrist Browne’s argument “that he knew of very few cases of religious monomania” (Schwieso 171), religious mania was considered an issue of concern during nineteenth-century Britain. For example, James Mason Cox looked to “religious fervour,” amongst others, as a cause for mental illness, illustrating that Haggard’s plight would not seem anomalous to the era’s medical minds (Small 41). In addition, Schwieso has examined the era’s “claim that religious extremism could be both the cause and result of insanity” and discovered that to many, “religious enthusiasm was seen as the cause of insanity which could subsequently become an actual brain disease” (173, 171). If a diverse number of Victorian doctors could make such claims with authority, then it seems likely that not only was “religious enthusiasm” as a cause for insanity a commonly held belief, but that the discomfort with such fervency still existed during in the 1870s.

Though Joshua Haggard was well respected in his small, rural community, nineteenth-century middle-class Anglican readers would not necessarily have afforded him this high regard. Certainly, this derisive attitude is reflected within the novel. For example, Oswald Pentreath’s father—head of one of the “good old families” of Combhaven and part of the “patrician order of the neighborhood”—calls him a “canting
hound” and a “Ranter,” which underscores the perception of evangelical Protestant preaching as bombastic and uncontrolled (Braddon Vol. 1 66, Vol. 1 59, Vol. 2 19).83 Before his rescue, Pentreath expresses the common suspicion of Methodist enthusiasm by sharing his father’s tendency “to ridicule the fervid piety of Dissenters” (Braddon Vol. 1 53). Even characters who do not share the Pentreath’s perspective of Methodism see Haggard’s devotion to God as extreme after his breakdown. His sister comes to compare him to St. Simeon Stylites, who practiced fasting and other forms of zealous self-denial to show his devotion to God (Braddon Vol. 2 51).84 Haggard begins to spend his days away from home and his business, “in solitary wanderings by the wild seashore, holding commune with his troubled soul” or on meandering journeys to visit his scattered parishioners (Braddon Vol. 2 150). Family prayer time, once a time to testify to God’s grace, instead becomes a moment of “fervid” devotion suggesting madness: “he groveled in the dust before an angry God, and heaped ashes upon his head, and abased himself with humility which touched the confines of fanaticism” (Braddon Vol. 2 155-156). His behavior intensifies to the extent that by the time the jury finds Haggard not responsible for Oswald’s murder, the coroner tells Arnold Pentreath, “Joshua Haggard is a mystic, a fanatic, a man who spends half his life wandering in solitary places” (Braddon Vol. 2 242). And, while Haggard’s parishioners admire the

83 In contrast to most other inhabitants of Combhaven, the “patrician” perspective suspects Haggard’s dual roles of minister and business owner. Previous to spending time with the Haggard family, Oswald Pentreath thinks of Haggard as a “smooth-tongued canting rascal, who improved his business prospects by an affection of sanctity” (Vol. 1 36). His father believes Joshua a “hypocrite” for trading his “Sunday ranting” for increased trade from his parishioners (Vol. 1 183).

84 While Judith means her comparison as a compliment to her brother’s fervency of devotion, the era’s readers would also know of Tennyson’s “St. Simeon Stylites” (1842). The protagonist of this poem is a monster of spiritual pride—“show me the man who hath suffer’d more than I,” he asks of God—making Haggard’s sister’s praise read as in fact a critique of Haggard’s sense of spiritual self-importance.
growing intensity of his devotion, others see his behavior as irrational and excessive, putting Haggard’s masculine self-containment and sanity on increasingly shaky ground.

Mr. Pentreath’s characterization of Haggard’s preaching as the fire and brimstone variety is not accurate until after Oswald Pentreath’s death; what is perhaps unsurprising is that though previously Haggard had enjoyed popularity and respect, once he “gave up humanity for lost, and plainly told” his parishioners so, that popularity “increased in a marked degree” (Braddon Vol. 2 137). While his business and family, most particularly his young wife, languish from his neglect, his status as a preacher increases. As Braddon’s narrator explains, “The darker his doctrines grew, the better his congregation liked to hear him. . . . They liked to hear that the devil was among them, at their shoulders, prompting them to evil, fighting for the mastery of their souls. ‘I can see him, I can feel his presence,’ cried Joshua, in a passion of despairing ecstasy” (Braddon Vol. 2 137). While they enjoy imagining that the neighbors they dislike or judge are perhaps the sinners that Haggard rails against, they are also drawn by the “passion” and “ecstasy” in his preaching. His “stirring sermons . . . acted on his hearers as a stimulant and a tonic” (Braddon Vol. 2 158), an effect that he enjoys. His “vigorous eloquence” fills the chapel “to suffocation” with parishioners who hope that his evening services will be one of his “devil-hunts” (Braddon Vol. 2 226). His sermons—which “had so often swayed and moved his flock”—inspire “smothered sighs, and head-shakings, and hollow groans, as of inward and bodily disorder” and “feminine sighs, disjointed ejaculations of ‘Alas!’ and ‘Too true!’” (Vol. 2 231, 226, 228). As the other areas of his life fall away, he derives an increasing degree of satisfaction from his ability to stir others with his preaching. “He was proud of his popularity, lifted up and exalted by the
idea that he was bringing sinners home to God, fighting hand to hand with the devil and all his angels” (Braddon Vol. 2 158). By novel's end, he indeed becomes the “Ranter” that Mr. Pentreath had believed him to be – the very stereotype of a Methodist preacher at a love-feast, though in this case it is a hateful perversion of these celebrations of devotion. Swept up in his fury and stoked by his popularity, Haggard inspires the very demonstrations of excessive devotional enthusiasm in his parishioners that Victorian doctors feared would drive people to the madhouse.

While Haggard’s fire and brimstone preaching inspires popularity, it also begins to suggest that he is inspired more by madness than devotion. After Arnold Pentreath finds his brother’s body—Oswald is shot and tossed to the bottom of a well—and accuses Haggard of the murder, the older man escapes justice due to his position in the community. In fact, he received no “reproach” from his parishioners, “unless it was for the foolishness in marrying a silly girl for the sake of her pretty face” (Braddon Vol. 2 253). After the trial, Haggard preaches to his congregation and “conjured up those visions of horror with a strange uncanny power, as if the fiend had lifted the corner of hell’s curtain, and showed him the fiery gulf behind. He dwelt on these horrors with a gloomy relish, and spoke of hell and doom with a familiar knowledge, as if he had steeped his soul in the fires of Pandemonium” (Braddon Vol. 2 250). His “gloomy relish” in preaching of the “fiery gulf” of hell speaks of not of his own righteousness, however, but rather his “uncanny” familiarity with “visions of horror.” As Naomi hears a stranger (drawn by Haggard’s growing reputation as a fire and brimstone preacher) say to a parishioner, “I can believe anything of this now I’ve heard him preach. . . . Because I am very sure he is a madman. . . . No sane man ever preached as that man preaches, and
you may take my word for it” (Braddon Vol. 2 250-251). And, though he manages to evade scandal and retain the respect of Combhaven, other potential consequences await Haggard. As Braddon’s narrator pointedly asks readers to consider: “Could there be pardon for a sinner who kept the secret of his guilt, and pretended to lead other men along the shining path to heaven?” (Vol. 2 225). Though he is not recognized as such, Haggard is indeed a sinner and his ability to lead others to spiritual redemption is compromised by his hypocrisy.

Braddon also signals Haggard’s change in mental state with his preference for solitude. If he is not wandering the countryside, he is in stormy contemplation and unreachable for conversation. Haggard also begins to lock himself in his room, a preference that flags his negative psychological change. “He wanted nothing between him and that awful solitude in which he had lived of late—the isolation which a mind unhinged makes for itself. . . . Even in the troubled state of his brain—a trouble which had been growing for months—that book was his rock of defense, his sheet-anchor” (Braddon Vol. 2 258). The Bible, once a source of positive inspiration, now acts as means for Haggard to justify his growing, and as the narrator points out, dangerous isolation. In the seclusion and loneliness of his mental state, he comes to believe that only God can judge and understand him. Joshua’s mind, once quick and incisive in business and unimpeachable in doctrine, becomes so “troubled” and “unhinged,” he loses his way. As the narrator explains, “Joshua’s mind was going on before him” (Braddon Vol. 2 277), as though it was a lost balloon that had escaped his grasp – a

85 Jennifer Carnell suggests, “in Braddon’s novels the usual convention of punishing villainy is often transgressed when the characters escape legal or moral justice” (194). Haggard, of course, is no exception to this convention.
clear signal he has fully succumbed to his religious mania. His daughter, a self-admitted actor in the transformation of her father from steady to “unhinged,” pinpoints the moment of her father’s mental “trouble.” As Naomi confesses to Arnold, Oswald’s letter to Cynthia—“a lover’s letter, full of despairing love”—“maddened” her father (Braddon Vol. 2 273). She remembers seeing her father in the woods after he had discovered his wife kissing Oswald farewell and “his face has haunted me ever since. If was the face of a madman” (Braddon Vol. 2 273). As Naomi explains of his role in Oswald’s death: “He was not in his right mind that day. He has never been the same man since” (Braddon Vol. 2 273).

“My Lily! No Villain Shall Sully Thy Purity While I Am Near to Shield Thee!”: Love as Monomania

It has been argued that the “single idea, passion, or train of thought” that drives monomania is connected to a deep need for stability (Davis 69-70), and Haggard certainly exemplifies that aim in his initial conception of his wife as sinless. In Monomania, which explores nineteenth-century conceptions and portrayals of the idée fixe, literary critic Marina van Zuylen claims that monomania is rooted in the “obsessive strategies people use to keep the arbitrary out of their lives; it is about the fanaticism and intolerance linked to their ideas of perfection and permanence” (1). For Joshua Haggard, his “obsessive strategy” relates to his passion for his much younger wife and his ideas of her sinless perfection and the permanence of their seemingly shared love and attraction. This monomania is seen when Judith suggests that Cynthia and Oswald are having an affair and Haggard asserts, “My lily! no villain shall sully thy purity while I am near to shield thee! My dearest! has the tempter assailed thee so soon, sin’s poisoned breath so soon tarnished thy soul’s whiteness? I shall love thee all the more,
guard thee more closely, honour thee more deeply, because thou has been in danger” (Braddon Vol. 2 84). And indeed, to Haggard, the "glowing" "ivory" purity of Cynthia’s skin appears to be matched by her soul (Braddon Vol. 1 134). As Braddon’s narrator explains, “She had lived among sinners, yet seemed to remain sinless. . . . It seemed to Joshua that in her beauty and youth there was a spiritual purity, which, even in contact with unholy things, had escaped all contamination” (Braddon Vol. 1 124). However, despite the suggestion that Cynthia was sinless, Braddon further complicates her description of her “purity” by her repeated use of “seemed” – suggesting that all may not be as it appears and cuing the reader that this may be a sticking point. While Haggard may preach of man’s sinfulness and of his ability to be purified by Jesus’s sacrifice, he was “false to his own theology” (Braddon Vol. 2 63). Rather than accept that Cynthia is a human, and therefore, capable of sin, he “would not admit of original sin in this one pure soul” (Braddon Vol. 2 63). Cynthia, then, according to Haggard’s “imperious edict” is not allowed to actually be a woman but instead must be “pure” and “unsullied”—in other words, a Methodist Virgin Mary—in order to be worthy of his love (Braddon Vol. 2 63).

The religious overtones of Haggard’s perspective (she is a “lily” who he will protect from “sin”) are no mistake, according to the era’s thinking. As von Krafft-Ebing (whose

86 “You hate my wife as she is lovely, as you never were—passionately loved, as you never were” (Vol. 2 81-82)

87 As Braddon explains, of Cynthia, he “could never believe the faintest shadow of evil of his beloved—not even the most venial deceit, the smallest double-dealing. She was the purest of the pure—pure as the saintly damsels of old—the women who ministered to the apostles in the sweet early dawn of Christianity. He could admit her to be no less pure than these—as white a soul—unsullied by human frailty. He had preached the sinfulness of the human heart—it was the very keystone of his creed—a sinful humanity in need of being called and regenerated, chosen and purified, redeemed by a vicarious sacrifice. But here he was false to his own theology: he would not admit of original sin in this one pure soul. Love had issued his imperious edict, like a papal bull, and this one woman was to be without sin” (Braddon Vol. 2 63).
work is further drawn upon in Chapter 2) argues, the “relation between religious and sexual feeling is also shown on the basis of unequivocal psycho-pathological states. It suffices to recall how intense sensuality makes itself manifest in the clinical histories of many religious maniacs; the motley mixture of religious and sexual delusions that is so frequently observed in psychoses” (8). And indeed, as Braddon explains, Haggard possesses delusions of both a religious and sexual nature, which is expressed in a strange mixture of narcissism and religious mania. “That intense egotism which is one of the characteristics of a mind off its balance had taken possession of him. He felt himself the centre of the universe. The Bible had been written for him. He stood face to face with his Creator, and felt himself worthy to be saved” (Braddon Vol. 2 261). And, in another example of his strange sense of superiority, Haggard is described as having a “curious feeling of superiority to all these people, as if the universe had been planned for him, and they were only accidents in it” (Braddon Vol. 2 277). In other words, a man of God comes to believe he is a God. In addition, Haggard’s belief in his own superiority combines with his delusions regarding Cynthia, leading him to fixate on her seeming transgression and explode with sexual jealousy.

While Haggard’s regard for Cynthia has religious overtones, his young wife’s feelings for him have similar associations. As Braddon establishes, Cynthia’s feelings for Haggard resemble the “excited fancy” of a follower attending a Methodist love feast, rather than passionate love. In fact, her gratitude for Haggard’s spiritual and financial patronage—it is he who raises her to respectability—leads her to pledge a desire to serve him. For Cynthia, the first time she hears Haggard’s sermon is revelatory. Having never heard skillful oration, or “pictures painted in words,” she listens “spellbound” and
compares him to St. Paul. He is “her spiritual sponsor, the benefactor who had given her the heritage of salvation, and her gratitude was measureless as her value of the blessings she had so nearly lost” (Braddon Vol. 1 215). While Cynthia indeed has feelings for Haggard, in contrast hers have a distinctly religious association, one verging on idolatry. She compares him to St. Paul and pictures his ruggedly handsome face “shining” with “glory” (Braddon Vol. 1 230). However, Braddon’s narrator is careful to point out that part of the reason she considers Haggard a “great man” is her limited life experience. “Her youth, her ardour, had nothing on which to fasten except this ideal of a good and perfect man” (Braddon Vol. 1 221). He is “good and perfect” in part because her “ardour” seeks someone to make an ideal of while her youth suggests that she may not have the wisdom necessary for perspective (i.e., to determine whether he is truly worthy of her devotion). Braddon further undermines readers’ possible hopes for their union when, as her narrator intones of Cynthia’s face as she looks up at Haggard after his proposal, “Why should the young heart ever change or fall away from affection so pure in its beginning, so holy in its growth? Why, indeed, save for the reason spoken of by the Prophet: ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?’” (Vol. 1 236-237). Faced with such commentary, no matter how pure or holy her love is for Haggard, a reader cannot feel optimistic about their age-disparate pairing, nor feel that their marriage is justified or reasonable.88 And, indeed, Haggard comes to believe that Cynthia’s heart is deceitful.

88 If a reader hoped that Haggard and Cynthia have the devotion and love to make their relationship successful and enduring, Braddon’s narrator is quick to reassure us otherwise. “This was the beginning of evils that came out of Joshua Haggard’s second marriage; an event in the life of man to which his kindred in particular and his friends in general are apt to take objection; and yet the responsibility of the act is all his, and the good or ill thereof is a cup by which his lips alone can drink” (Vol. 1 242). Braddon’s use of
Haggard’s previously formidable sense of himself is deeply punctured by his recognition that his young wife’s feelings for him are more reverence than romance – a realization that inspires this character’s descent into religious mania. While Cynthia does love and revere her husband, she does not desire him, something she discovers when Oswald Pentreath reads Werther to her and his fiancée, Naomi. From this novel, Haggard’s wife learns that her life is not truly complete. She is electrified by the “story of a love that was fatal” and “overmastering” (Braddon Vol. 2 50). Braddon explains that this other sort of love was “not a reverential affection, not gratitude, esteem, respect” of the sort she feels for her husband, “but blind, unreasoning passion—a fire kindled in a moment, and consuming the soul” (Braddon Vol. 2 51). Though Haggard feels passion for his wife, she does not return his desire (in fact, she hadn’t even previously understood the existence of desire). She may tearfully rebuff the age-matched Pentreath’s love but the damage has been done. She knows that while she truly loves her husband she does not mirror his ardor, and she now keenly notices its absence. The idea that Cynthia might not be as pure as Haggard had imagined her to be (though she is, in fact, she is innocent of any indiscretion) causes a crisis. Having lost all perspective in his grief for the loss of the wife he had imagined, he now sees her as an Eve who has listened to the serpent’s words and “gathered the fatal fruit” (Braddon Vol. 2 125). Though he understands the fallibility of man, he thought that in Cynthia “there could be one exempt—one free from humanity’s universal taint. Fool, fool, fool!” (Braddon Vol. 2 126). In his anger at being made foolish, he comes to see his wife as

“evils” and “ill” here, and “pity” and “mystery” elsewhere on this and the preceding page of the novel, signal that events will not unfold towards happiness for Haggard and his young wife.
not as innocent as she appears but instead the perpetrator of a crafty and conniving illusion. As he tells himself, “She is all dissimulation . . . fairest seeming, sweetest show—bitter as ashes within!” (Braddon Vol. 2 129). Haggard expects Cynthia to remain perfect and unchanging, however, he fails to see that for her to be, as Braddon puts it, “free from humanity’s universal taint” would make her in fact, not human at all. Further, his attitude shows that Haggard considers himself free from that taint, though his offense at being humiliated and made a fool illustrates the pridefulness that leads to both his madness and the tragic outcome of so many of the novel’s characters.

Haggard’s religious mania is also revealed in his association between his desire for Cynthia and his fears of Satanic interference. Early in the novel, part of his hesitation regarding whether it would be foolish to marry Cynthia is that he does not fully trust his attraction to her. He asks himself, “Is it sinful to love her for her youth and her beauty, her sweet tones and looks and fond winning ways? Is the attraction that draws me to her despite myself sensual and devilish, a snare of Satan set to catch me in my pride, or is the charm as innocent as it seems to me to-night?” (Braddon Vol. 1 234). While Cynthia may appear youthfully sweet—and, as Haggard admits, that is part of why he is attracted to her—her pink and white beauty comes to be seen as just another sign that she is a tool of Satan. As critic Andrew Scull affirms, the link between insanity and demonic forces is one that was common during the era, and “scriptural discussions of demons and witches served to reinforce popular belief in an almost palpable spiritual malevolence and satanic temptation, one of whose most visible manifestations was maladies of the mind” (176-177). The connection between demonism/witchcraft and religious mania is echoed in Haggard’s assertion that Cynthia was sent by Satan to
tempt him from his path of righteousness or other characters’ suggestion that Cynthia
won Haggard through bewitchment.

Braddon’s descriptions of Cynthia’s seemingly innocent flaxen haired and azure-
eyed beauty indeed suggests that she possesses unnatural qualities that inspire
Haggard’s dangerous rapture. When Haggard first comes upon Cynthia, though she is
little more than a ragged and homeless waif, her beauty is easily discernable. Though
his first instinct is to take measure of her qualities through questioning and discern
whether he can assist her in some way, he can’t help but notice her little “bare feet” that
“shone ivory white under that clear water,” which gives his heart a “curious thrill—half
fear, half wonder—as if he had seen a fairy” (Braddon Vol. 1 112). Certainly, his notice
of her perfect, little feet suggests a degree of sexual interest even upon their first
meeting (bringing into question how parental his interest ever was). Further, his
comparison of her to a “fairy” marks her not a woman, or even a girl, but a creature from
fairytale, an association that possibly marks her as being allied with magical tricksterism
of the type associated with witches and otherworldly creatures. To Haggard’s sister,
Judith, his continuing blindness in the face of her evidence of Cynthia’s infidelity,
“almost tempted her to believe in witchcraft. . . . Here, surely, was a case of demoniac
possession, an example of something more foolish than mortal folly” (Braddon Vol. 2
84-85). Naomi, in an echo of this characterization, imagines that “some unholy
witchcraft, some subtle silent exercise of womanly artifice” had worked through the
“bewitchment of fair looks and winning ways” (Braddon Vol. 2 109-110, 116). In
addition, the jury does not believe Haggard is guilty of murder because his reputation is
so unimpeachable and instead prefers to imagine that he was under external influence.
“He couldn’t ha’ done it unless he wur bewitched,” says one, while another agrees, “Who knows if that young wife of his didn’t bewitch him. . . . There’s many ‘as marked a change in him from the time she came among us” (Braddon Vol. 2 240). For Haggard and his peers, his insanity is easily rooted in his desire for and marriage to beautiful, young Cynthia.

**Reading “Body-Talk”: Victorian Connections between Madness and Gender**

While as the previous section establishes, Victorians made a clear association between Dissenting religious belief and insanity, the association between gender and insanity is more contested by critics. For example, critic Helen Small critiques the commonly accepted supposition, made popular by critic Elaine Showalter, that the diagnosis and treatment of madness was indeed gendered and seeks to “question received assumptions about the role of sex in relation to madness,” claiming, “most general treatises on insanity seem to have had remarkably little to say on the subject” of women’s maladies (63, 44). Further, sociologist Joan Busfield argues against the suggestion that women predominate the Victorian diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. Despite such arguments, however, many of the Victorian era were ready to associate a tendency towards insanity with femaleness. As critic Peter Melville Logan’s work on nervous complaints affirms, connections were made between madness and gender during the era. Victorian efforts to understand the seeming increase in

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89 As Showalter explains in her Introduction to *The Female Malady*, “women were believed to be more vulnerable to insanity than men” (7).

90 Busfield suggests “that some mental disorders appear to be more distinctively female, whilst others have a more masculine face, and yet others are more or less gender-neutral” (14).

91 For example, Esquirol “argued that biological processes like menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and the menopause weakened women’s psychological defenses against violent compulsion” (Mangham 1).
nervousness and other forms of mental illness were tied to the effects of an increasingly overwhelming quality of everyday life. The nervous body becomes “overly inscribable, one that is too easily written upon by the impressions of its day-to-day experience” (Logan “Narrating” 209). Further, and most importantly for this discussion, this “inscribable body is always gendered female” (Logan “Narrating” 209). The inscriptions of daily life, which wears upon the nerves, means that a woman “has a story to tell, while the healthy male body has none” (Logan “Narrating” 211); to put it another way, a woman with a seeming nervous condition has what Logan, in *Nerves & Narratives*, calls “body-talk” (75).

Though the inscribable, nervous body was consistently gendered as female, it was not only women who were impacted. Nineteenth-century physician and writer Thomas Trotter described nervous males of the Victorian era as “commonly pale and sallow, soft-fibered, and of a slender make” with an “effeminacy of manners, and smallness of voice, that sometimes makes their sex doubtful” (qtd. in Logan “Narrating” 210). Trotter connected male nervousness to profession, as those of “nervous temperament” were of business or of “effeminized commercial society” (qtd. in Logan “Nerves” 33). The era’s seeming “epidemic of nervous disorders” was seen “as a wholesale transformation of male bodies into female, and it was this regendering of the social body that doctors sought to cure” (Logan “Narrating” 210). If Victorians believed that madness could regender, as this project illustrates, aging has been shown to have a similar function (as shown in Chapter 2), which means that Haggard is doubly impacted.

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92 “Madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady” (Showalter 4).
While the persistent though contested connection between mental illness and gender is of interest for this analysis, even more noteworthy is that made between religious mania and gender. Though Schwieso suggests that “there seemed to be no general claim that religious lunacy was peculiar to women” (174), he presents no evidence to the contrary. And, indeed, other Victorian writers and recent critics do claim that women were more likely to suffer from religious mania. In their Introduction to the section, “The Sexual Body,” of *Embodied Selves*, critics Taylor and Shuttleworth provide evidence of the Victorian association between gender and religious mania. In writing of treatment of hysteria and other maladies of the Victorian female, they explain “religion features in these discussions only as a form of displacement for sexual energy. Maudsley who makes the first systematic attempt to define the psychological features of puberty, even goes so far as to suggest that St Theresa . . . was simply suffering from ‘the influence of excited sexual organs on the mind’” (167). Or, as John Gideon Millingen wrote in 1848, as the woman is more influenced by her “uterine system” than her brain:

> Therefore is she subject to all aberrations of love and religion; ecstatic under the impression of both, the latter becomes a resource when the excitement of the former is exhausted by disappointment, infidelity, and age—when, no longer attractive, she is left by the ebb of fond emotions on the bleak shore of despondency; where, like a lost wanderer in the desert, without an oasis upon earth on which to fix her straining eyes, she turns them to heaven, as her last consolation and retreat (169)

Millingen’s associations between disappointed love and mental illness of a religious cast are apt when analyzing *Joshua Haggard’s Daughter*. Further, what is of particular note for this analysis is the relationship he asserted that existed between religious fervency and the disappointments of love associated with aging – one that is sadly borne out over the course of Braddon’s novel.
The era’s associations between gender and religious mania are further intensified by Haggard’s particular brand of faith: Methodism. John Conolly’s examples of patients suffering from religious mania were solely women. For example, one had an “attack of ‘Religious Excitement’” after attending a “Wesleyan Methodist love feast” (Logan “Imitations”). Conolly’s diagnosis of religious “excitement” or mania in such patients “emphasized the central theme of his essays: the social danger of evangelism” (Logan “Imitations”). Unsurprisingly, this danger was most acute for women. As he explains it, the patient in question lived in a rural community, similar to that of Joshua Haggard’s *Daughter*: “Into this simple, virtuous community comes a dramatic evangelical preacher, seducing the inexperienced locals into ‘enthusiastic singing, earnest prayers recommended by strenuous physical action, and long sermons, in which the free reins are given to excited fancy’; such stimuli ‘attract the common people with a force quite irresistible’” (“Imitations” 23). Under such “stimuli,” the patient found her “control of her mind was gone,” which Conolly attributes to “the vulnerability created by an inferior education,” an outcome guaranteed by the inadequacies of female education, which “in general is poor” and “composed of such ‘vapid books and songs and occupations’ that even modern, so-called women are susceptible to religious mania” (“Imitations” 23).

Though Conolly does not explicitly state that a man cannot be susceptible to religious

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93 The high numbers of Methodists who were female could in part explain the seeming association of women with religious mania, since many were quick to make the connection between Methodism and mental illness. In fact, almost two thirds of Methodists were women, half of whom were unmarried (Hempton “Methodism” 13).

94 As Logan explains it, a “love feast” was a “ceremony of food, singing, and testimony popular in the evangelical revival movement of the nineteenth century” (“Imitations”).

95 Conolly claimed that “[T]here is no single cause of insanity more frequent than fanaticism” amongst ‘woman of various degrees of understanding,’” which is another way of saying those of lesser intelligence (Schwieso 169).
mania, clearly the suggestion is that a man of Haggard’s apparent virility and capability should not necessarily be so easily excited to dangerous levels of “fancy” as he ends up being. And while his lower-class education could put him on equal footing with some of the era’s women, leaving him vulnerable in ways a man of a higher class of education would not have been, his type of faith is another factor that would be seen as explaining his religious mania. Indeed, Braddon’s novel makes overt connections made between Methodist faith and madness, with Haggard’s idealization (and eventual condemnation) of his young wife expressed in the language and ideology of his faith.

**Conclusion: the Crisis and Resolution of Embodied Sexual Jealousy**

While, as has been shown, recent work analyzing the relationship between gender and religion has primarily focused on the experience of Victorian women, exploration of Victorian conceptions of the intersections of religious faith and masculinity have also emerged. Critics Donald Hall and Herbert Sussman, to use a few of Frederick S. Roden’s examples, have sought to address the gap by investigating “the role Christianity played in the construction of Victorian masculinity” (394).96 Certainly the precepts of “muscular Christianity,” which made an “association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself” (Hall 7), are useful in this analysis of Joshua Haggard, who is a prime mid-life example at the beginning of Braddon’s novel. As Hall explains, however there are limitations imposed by the possession of physical and social capability:

96 Further, as Andrew Bradstock et al. explain, “One of the first topics in this field which attracted the attention of literary critics and historians was the connection between the growing cult of Victorian manliness and Evangelical and Broad Church forms of Christianity” (Bradstock 3).
For Kingsley, Hughes, and others of the period, “manliness” was synonymous with strength, both physical and moral, and the term “muscular Christianity” highlights these writers’ consistent, even insistent, use of the ideologically charged and aggressively poised male body as a point of reference in and determiner of a masculinist economy of signification and (all too often) degradation. (9)

As Hall indicates, during the Victorian era the male body becomes a “point of reference” that illustrates a man’s “manliness”; for a variety of men, including those who are visibly aging, the body becomes a signifier of degradation, which in the case of Haggard occurs after his spiritual crisis inspired by his seeming loss of Cynthia to a much younger rival in love.97 By novel’s end, Haggard loses all the strengths associated with muscular Christianity, and he is neither physically strong, filled with “religious certainty,” or still able to “shape and control” his world.

Haggard comes to an emotional and physical crisis over his sense that something has changed within his marriage to Cynthia, illustrating the impact of this crisis upon his masculinity. His sister influences this realization, motivated by her confidence that a “girl of nineteen is no wife for a man of your age” (Braddon Vol. 2 80). Judith punctures his protective impulses and devotion for Cynthia with her observation that “a man of your age, who marries a young woman for the sake of her pretty face, is blinder than the blindest mole. He has not eyes to see anything but the prettiness” (Braddon Vol. 2 82).98

97 Even the presence of his spiritual crisis contributes to Haggard’s effeminization over the course of the novel. “Spiritual crises are gendered in the Victorian novel; remaining true to her sacred marriage vows in the face of intolerable personal suffering is the burden of a number of fictional heroines” (Fraser 111).

98 Haggard’s unreasoning love for his young wife can is in part rooted in his age. Naomi’s fiancée explains of Haggard’s besotted manner with Cynthia, “For a man of your father’s age, love is a very serious business. Cupid has a stronger grip upon sober manhood than on shallow and frivolous youth” (Vol. 1 291). This sentiment echoed in Braddon’s Lady Audley’s Secret. Sir Michael compares his feelings for Lucy Graham to that of his first wife (a family-approved and financially advantageous arrangement), “But this was love—this fever, this longing, this restless, uncertain, miserable hesitation. . . . at the sober age of fifty-five, Sir Michael Audley had fall ill of the terrible fever called love” (7).
The suggestion that he has been blind to anything truly amiss raises a “sombre fire” in his eyes, which made her “quail” before the “unknown demon she had raised” within her brother (Braddon Vol. 2 79). Under the influence of this “demon,” he begins to sweat and his “broad muscular hand . . . shook like a leaf. . . . Never had his manhood been so shaken—never in all the trials of his early life . . . had he felt the hot blood surging in his brain as it surged to-day” (Braddon Vol. 2 82-83). Though his hand is still described as broadly muscular, its power is diminished by the rageful fire that rises within him. Braddon’s repeated use of the word shake—with its suggestions of an uncontrolled and trembling, and therefore unmasculine, reaction—serves to underscore how deeply Haggard has been affected by Judith’s narrative. In addition, after their argument, Judith notices that her brother’s fiery rage is gone, leaving him reduced. “He was deadly pale; and now that the angry light had gone out of his eyes, his face had a faded look, as if the anguish of many years had aged him within the last half hour” (Braddon Vol. 2 85). When he goes to his daughter later that day to tell her that her engagement to Pentreath is cancelled, she too notices the impact of the emotional stress he has experienced. “She had not seen him since his interview with Judith; and that aged and altered look in his face, which had struck the sister, alarmed the daughter” (Braddon Vol. 2 87). Both women notice that the anguish of realizing that something may have developed between his wife and his future son-in-law has altered Haggard to the extent that he now appears aged.

In fact, Haggard’s aged exhaustion figures strongly within the novel after his murder of his rival for Cynthia’s desire. For example, when Arnold Pentreath visits Haggard to let him know what he’s learned of his brother’s disappearance (or rather, his
death), he finds him half asleep, “exhausted” from his “pilgrimages over hill and dale”; in fact, Haggard’s “whole life was much more exhausting than it had been, the candle was being burned more fiercely. Traces of fatigue showed plainly in the sharpened lines of his face, in the pallor of his skin, and the shadows about his eyes” (Braddon Vol. 2 194-195). Further, during his confrontation with Cynthia after he thinks she has been conspiring with Arnold Pentreath, “he passed his hand across his brow wearily” (Braddon Vol. 2 208). Finally, on his journey to Cornwall to reclaim Cynthia, he jumps on a carriage before it has stopped and the driver tells him as he’s getting off, “Don’t try to get up to the outside of a coach before the horses ‘ave stopped. You’re in the prime of life, sir, maybe; but you’re a good many years too old to do that with safety” (Braddon Vol. 2 279). The driver offers a mixture of affirmation and denigration of Haggard’s aging masculinity – while he is as the driver politely puts it, in the “prime of life,” he is also a “good many years too old” to be jumping onto moving carriages. The once virile and manliest of men, capable of besting the ocean, is now ashen and faded, exhausted by his disappointment in love. Though he had once felt 20 years younger in the thrall of his desire for his much younger wife, losing confidence in her desire for him reverses that rejuvenation, leaving him visibly aged. Though in the first half of the novel, he is repeatedly presented as having escaped the effect of aging, he is no longer able to resist its imprint upon his appearance.

Braddon reveals that Haggard himself fears his advancing age has rendered him undesirable. Despite his attempts to come to peace with the incident of his wife and Oswald reading Werther. his sister’s hints and whispers are like “poison” to his mind and he observes that Cynthia is “under the burden of some secret sorrow” – leading him
to suspect that something is amiss (Braddon Vol. 2 77). Braddon makes us privy to his attempts to work through Cynthia’s visible manifestations of unhappiness. He wonders if she “regretted” their marriage, “that she had chosen him hastily, mistaking religious fervour for love?” – a fear that, as has been established, is an accurate reading of Cynthia’s feelings for her much older husband. He then asks himself, “How should she love me? . . . A man more than twice her age; grave—full of cares for serious things. Is it natural that she should find happiness in my society or in the life she leads here?” (Braddon Vol. 2 78). Haggard’s readiness to accept that his wife does not love him, that she would find life with a “man more than twice her age” monotonous, reveals his sense of his vulnerability as the older half of an age-disparate marriage. As Haggard comes to sense, perhaps their pairing is not a natural venue to happiness, leaving it open to rupture under the pressure of age-matched attraction.

While Haggard’s body is clearly imprinted by his sexual disappointment, his mind, once clear and sharp is also affected – illustrating the deeply felt impact of his loss of assurance in his young wife’s love. His thinking is described as becoming dream-like or detached from reality. For example, when Arnold Pentreath comes to him, we see Haggard with an outside perspective, one his awed and fearful family and parishioners do not: “Joshua Haggard opened his eyes and started up. He looked at Arnold curiously for a moment or so, as if he scarcely knew him—like a man not quite released from the thraldom of a dream” (Braddon Vol. 2 194-195). Further, as the coachman observes at novel’s end, “the fact is the minister is wearing of hisself out. . . . He’s got oddish ways with him, and a look as if he didn’t half know what’s going on round him” (Braddon Vol. 2 280). Though Haggard’s reputation remains such that he escapes justice for Oswald
Pentreath’s death almost solely on the basis that he is still perceived as a great man, some can detect that he has become odd and detached from reality. Haggard’s spurning of Cynthia also affects his preaching. As his daughter notices, when he preaches, he does so “without plan or method,” lacking his former “logical precision or directness” (Braddon Vol. 2 227). At the pulpit, he turns the pages of the Bible “nervously” (Braddon Vol. 2 227), as though afraid of what he might find that will refute his condemnation of Cynthia and mortal punishment of Oswald Pentreath. As Braddon makes clear, succumbing to both his desire for Cynthia and his fiery jealousy regarding his loss of assurance that she mirrors his desire devastates this once seemingly ageless man.

Haggard’s sexual jealousy over Cynthia’s desire for Oswald Pentreath is actually another facet or expression of his mania. If his mania is rooted in his obsessive strategy, to use van Zuylen’s term, to believe that his young wife’s desire for him matches his own, it is easy to locate the anxieties that drive such psychological machinations. “Amorous jealousy tells us less about the fear of unfaithfulness than about our need for unblemished validation. The self will only be convinced of its own worth by the faultless devotion of another” (van Zuylen 11). Further, as van Zuylen explains, Freud suggested jealousy is a “compensatory activity,” one that “works towards preserving something that would have weakened in a matter of time. It is a crafty system of postponement” against acknowledgement of one’s “own impotence” (12, 13). Haggard’s jealousy serves to validate and compensate for his masculinity – indeed weakened, and according to the thinking of the time, devolving towards impotence. Haggard’s strategy to stave off and postpone that loss is a relationship with
a much younger woman, one who makes him feel loved and desired. The flaws in such a system however, are multiple. Not only does the compensation not resolve the underlying gap or void that inspired Haggard’s obsessive strategy but it leaves him even more vulnerable. In an echo of the narrator’s injunction to not trust a young heart, this “unblemished validation” cannot be sustained. Indeed, Cynthia never desired him as he had hoped and in time, her head and heart turns to another (and younger) man. With the shift of her romantic focus goes Haggard’s grasp of his own waning masculinity, and in turn, his sanity, revealing just how much his “crafty system of postponement” was shifting to conceal.

Readers are quick to identify one of the inspirations for Haggard’s madness as sexual jealousy. Haggard himself makes the connection after he reads The Sorrows of Werther, the book that revealed Cynthia’s feelings towards Pentreath, and reflects that he could have had the same happy ending of Goethe’s characters, though “Albert did not know that his wife’s heart had gone from him” (Braddon Vol. 2 100). The knowledge he does not possess his “wife’s heart” creates in Haggard a “jealousy of the past, jealousy of a ghost” (Braddon Vol. 2 140), which makes him stonily immune to entreaties of forgiveness from other characters, including his wife. Haggard’s recognition of his own jealousy is matched by Arnold Pentreath’s suspicions. His struggles to enact revenge for his brother’s death are filtered through his willingness to “believe that Joshua’s crime had been an act of jealous madness” (Braddon Vol. 2 246). This pairing of sexual jealousy and madness is little understood by one of the chief actors in its inspiration, however. While Cynthia knows that her husband’s feelings have changed since his discovery of her feelings for Oswald, she is unable to understand
why. “She did not believe that jealousy was the cause of her husband’s
estrangement. . . . She did not know that there is a kind of jealousy, and that which has
its root in the deepest love, which puts on the garb of hate, and has not seldom
culminated in murder” (Braddon Vol. 2 140). Just as Haggard’s conception of Cynthia as
a perfect woman does not allow her to possess human foibles, her admiration and
respect for her husband, as well as her emotional naivety, makes it difficult for her to
imagine that both he and their marriage could be undone by something as irrational and
petty as jealousy.

Braddon strongly posits that Haggard’s passions inspire not only his pursuit of his
beautiful young wife but also his religious-mania driven spurning of her. While Cynthia
thinks her husband’s rejection is rooted in hatred or disgust, the narrator suggests that
Haggard’s “deepest love” for his young wife also plays a part. The narrator compares
Haggard’s unreasoning jealousy to that of Othello’s – both have the “passion of strong
natures” (Braddon Vol. 2 140). Passion is a word with associations of intensity of
emotion, sexual desire, and an outburst of anger, which are all true in Haggard’s case.
Characters within the novel also recognize Haggard’s passionate nature. For example,
after he heatedly attacks his sister as a means to protect Cynthia—and his idea of their
love—from her pointed accusations of impropriety, she replies “I’m sorry to see you so
beside yourself with passion” (Braddon Vol. 2 82). Further, in his confessional letter to
Arnold Pentreath, Haggard admits he was driven by “blind passion,” a characterization
echoed by his daughter who described him as being “blinded, maddened by passion”
(Braddon Vol. 2 270, 271). Unfortunately, as shown in the actions of Haggard (and
Othello), “passion is fatally blind” (Braddon Vol. 2 140). As a result, Haggard cannot see
the truth that his wife had never physically strayed from their marriage. Though he may have felt the “deepest love” for his wife, it is a love that is irrational and “unreasoning” (Braddon Vol. 2 260). The gratification Haggard receives from having married Cynthia is undone, revealing the underlying insecurities that drove him to seek out marriage. After months, Haggard eventually realizes he misjudged his young wife. As he comes to acknowledge “I have known no peace of mind since that day. Heaven has given me no token of approval or forgiveness” (Braddon Vol. 2 261). Previously so sure that God would approve his sacrifice of his young wife’s love, Haggard begins to doubt heavenly approval of his harsh and violent actions.99 The narrator admits that Haggard had “been oppressed and troubled in mind for a long time” and it now appears as though he himself has realized that perhaps he was not in the right after all (Braddon Vol. 2 269).

Worn and aged by his breakdown and recognition that he was in the wrong, Haggard’s once-vibrant masculinity fully gives way. In his letter of confession to Arnold Pentreath, Haggard wrote that Oswald “stole my young wife’s heart—came between me and the most perfect happiness that Heaven ever vouchsafed to man” (Braddon Vol. 2 269). In reality, however, as we have seen, it was Haggard and his injured spiritual and sexual pride that “came between” him and his “perfect happiness.” As Braddon’s narrator observes, Naomi had “noted his conduct to his wife, and had seen his harshness, his coldness, his growing aversion—the chilling mask which passionate love

99 Readers have long criticized the unbelievability of Cynthia’s innocence. For example, Robert Lee Wolff finds Cynthia’s apparent innocence implausible — “As a married woman, Cynthia could hardly have been as innocent as MEB made her, especially after a girlhood spend in a traveling circus” (272). So, too did a contemporary reviewer in the Spectator, who felt that Braddon had “exaggerated Cynthia’s innocence to ‘absurdity’” (Wolff 275). But, though it may indeed seem absurd, certainly Braddon does not suggest that Cynthia is more sophisticated than she appears to be to Haggard, despite spending her early years in a “traveling circus” (Wolff 272). As Pamela K. Gilbert affirms, “Cynthia is exactly the innocent child she looks” (Gilbert 186). Haggard’s first impression of Cynthia is the correct one.
puts on when jealousy gnaws the heart” (Braddon Vol. 2 213). Haggard’s “jealousy” is what undoes a good marriage, and leads to three deaths. As he admits to his daughter on his deathbed, “My latter days have been full of sin. I have been the slave of passion. And yet I might have been happy. I can see her still—sitting in the sunshine—hair like spun gold—so helpless and lovely, so ignorant of good and evil—like Eve when God gave her to Adam” (Braddon Vol. 2 298-299) – though, sadly, Haggard himself is the serpent in his own Eden. His admission that he has been a “slave of passion” reveals much about the era’s perceptions of aging male desire as unstable and ungovernable. However, while readers receive full disclosure of the nature of his sin, curiously the townspeople and Haggard’s parishioners “still honour Joshua’s memory as that of a great and good man” and that “no shame or dishonour has ever been attached to [his] name in the public mind” (Braddon Vol. 2 303). While he has been a “slave of passion” and committed various acts of violence—whether emotional, spiritual, or physical—under its thrall, Haggard’s desires and all he did for them rests quietly in his grave. As Braddon makes clear, Haggard’s religious mania is inspired by his sexual jealousy for his young wife’s age-matched desire. However, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, writers increasingly argued that the desires of young women—fictionally represented in this chapter by Cynthia and in the next by Mary and Avice—should inspire marital decisions, an outcome that ultimately undermines the desires of aging male characters.
CHAPTER 6
MAKING WAY FOR YOUNG LOVE: TRANSFORMING AGING DESIRE AND
CELEBRATING MUTUAL PASSION IN TROLLOPE AND HARDY

In August 1888, Mona Caird’s article, “Marriage,” was published in Westminster Review. In it, Caird explored the ways in which the “present form of marriage” is a “vexatious failure,” asking how it can “be rescued from a mercenary society, torn from the arms of ‘Respectability,’ and established on a footing which will make it no longer an insult to human dignity” (“Marriage” 197). Caird’s interest in reforming marriage from an insultingly mercenary institution to one that is warmly loving and happy was part of a larger effort to (in an echo of Darwinian sexual selection) make the specifically sexual desires of women predominantly important in the pursuit of marriage. This model can be seen in the novels of Anthony Trollope and Thomas Hardy, both of whom bring age-disparate pairings to the brink of marriage and then have them retreat into paternal relationships. Trollope’s An Old Man’s Love (written in 1882, published posthumously in 1884), is about a man in his early fifties who wants to marry a young woman in her early twenties but instead assumes a guardian role in order to facilitate and support her marriage to a man her own age. Hardy echoes this age-disparate construct in the two versions of his novel, The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved (1892) and The Well-Beloved (1897). Whether the older man’s marriage to a much younger woman is annulled (as in 1892), or the younger woman elopes with a man close to her own age before they can marry (as in 1897), in the end, the older man (fifty-nine or sixty, depending on the
version), funds the younger woman’s marriage to a man her own age, though he had wanted her for himself.100

These older characters’ desires for younger women are frustrated for one simple reason: their age. Despite these characters’ hopes and machinations, they are shown to be over the tipping point for romantic love – as affirmed by the era’s developing attitudes towards appropriate rationales for marriage. As this chapter shows, writers—including Caird, Frances Power Cobbe, and Marie Corelli—began to argue for changes in Victorian conceptions of marriage, suggesting they led to a suppressing, undignified, and slave-like existence for women. They asserted that financial considerations and duty, the very concerns that drive the acceptance of marriage for Trollope and Hardy’s young female characters, should not motivate marriage. Instead, writers sought to re-define marriage, arguing that it must be inspired by mutual love, passion, and friendship – ultimately affirming that age-disparate marriages are best avoided due to their potential for personal, domestic, and social disaster. According to this thinking, rather than marrying the young woman himself, the older man should protect her financial and romantic interests, in effect acting as a steward for a future that she will not share with him.

If the title of Trollope's novel prompts the question, what is an old man's love, these texts suggest it is one that is best chaste, and Trollope and Hardy's novels illustrate the bitterness and loss that pervades an aging man's decision to accept his

100 The protagonists of these novels do offer an echo of Dickens’s John Jarndyce. He releases his younger fiancée, Esther Summerson—who had been his ward—to marry a man close to her own age and buys them a home to live in after their marriage. However, as their age-disparate pairing is a minor plot line in Bleak House, this novel is outside the scope of this project. In contrast, in Trollope and Hardy novels this focus is central, as reflected by the titles of these novels, which refer to one or the other half of the age-disparate pairing.
transformation from a viable love interest into a paternal figure. As Chapter 2 touched upon and this chapter makes clear, an aging male body, no matter how seemingly youthful in appearance, could be read to detect a man’s social and biological age. That reading would, in turn, determine whether a man had aged to the extent that he had become desexualized. As such, Trollope and Hardy’s protagonists are inspected and evaluated by other characters (and inspect and evaluate themselves) to determine how deeply aging has impacted them. This evaluation determines whether the characters have stepped over the razor’s edge that divides an aging man from maturely distinguished to doddering, signaling whether the marriages could be inspired by the young woman’s passionate love or merely her pecuniary interests and duty – with the former considered unlikely if not impossible by common Victorian opinion, and the latter the expected motivator for age-disparate pairings. According to the era’s thinking, a man’s age determines his right to experience and pursue desire, and, as it turns out, a man’s age also determines whether he can be truly desired – illustrating that masculinity is potentially reinforced or undermined by desire depending on a man’s place on the life course. Examining these two very different novels together with late-nineteenth century marital writing shows that the novels are, in fact, part of a larger conversation that argued for honoring and privileging the desires of young women. Rather than solely expressing a move of loving sacrifice, then, we can see the male characters’ forfeiting of their marital interests as a painful acceptance of the desexualization prescribed by both their advancing age and the era’s idealization of mutual passion as an indicator of true marital compatibility.
Though it might be imagined that there would be little overlap between the novels of Trollope and Hardy, both show a surprisingly consistent concern with (and answer to) the perceived problem of age-disparate desire. At the opening of Trollope’s *An Old Man’s Love*, William Whittlestaff’s quiet and scholarly existence in the country is interrupted by learning that the now-orphaned daughter of his best friend faces destitution. As Mary Lawrie is in her 20s and he is in his 50s, he decides to bring her to live with him as his adopted daughter. Soon, however, Whittlestaff falls in love with his ward, proposing marriage. He is then faced with winning the affections of a woman who both sees him in a fatherly light and is already in love with a man close to her own age who is too impoverished to marry her. Inspired by duty, Mary accepts Whittlestaff’s offer of marriage the same day that John Gordon, her first and true age-matched love, returns to propose marriage. The remainder of the novel explores Whittlestaff’s struggle to honor both Mary and his desires, with the older man ultimately ceding to his younger rival. The other novel examined in this chapter has a similar outcome. Originally published serially, Hardy’s *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* was developed, with changes that are touched upon in this chapter, five years later into the novel, *The Well-Beloved*. In both versions, the protagonist (Jocelyn Pearston or Pierston, depending on the version) is a sculptor of some acclaim who grew up on an island off the southern coast of England and returns three times during his adulthood to

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101 Changes between the two versions have been carefully delineated by critics Richard H. Taylor, Patricia Ingham, and Anne C. Pilgrim, but the focus of this analysis will be the third chapters, which make the most overt commentary on age-disparate marriage; in the 1892 version, this chapter is called “A Young Man of Fifty-Nine,” and in the 1897 version, is titled, “A Young Man Turned Sixty.”
unsuccessfully court three generations of look-alike women named Avice Caro.\footnote{In this chapter’s analysis of the two versions of Hardy’s novel, the protagonist will only be referred to as Pierston when the 1897 novel edition differs from the one published serially in 1892.} His pursuit of marriage to the third Avice, as detailed over the last third of both versions of the novel, is complicated by his age (he courted her grandmother, after all) and her pre-existing love for an impoverished man her own age, ending with Pearston withdrawing his romantic interests. Ultimately, both novels affirm the ideals of marriage put forth by fin-de-siècle writers, affirming that young passionate love trumps the love of kind and wealthy (but unfortunately) old man.

**Barriers to Age-Disparate Desire: Victorian Attitudes Towards Women’s Marital Choice in the Fin De Siècle**

Unsurprisingly, Caird’s “Marriage” inspired a heated response, one that to quote editor Harry Quilter, was considered the “greatest newspaper controversy of modern times” (qtd. in Richardson 183). This, as *Court Journal* described it, “very clever” article (qtd. in Richardson 183) generated this reaction for several reasons. First, Caird’s controversial take on marriage as akin to a financial transaction, and worse slavery, went against the grain of Victorian belief regarding the role of women and the sanctity of the domestic sphere. Second, as critic Valerie Sanders explains, Quilter “published a selection” of Caird’s article “under the heading *Is Marriage a Failure?*” and solicited his readers’ response. Quilter’s inquiry was a resounding success, as “within six weeks, some 27,000 readers had taken up the *Daily Telegraph*’s invitation to respond to the issues raised by Caird” (Heilman 166). As the volume of these letters attested, “many of his correspondents clearly thought” this question was an important one, and “welcomed the chance” to respond to Caird’s ideas (Sanders 25). Clearly, her article touched a
nerve, one that reveals how deeply many Victorians were considering the meaning of marriage. As Victorian pro-marriage writer, Elizabeth Rachel Chapman, admitted, “the once sacred and once theoretically indissoluble life-tie between husband and wife has become, in short, an open question” (qtd. in Sanders 25). Sanders explains that “if marriage was the norm in Victorian middle-class England, it was a highly uneasy norm, constantly under attack from lawyers, reformers, moralists, and feminists” (25). This section examines how Victorian writers, like Caird, Cobbe, Corelli and others, contested, considered, and idealized marriage as a means to combat the misery of “an unhappy marriage,” which “means utter shipwreck of the woman’s life” (Caird “Ideal” 623).

One way in which fin-de-siècle writers argued against the era’s standards of marriage was to demonstrate how it was largely devoid of sacrament and romance, and ultimately more like a commercial exchange. For example, in “The Modern Marriage Market,” a series of articles written by Marie Corelli, Susan Jeune (Lady Jeune), Flora Annie Steel, and Susan Harris (Countess of Malmsberry). In this series, published in 1897 in the monthly magazine, The Lady’s Realm, each writer considered Victorian attitudes towards the pursuit of marriage, weighing which motivations were the most appropriate and morally valid. Marie Corelli, the best known and most widely critically considered writer of the four,103 bemoans how the “weight of polite lying” suppresses the

103 As Annette R. Federico explains, though Corelli “wrote at a time when feminist agitation was at its peak,” she had a mixed reaction to the era’s emergence of feminism, and “opposed women’s suffrage and detested the New Woman” while she also “believed in the intellectual equality of women, supported women’s economic independence as an indispensible right, and loudly opposed sexism within the male literary establishment (241). Similarly, Janet Galligani Casey argues while Corelli “supported the general spirit of feminism . . . she also cherished her role as a Victorian woman who must necessarily recoil from any frank discussion of a frankly sexual nature” that was common among New Woman writers of the era (165).
truth regarding the “modern marriage market,” as she termed it, a term redolent with mercenary associations. And indeed, as she explains, she specifically wrote the article to allow the magazine’s women readers to understand that “nowadays we are married, both men and women alike, for what we have, and not for what we are” (Corelli 17). She bemoans how the “spirit of fin de siècle cynicism and mockery” has “pervade[d] all the preliminaries of marriage and marriage itself” and as a result, “the high and noble intention of marriage is entirely lost sight of in the scheming, the bargaining, and the pricing” (Corelli 35, 20). She argues that though the British of the 1890s “shuddered gracefully” at the prospect of slavery that, in fact, the London season is akin to the slave market of “Stamboul” with couples not truly being married, “but bought for a price” (18). Caird, too, bemoans the financial overtones of marital choice, decrying that “capture-marriages” and other marital subjection has dominated the history of marriage (“Marriage” 191) and tracing how Victorian conceptions of marriage are rooted in the “ancient practice of bride purchase,” arguing that even in the 1890s, “a nubile Victorian woman effectively sold herself to the highest bidder” (Yalom 269). In fact, as Caird puts it pointedly, “women were bought and sold as if they were cattle,” making clear that Victorian marriage deprives women of not only romance but also humanity (“Marriage” 192).

Lest a fin-de-siècle reader think that Victorian women who marry well are a fortunate product of the modern marriage market, writers also made clear that such marriages, no matter how advantageous, were a likely avenue to wretchedness. Corelli, for example, points out that these marriages can often lead to deep unhappiness, asking: “Will the possession of jewels, gold, and estates, be of any avail as consolation in the hours of pain and loss?” (49). As these writers make clear, a life of bejeweled
luxury will be poor comfort to the emotional poverty than can accompany mercenary marriages, illustrating what a poor exchange many of the era’s women made when marrying. Caird provides further detail of what the “pain” of Victorian marriage can entail. Though Caird acknowledges “there are bright exceptions to this picture of married life” as bleak, as she argues, “in most cases, the chain or marriage chafes the flesh, if it does not make a serious wound” (“Marriage” 197). And the chafing and wounding quality of Victorian marriage indeed impacts the “flesh,” as marriage legally gave “husbands complete possession of their wives’ bodies,” including the ability “to force sexual intercourse and compulsory childbearing on their wives” (Kent 92), making marriage “little better than sexual slavery” (Heilman 165). In fact, with the developing awareness of the catastrophic impact of diseases like syphilis to women and their children, marriage was indeed something to be feared. The parallels between marriage, sexual slavery, and financial interests led writers like Caird to posit, “Prostitution is as inseparable from our present marriage customs as the shadow from the substance. They are two sides of the same shield” (“Ideal” 635). Worse, though the era’s marriage, child custody, and divorce laws had improved by the end of the

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104 Interestingly, some writers of the era also expressed the fear that re-approaching the grounds of marriage would leave women even more vulnerable to male sexuality. A representative perspective was shared by Lady Emily Acland: “It is the Christian religion which has raised women to the position they now occupy. GOD has protected women by His law of marriage. We do not want to become simply the slave and plaything of men’s passions” (qtd. in Kent 103).

105 In addition, developing awareness of the potential transmission of venereal disease and the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth heightened the fears of what marital intimacy offered (Kent 104-109). Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) is an example of *fin de siècle* fiction that represents those dangers, as can be seen in her examples of Evadne and Edith, the latter of whom dies from contracting syphilis, a topic analyzed by Elaine Showalter in “Syphilis, Sexuality, and the Fiction of the *Fin de Siècle.*” In fact, other critics have explored the novel’s association between degeneracy and aging, with critic Lisa K. Hamilton discussing how it shows a “particular kind of body is dangerous” and that an “aura of agedness, exhaustion, and physical decay” indicates degeneracy, positioning aging within the era’s larger narrative around gender and conceptions of degeneracy (72, 73).
nineteenth century, most women still had little recourse in ending their marital misery, for, as Caird explain, “a woman regards it as her duty to endure the worst miseries of an unhappy marriage, although conscious that she has been forced or persuaded into it” (Caird “Ideal” 627). The weight of that sense of duty not only leads women into marriages devoid of real feeling and affection, but also keeps them there, illustrating to degree to which marriage could damn Victorian women to a life of misery.

A further signal that a marriage was on shaky moral ground was the ages of the couple, with age-disparate marriage argued to be a clear venue to marital unhappiness. For example, Mrs. E. B. Duffey, Victorian writer on etiquette, in her 1873 text, *What Women Should Know*, asserts that the comparison of marriage to prostitution is particularly true of age-disparate marriages. Duffey argues they are worthy of “abhorrence” as “there is something utterly repugnant to good morality and good taste in such a union” (qtd. in Stall 162). She asserts that such marriages “can certainly never be brought about through motives of mutual affection,” making the young woman motivated by “mercenary motives,” and therefore making her “worse, if possible, than the prostitute . . . in many of these ill-assorted marriages of old men to young girls, the motive upon one side is physical, and upon the other is financial. One lusts after the flesh, and the other lusts after the gold” (qtd. in Stall 162-163). As Duffey makes clear, the old fool who will trade his gold for flesh is worthy of contempt, casting a particularly unsavory light on the marriages Trollope and Hardy’s protagonists are pursuing. And, the young women who accept an age-disparate, or “ill-assorted,” marriage are also problematic, as Duffey’s description of them as worse than prostitutes for accepting marriages that cannot be inspired by “mutual affection” illustrates. Susan Harris, one of
Corelli’s respondents, agrees with Duffey that women should “learn that all that glitters is not gold” (163). In order to ensure that “perfect union,” Harris suggests that those seeking marital happiness “must bring a certain capital of youth and health, and in addition, qualities, moral and mental, such as are necessary to advance them in their condition of life” (163, 164). Her emphasis on the youthfulness and health—an association the era’s science and medical writers reinforced through their delineation of the debilitation associated with aging, as shown in Chapter 2—of those marrying makes clear that marriage is the purview of the young.

Another way in which fin-de-siècle writers argued against the era’s standards of marriage was to connect them to Darwin’s theories of sexual selection. The direct influence of his ideas on the thinkers and writers of his time can in part be seen in the way in which Darwin’s text “provided an intellectual foundation to Victorian feminist aspirations and aesthetic ideology. . . . The theory of sexual selection, after all, posited narratives of courtship in which females were the ultimate decision makers and males competed for female approval in order for procreation to occur” (Kaye 86). The impact of this new narrative of the key role of female-driven sexual selection can be seen, for example, in feminist writers who used Darwin’s ideas to argue that the qualities that are seen as inherently feminine were in fact the result of social influences. Critic Gillian Beer argues for such a link, explaining, “It is likely that the Descent, even more than the Origin, was the seedbed for later Victorian writers, such as George Gissing, Grant Allen, H. G. Wells, and for New Woman novelists, like Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, and George Egerton” (xxiv). Further, critic Richard Kaye also suggests asserts “there was material in Darwinian evolutionary theory for Victorian feminist theory” (101). Caird’s attention to
the “socially constructed nature of biological discourse” (Richardson 185) was revealed in, “Marriage,” where she argues against the “careless use of the words ‘human nature’ and especially ‘woman’s nature,’” explaining that “history will show us, if anything will, that human nature has an apparent limitless adaptability, and that therefore no conclusion can be built upon special manifestations that may at any time be developed. Such developments must be referred to certain conditions, and not be mistaken for the external law of being” (186). While, as Beer explains, the “idea of sexual selection made for a complex confusion of biological and social determinants in descent, transmission, and sex-roles” (200), Caird and her ilk felt no such confusion, arguing instead that women should realize they did not have to accept the supposed dictates of nature as law when choosing who and why to marry.

The unhappy Victorian marriage was argued to not only damage women on an individual level, but in an echo of Victorian precepts of aging sexuality, to also result in larger personal and social ills. For example, Frances Power Cobbe, best known for her spirited defense of women’s rights to education and employment as an antidote to the problem of the many unmarried Victorian women (i.e., the surplus woman problem, see Chapter 7), suggests that true freedom in choosing marital partners can be linked to both individual happiness as well social benefits, arguing that if Victorians “seek to promote the happiness and virtue of the community, our efforts must be directed to encouraging only marriages which are the sort to produce them – namely, marriages founded on love” (Cobbe 72).106 In addition, Caird cautions that as a result of women’s

106 Recent criticism has explored Cobbe’s importance. Albert Sears argues that her 1878 article, “Wife Torture in England,” “so thoroughly exposed the inadequacy of laws pertaining to domestic violence that Parliament answered her call within two months” and amended the Matrimonial Causes Act (67).
continual emotional and physical subjection, men and women cannot easily have “friendly discourse,” which makes it nearly impossible for “the sexes to learn about the truth concerning the real thoughts and feelings of the other” (“Marriage” 186-187), knowledge necessary for true marital partnership. Further, as Caird delineates, the impact of that suffering and lack of mutual understanding is that women’s mistreatment is paid back in marital unhappiness for both partners: “Through her, in great measure, marriage becomes what Milton calls ‘a drooping and disconsolate household captivity’” (“Marriage” 187). As Cobbe, Caird, and other writers make clear, Victorian conceptions of marriage can produce a multitude of negative consequences, ones that indeed appear to threaten the happiness of fictional Mary Lawrie and Avice Caro.

Merely citing the consequences of Victorian marriage customs and laws for women was not enough – the era’s writers also made a point to redefine what the ideal marriage would entail. As Susan Kingsley Kent argues, “starting in the 1880s,” writers made an “assault on marriage” that “constituted a fundamental element of the women’s attempts to gain freedom, equality, dignity, respect, and power” (81). However, as part of this attempt, writers did not necessarily argue for a “radical break with tradition” by “reinventing rather than rejecting their domestic role,” as critics Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis explain (9). Instead, as an antidote to what was argued to be the Victorian norm of marital misery, writers proposed grounding marriages in deeper and more genuine emotions. Caird argues that ideal marriages will occur as a result of

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Hamilton also examines that article as a means to reveal the “complex interactions of Victorian feminisms and the mainstream, established press” (“Making” 438), also suggesting that Cobbe’s work at the Echo allowed her to “shape public opinion on the ‘Woman Question,’” making her work more widely available to women who did not self-identify as feminists (“Locating” 48).
“genuine attachments founded on friendship” (“Marriage” 200), suggesting that women should seek relationships that are built upon camaraderie, compatibility, and respect, rather than a need for financial and social stability. In addition, Susan Harris writes of the “deep longing which consumes both men and women”: the “hope of fellowship and effort to attain perfect union” (156). One way to ensure Victorian women were free to choose loving marriages is economic independence, a topic considered by Cobbe in a 1862 article where she argues against marriage driven by “interest” or selfish, financial motives and instead wants women to pursue marriage “founded on free choice, esteem, and affection – in one word, on love” (Cobbe 72). As Hamilton argues, Cobbe’s “vision” for marriage is not for women to “risk marriage unthinkingly” but to “decide her future from a position of freedom” (“Locating” 60). Caird also argues that the “first condition of free marriage” is the “economical independence” of Victorian women, asserting that they “ought not to be tempted to marry, or to remain married, for the sake of bread and butter” or “for the sake of freedom and a place in life” (“Marriage” 199, 200) – concerns that indeed weigh upon Mary and Avice. Further Caird suggests, “even the idea of ‘duty’ ought to be excluded from the most perfect marriage” (Caird “Marriage” 197-198). Mutual, “intense” attraction and passion are what should drive these ideal marriages, not considerations of dutiful obligation or financial need – an argument that both Trollope and Hardy ultimately affirm in their novels.

A primary way Victorian writers argued marriage could be ideal rather than mercenary or inspired by duty was to ensure it was inspired by mutual passion. For example, Caird argues that the ideal marriage will arise from passionate attachment and should only be pursued if “life apart will be empty and colourless” (“Marriage” 197),
leaving no place for the burden of duty or financial need when selecting a spouse. In “The Modern Marriage Market,” Susan Jeune “argues that the “hearts of girls in England are pure and single-minded,” and as such these paragons of purity should choose their husbands—“their helpmates and companions in life”—motivated by “love” and “pure, genuine passion,” no matter “however well gilded or attractive may be the advantages which money without love holds out” (90). Jeune’s privileging of love and passion is fascinating in part because even her largely conservative perspective celebrates physical “ecstasy,” which makes the seemingly universal message clear – not only does friendship matter, but also sexual attraction. And indeed, sex was, in fact, seen as a key component to marriage – an idea with negative implications for aging men. As Estelle B. Freedman and Erna Olafson Hellerstein argue,

Marriage entailed the right—and the duty of mutual sexual access. The marriage ceremony of the Church of England required the groom to say to his bride, ‘With my body I thee worship’ . . . Indeed, Church and State recognized sex as the essence of marriage, and counted the inability or refusal to perform as among the few grounds for the annulment of the marriage contract. (124)

Here the potential complications for the age-disparate couple as imagined in the era’s medical and science writing are multiple: perhaps the aging man will not be able to consummate his marriage, leaving it invalid; and, perhaps he will not be able to adequately control the impulses that drive such bodily worship, a possibility that became increasingly intolerable to late-Victorian feminist writers.

Indeed, in an echo of both Darwinian ideas and those of moralists and physicians who critique age-disparate marriage as likely leading to heartbreak (as discussed in Chapter 2), writers who consider and sought to reform marriage suggest that women who ignore their needs for passion will cause disaster. Corelli, for example, cautions
that the “passion of love is a natural law,—a necessity of being” and, as such if a woman marries “without that love truly and vitally inspiring her, she will in time find that the ‘natural law’ will have its way, and attract her to some other than her lawful husband, and drag her steadily down through the ways of sin to perdition” (Corelli 43-44). Not marrying for true and passionate love then, is a sure path to misery for all involved – a “natural law,” as is shown in the following sections, that Whittlestaff and Pearston attempt but fail to overcome in their pursuit of marriage to much younger women.¹⁰⁷

John Maynard traces the influence of Christianity in shaping conceptions of marriage and male sexuality, explaining, “it built a system that presented sex as a most dangerous force that must, at all costs, be appeased. The underlying structure of thinking is one that empowers and celebrates sex as it seems to deny it: a kind of steam pressure system with marital sex the control valve that alone can prevent a moral catastrophe” (28). If sex was seen as a “dangerous force” that only marriage could control, then it is easy to imagine that the aging man would be seen as having a poor grip on its “control valve,” leaving him vulnerable to a variety of catastrophes, moral and otherwise. It is no wonder that each of the writers featured in this project affirm the attitude espoused by the narrator of H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887), Ludwig Holly, who in speaking of “true love,” claims “all I have to say is that it is a very bad state of mind for a man on the wrong side of middle age to fall into” (262). Indeed, as this project

¹⁰⁷ Fascinatingly, Flora Annie Steel, one of the latter respondents to Corelli, derides both the “girl who gives herself for exchange in pure passion” and the “one who sells herself for gold,” arguing that both are equally “mercenary” (102). In contrast, she insists women “need a surer guide, a more bracing and wholesome gospel” in selecting whom to marry (Steel 129) – one that takes into consideration the good of society as a whole and primarily focuses on the procreative purpose of marriage.
shows, the literature of the era abundantly illustrates the badness of love for a character who is middle-aged and older.

“It Was a Pity That He Should Be So Much the Elder”: Passionless Proposals, Rejected Affection, and Transformation of Desire in Trollope

William Whittlestaff initially appears to have a paternal interest in Mary Lawrie. In fact, the twenty-five year difference in age convinces him that he can bring the now-orphaned daughter of his friend into his home without scandal. He tells himself and others that she will live there “as though she were my own daughter” or “my own girl” more than once, which the narrator helpfully explains, “By this he meant to imply that he would not be expected to fall in love with her, and that it was quite out of the question that she should fall in love with him” (Trollope 5, 4). The narrator’s seemingly heavy-handed clarification, as well as Whittlestaff’s repeated characterization of Mary as daughterly, suggests that he is attempting to persuade himself that he will only have fatherly feelings for the younger woman.108 Whittlestaff’s elderly housemaid, Mrs. Baggett, is clear about her suspicions regarding his abilities to maintain a paternal interest. As she explains, “It ain’t for your good, Mr. Whittlestaff. You ain’t a young man—nor you ain’t an old un; and she ain’t no relations to you. That’s the worst part of it. As sure as my name’s Dorothy Baggett, you’ll be falling in love with her” (Trollope 5-6). As Mrs. Baggett points out to Whittlestaff, at fifty, he is neither young nor old, a sentiment echoed by the narrator, who explains of Whittlestaff: “He was not a young man, because he was fifty; but he was not quite an old man, because he was only fifty”

108 Critics have described the relationship between Whittlestaff and Mary in a variety of ways that underscore their father-daughter relationship, such as “his adopted daughter” (Ray 113) or his “ward” (Lansbury 99, Tracy Trollope’s 93).
Trollope provides further evidence of Whittlestaff’s liminality of age (which has unsurprisingly inspired exploration by other scholars of Victorian conceptions of aging). For example, despite being past mid-life, the novel makes clear that Whittlestaff still retains physical vitality. As the narrator explains, he is “as fit, bodily and mentally, for hard work as ever he had been,” while his “mouth was large and manly. The strength of his character was better shown by his mouth than by any other feature” (Trollope 12, 22) – a description that suggests he possesses sensual appetites. Critics also read Whittlestaff as being youthful despite his age, with John Sutherland describing him as “just 50 years old” and “hale,” concluding that “this ‘old man’ is as sound as a nut” (vii). Whittlestaff, at “just” fifty, is healthy enough to be considered “sound as a nut,” and young enough that “old man” can be put in quotes – in other words, not a man heavily marked by old age. Further, as the narrator explains, in a classic affirmation of the precept that men can age well, though he shows “signs indeed of age,” including graying hair, they were “signs which were very becoming to him. At fifty he was a much better-looking man than he had been at thirty” (Trollope 21). Whittlestaff is both a “young man” and an “old un,” and while he lives a stuffy and monkish bachelor existence, he is still attractive and strong.

109 The covers of various editions of the novel seem to share characters’ struggle to define how old fifty truly is by including portraits of men who are decades older than Whittlestaff, who is fifty, apparently mislead by the novel’s title.

110 Karen Chase explores the instability of age found in Trollope’s novels to lead into an examination of almshouses. Esther Godfrey explains that Whittlestaff’s age put him in a “position between an elderly sexual ambiguity and a youthful virility . . . the text also indicates that perceptions of age, like perceptions of gender, are subjective” (188-189). Finally, Kay Heath argues, “Whittlestaff is described in terms of liminal aging at midlife. Though the title claims that the protagonist is ‘old,’ the opening contends with that description, representing Whittlestaff in a border space of late midlife” (65).
As is soon clear, however, Whittlestaff’s liminality of age does not translate to his being a viable age-disparate love interest. The reader has no reason to imagine that Whittlestaff will not seek to mend his long-ago broken heart with Mary, or for that matter, that she will not be attracted to this older man. In fact, after proposing marriage, Whittlestaff tells Mary with his hand over his heart that “I have got a place for you;—but it is here” (Trollope 54). To Mary, his “power of speech” and “dignity” makes him “not now appear so old,” helping her realize that if she had not already fallen in love with thirty-year-old John Gordon that she might be able to come to love Whittlestaff (Trollope 54). Of course, it is not difficult to notice that Mary does not see him as young, but “not . . . so old,” a distinction that marks him not necessarily elderly but still aged. A contemporary reviewer complicates this reading of Whittlestaff, describing him as an “elderly gentleman who falls in love” and claiming that “he is old beyond his years, for he is only 50; and he is made more of a prig in manners and deportment than he need have been” (Unsigned notice, The Times 523). The reviewer’s description of him as both “elderly” and “old beyond his years,” as coded by his priggish and scholarly demeanor, affirms the Victorian conception of 50 as beyond maturity and into decline, and supports the idea that aging has markers beyond the chronological or biological. For further affirmation of this reading that Whittlestaff is already in decline, Trollope offers the perspective of Reverend Blake, who lives in the same town as Whittlestaff and describes him as “old” to Gordon, who in turn clarifies that his rival has “just turned fifty” (Trollope 98). Blake is dubious of such distinctions saying that though he is not a “cripple or bedridden,” “fifty is old” (Trollope 98). And though Blake may suggest
Whittlestaff is “not at all too old to fall in love with any young lady” (Trollope 98), as *An Old Man’s Love* shows, he does not inspire “any young lady” to “fall in love” with him.

Whittlestaff himself reads his body for signs that he is indeed too old to be loved and desired by Mary. Suspecting that his age is a barrier to marital happiness, he sadly reflects, “Yes; it was a pity that he should be so much the elder. And he knew that he was old of his age,—such a one as a girl like Mary Lawrie could hardly be brought to love passionately. . . . He looked at himself in the glass over and over again, and always gave the verdict against his own appearance. There was nothing to recommend him” (Trollope 153-154). Though at fifty he is not elderly, he is staid and comes across as older than his age, and therefore apparently unable to inspire passionate, desiring love. A look in the mirror puts Whittlestaff in poor comparison to the dark haired and strapping Gordon, making him feel as unlovable as he feels unloved. As he puts it, after repeatedly inspecting and interpreting his appearance, he has “nothing to recommend him” as a love interest. As this mirror scene shows, Whittlestaff interprets his appearance in a manner that reflects the era’s medical writing on aging, as detailed in Chapter 2, illustrating the extent to which he has accepted his own desexualization.

Early in the novel, Trollope makes clear that Whittlestaff is aware that Mary does not see him in terms of romance, illustrating their complete lack of romantic reciprocity. For example, his desire to woo and win Mary is frustrated by the coolness and reserve of her regard for him, as he continually fails to break through the “respect, verging almost into veneration” in her manner “which seemed to crush him when he thought that he might begin to play the lover” (Trollope 18). Later, once Whittlestaff summons the courage to hope for more than “veneration” from Mary, he makes one of the more
poignantly pathetic proposals ever recorded in literature: “Mary . . . can you endure the thought of becoming my wife?” (Trollope 35). The reader cannot help but notice that though his delivery may be characteristically understated, rather than conveying a hope that she will feel joyful at the thought of becoming his wife, Whittlestaff frames his bid for marriage as though it is a “tedious” punishment that he hopes Mary can withstand (Trollope 54). Critic Kay Heath discusses how this proposal reveals Whittlestaff’s undermined masculinity, explaining, “his resolve to wed Mary may seem a declaration of romantic viability, but when he eventually proposes, he does so not in the confident tones of love, but as a suitor devalued by age” (65). Certainly Mary’s response to his proposal—“she drew her arm away, and turned her face, and compressed her lips, and sat without uttering a word” (Trollope 35)—underscores their lack of emotional connection and suggests that Whittlestaff will never be able to truly bridge the gulf between his previous role as father-figure and his hoped-for role as lover. Indeed, Mary’s reply to Whittlestaff’s proposal lacks the passionate directness that one might expect and is instead expressed as a winding, negative construction, suggesting doubt. She says, “I suppose so. . . . If you wish for me, I will be yours” (Trollope 42) – making clear that she herself does not want to be his wife, but that if he wishes to have her, she will obey his desires, indicating how far this proposal falls short from the era’s marital ideal of mutual attraction.

Trollope further colors Mary’s decision by emphasizing her sense of duty to the man who so willingly took her in. She knows that she is a recipient of charity—as she puts it, “were not the very boots on her feet his property?”—that saved her the indignity of having to work as a “friendless governess” (Trollope 32). And though her “heart
welld over with gratitude,” this feeling is nothing like that she has for John Gordon, the “young man who had stirred her heart, and had won her affections” (28). As Trollope makes clear, Mary does not accept Whittlestaff’s proposal of marriage because she loves him; instead, the weight of charity and gratitude, along with her assumption Gordon will not return for her, demand her acceptance. The overriding role of duty in her acceptance of Whittlestaff says much about the emotional gap that exists between Mary and the much older man she is to marry. Whittlestaff himself is conscious of the duty that his charity places upon Mary, one that highlights the difference in their ages. As he tells himself, in an echo of Caird’s injunction for women not to be concerned for their “bread and butter” when marrying, “a grey-haired old fool, such as he was, had no right to burden the life of a young girl, simply because he found her in bread and meat. . . . I am an old man, and an old man shouldn't ask a young girl to sacrifice herself. . . . Love, I fear, is out of the question. But for gratitude I would not have her do it” (Trollope 19, 21). Further, after the return of Gordon, Whittlestaff relies upon financial justifications for his claims to marry Mary. He asks himself, “how frequently do diamonds melt and come to nothing?” suggesting that Gordon’s fortune is ephemeral and making Whittlestaff sure he “was the safer staff of the two on which a young lady might lean” (Trollope 146-147). Despite his attempt to convince himself that he is the “safer” and more “superior staff” (no comments needed on Trollope’s phallic word choice and suggestive character naming) for Mary to lean upon, a “pang in his bosom—a silent secret . . . kept on whispering to him that he was not the best beloved” (Trollope 147-148). Though he has said he accepts that Mary may not return his passionate love as yet, the narrator reveals the “pang” that stings his hope for perfect marital contentment: that he is not
and never will be her “best beloved.” As the marital writing of the era argues, and Trollope affirms, duty and financial considerations are not a justifiable rationale for age-disparate marriage.

The lack of emotional connection between Whittlestaff and Mary is matched by a lack of physical chemistry. Before their marriage, “Mary Lawrie was as cold to him as though he had been seventy-five instead of fifty,” and Mary’s acceptance of Whittlestaff’s proposal does little to thaw her regard (Trollope 8). Unable to bridge the gap between his desire and her conception of him as fatherly, Mary appears to be revolted by the prospect of intimacy with Whittlestaff. For example, she readily clasps his hand when he request her to do so after her acceptance of marriage, but when he asks her for a kiss, “She just turned herself a little round, with her eyes bent upon the ground” (Trollope 42). Her body language is clear – by turning away, she wants to put space between herself and the man she is to marry, while the lack of eye contact evinces disengagement and perhaps even fear. Whittlestaff tells her “there must be a kiss,” reminding her that “Mary, you are now all my own” (Trollope 42). His ownership is a sentiment echoed by Mary herself, who tells herself that “she would not begrudge him kisses if he cared for them,” as they were “his by all the rights of contract” (Trollope 43). When he later “pressed his lips to hers”—an exceptionally clinical and non-stirring description of a kiss—she asks herself, “How was it possible that she should prevent him?” (Trollope 55). Mary’s horror at the prospect of intimacy with Whittlestaff is accentuated by this continued acknowledgement that she has no real grounds to deny him; as his affianced, and then his wife, she must submit to that which Caird and others identified as the sexual slavery implicit in Victorian marriage: “He had, as it were, taken
complete possession of her, by right of the deed of gift which she had made of herself that morning” (Trollope 56). However, though he may be able to press his lips to hers, she will only be aping affection, for as Mary asks herself, “Of what comfort could she be to him, seeing that she had been unable to give him her heart” (Trollope 48). While Whittlestaff can claim her body, and hope to win her affection, few indicators suggest such an outcome is possible – an outcome easily predicted by the era’s marital writers (as well as the medical writers detailed in Chapter 2).

Whittlestaff reads Mary’s reserve and lack of interest in physical affection as a reflection of the disparity in their ages. He wonders aloud, “How should I change my habits, so as to make my advanced years fit for your younger life?” and hopes that he is “not yet too old to make this altogether impossible” (Trollope 52-53). In fact, Mary does read him as aged, as shown when after her spiritless acceptance of his offer, she watches him from a distance and notices “that he appeared older than she had ever remarked him to be before. . . . There was no look about him as that of a thriving lover. Care seemed to be on his face,—nay, even present, almost visibly, on his very shoulders” (Trollope 43, 49). Rather than jubilant and enlivened by the prospect of attaining his dream of marrying the younger woman, Whittlestaff appears older than he ever has. The visible imprint of the stress of disclosing his love and having it almost wholly rebuffed, as well as worrying about how to make Mary happy, weighs upon

111 As Mary asks herself later when wondering why submitting to Whittlestaff’s touch feels “strange”: “But was she not his property, to do as he pleased with her? And there could be no ground for displeasure on her part” (Trollope 169). Mary’s dispirited acquiescence to Whittlestaff’s affection is similar to the plight of Rhoda Broughton’s Nell in Cometh Up as a Flower (1867). She asks herself of Sir Hugh, her older fiancé, “am I not his property? Has he not every right to kiss my face off if he chooses, to clasp me and hold me, and drag me about in whatever manner he wills, for has he not bought me?” (325). Broughton, however, does not spare Nell marriage as Trollope does Mary, only putting her out of her misery via death.
Whittlestaff, aging him. Throughout his cogitations regarding his desire to wed Mary, Whittlestaff cannot escape the sense of himself as an old man, one who feels far too old to inspire the attachment and desire necessary to generate genuine marital interest. He is a “grey-haired old fool,” and one who cannot apparently expect love from a woman so many years his junior. Though, as he tells himself, “possessing her would give a brightness to his life,” Whittlestaff is conscious that he may not be a similar source of brightness for the younger woman (Trollope 42).

Trollope signals Whittlestaff’s impending transformation to a paternal figure through the return of his young rival, John Gordon. As the novel’s detailed description of Gordon makes clear, he offers a very different sort of masculine appeal from that of Whittlestaff. In fact, as critic Esther Godfrey argues, as Mary’s “sexualized masculine ideal,” Gordon “embodies a youthful and sexual masculinity, and for the rest of the novel, serves as a foil to the aging Whittlestaff” (192). Indeed, Gordon is described by the narrator as the “personification of manliness,” with his “iron will,” his tall and strong physique, and his taciturn but gentlemanly bearing (Trollope 44-45). In addition, Trollope makes the “younger and more dashing rival . . . a man of action” (Tracy “Lana” 19), as shown when made poor by his father’s bankruptcy, he goes to South Africa to make a fortune that “might enable him to marry Mary Lawrie, and he had carried his purpose through with a manly resolution” (Trollope 69). Critic Shirley Robin Letwin reads Gordon as affirming the relevance of sexual desire in selecting a husband, arguing, “Far from suggesting that woman are or should be any more indifferent to sexual desire than men are, Trollope denounces those who believe a women should be free from that desire” (Letwin 141) – an attitude that many of the era’s marital writers
indeed espoused. And in fact, Mary’s resolution to put her feelings for Gordon behind her is directly challenged by his physical presence. She sees his “black hair, his bright pleasant eyes, his masterful mouth, his dark complexion, and broad, handsome, manly shoulders” and wants to “rush into his arms” but “repressed herself” upon remembering that she has promised herself to Whittlestaff (Trollope 65-66). While Trollope provides extensive evidence that Whittlestaff is older but not old, any seeming ambiguity of age he may possess is shown in poor contrast to a rival with “broad, handsome, manly shoulders.”

Trollope provides extensive textual evidence that Mary’s passionate preference for Gordon is, in fact, natural. As critic Coral Lansbury puts it, Whittlestaff “sees himself as lover and husband” (99); however, though he sees himself in that mode, no one but his elderly housekeeper, Mrs. Baggett, shares his view. For example, Montague Blake points out to his fiancée “a lady always prefers a young gentleman to an old one,” while Blake’s fiancée—who is near Mary’s age—agrees, claiming, “If it does turn out that she marries Mr Whittlestaff, I shan’t think much of her, I can tell you that” and calls the thought of marrying Whittlestaff herself “nonsense” (Trollope 144, 142). In addition, when Mary mulls over which man to choose, the narrator intones, “could there be a doubt” as to which man that indeed would be: “Was it not in human nature that she should bind herself to the younger man, and with him go through the world, whether safely or in danger?” (Trollope 156-157). Further, later in the novel, Whittlestaff realizes that not only was his love triangle a source of gossip to his neighbors, but further that “all the world was against him,” and admits that losing Mary to Gordon is an outcome
that is painful but one “nearer to human nature” (Trollope 218, 250).\footnote{This condemnation takes on overtones of incest, as shown when upon meeting Whittlestaff, Gordon is shocked to learn that the man Mary is to marry “had usurped the place of guardian” (Trollope 72), with the word “usurped” suggesting that there is something transgressive about their pairing. Whittlestaff interprets Gordon’s surprise as saying, “Who! an old man like you to become the husband of such a girl as Mary Lawrie! Is this the purpose for which you have taken her into your house, and given her those good things” (Trollope 76), suggesting Whittlestaff lured Mary into his comfortable home with the express purpose of making her his wife. Mary herself affirms this idea; when Gordon asks Mary when the transition from guardian to lover happened, she replies, “It has been happening, I suppose, from the first day that I came into his house” (Trollope 82). As critic Robert Tracy puts it, Whittlestaff “tries to keep his young ward for himself” (Trollope’s 93), while as Kay Heath points out, “he literally could be her father,” both of which Whittlestaff’s interest in Mary as predatorily incestuous overtones (66).} Marrying Whittlestaff may offer shelter, but it would be a “nonsense” choice for Mary, and one not in keeping with human nature – reflecting the attitudes regarding the importance of mutual desire expressed by the era’s marital writers, as well as the Darwinian theories of sexual selection embraced by those writers.

Indeed, An Old Man’s Love fully affirms that financial need and the burden of duty cannot trump age-matched love as a basis for marriage. Michael Sadleir describes Whittlestaff’s desires for Mary as “fondness—half protective and half passionate—of a man of fifty for a girl some thirty years his junior” (220), and after Gordon’s reappearance, Whittlestaff’s passions give way to his protective impulses for the young woman he loves. Faced with a growing sense of responsibility towards honoring Mary’s desires for another man, Whittlestaff realizes that the “only gentlemanly and decent thing is for him to give her up” and to “stand at her wedding as her father, not her husband” (Super 427). Trollope further cements Whittlestaff’s paternal role by having him not only release Mary, but also financially support her marriage to Gordon. If he cannot offer her comfort and safety as his wife, then in an act of “saintly renunciation” (Terry 169), he can shelter her financially, as he would a daughter. By novel’s end, Trollope makes Whittlestaff good on his initial promise to make Mary his daughter,
telling her, “I, at any rate, shall have no wishes,—except what may be best for your welfare . . . There will be money matters, which you will have the goodness to leave to me. Are you not my daughter, Mary, my only child?” (Trollope 258). Whittlestaff cannot bring himself to marry another man’s love—as he puts it, “I could not hold her to my bosom, knowing that she would so much rather be in the arms of another man” (Trollope 223)—and, so instead fills the role of the father, offering a dowry in place of a life by his side. Critics have seen Trollope’s novel as affirming “that elderly solicitude and desire are no substitute for youthful passion” (Edwards 81) and arguing for a “distinction between love and affection or admiration” (Letwin 140). As Trollope shows us through Mary Lawrie’s plight, respectful admiration cannot be viable grounds for marriage. As critic Robert Tracy puts it, Whittlestaff “recognizes the limitations his temperament and years place on him; he accepts these limitations at last, recognizing . . . that a function of old men is to relinquish” (Trollope’s 321-322). Indeed, as Victorian marital (and medical) writers affirm, aging men should “relinquish” their romantic claims to much younger women, and instead make way for young love.

“He Had No Business There”: Passionless Proposals, Rejected Affection, and Transformation of Desire in Hardy

Nearing sixty, Pearston’s restless search for his perfect woman—his “Well-Beloved” or ephemeral ideal of feminine beauty—has seemingly evolved in a manner that reflects his increasing age. When Pearston was younger, Hardy’s narrator explains, each woman had been “nothing to him other than the temporary abiding-place,” but with the perspective of age, “his heart showed extraordinary fidelity to the specimen, with all her pathetic flaws of detail” (Hardy 116). In fact, early in this section of the novel, with his seeming “fidelity” to even a woman’s “pathetic flaws,” it appears that Pearston will
match his love life to his chronological age. Before he meets the third Avice, for example, he considers marrying her now care-worn mother, who having through the effect of time and experience has been reduced to a “sorry shadow” of her youthful self (Hardy 117). He is not perturbed by the “decline of his adoration to friendship,” because he initially feels that a marriage inspired by friendship is more in keeping with his age. “If he did not love her as he had done when she was a slim thing catching mice in his rooms in London, he could surely be content at his age with comradeship. . . . The feeling that he really could be thus content was so convincing that he almost believed the luxury of getting old and reposeful was coming to his restless, wandering heart at last” (Hardy 118). However, the promise of growing “old and reposeful” evaporates once he meets her daughter, and the second Avice becomes the “old Avice,” a “relic of the Well-Beloved” and its “empty shrine” (Hardy 120). Pearston, on the other hand, appears largely unaged and “unaltered” from his last visit—as the second Avice says, “Why – you are just the same!”—a fact that seems to sadden him; as the narrator explains, his “inability to ossify with the rest of his generation threw him out of proportion with the time” (Hardy 117). Pearston, then, is a man whose appearance, desires, and age are at odds, leaving him as vulnerable to disappointment as the younger, but older in appearance and behavior, Whittlestaff.

Pearston’s desire for the third Avice quickly comes up against his age anxiety. They first meet when he rescues her after her foot gets caught in some rocks during a nighttime walk. With his relatively youthful appearance—he is described as “well preserved, still upright, trimly shaven, agile in movement,” making him sound very much like a spry mummy that has come back to life (Hardy 123)—the “flattering rays of the
moon” offer him a chance to pass for a younger man and allows him to inspire the young woman’s interest (Gilmartin 234). In the 1897 version, Pierston even says he might have been as young as the third Avice thought he was “as far as feelings were concerned,” suggesting that he retains an emotional youthfulness to match his apparently youthful body (Hardy 295). This encounter makes Pearston wish for Mephistopheles to appear with an offer of “restoration to youth,” which fills him with a “rush of sadness” that swept through his soul, taking him far from the contentment that seemed possible earlier in the day (Hardy 124). And, while he does gain her interest, the third Avice thinks he is a “younger man – a much younger man” than his real age, leaving him with a “dread of encountering her in full light till he should have advanced a little further in her regard” (Hardy 125, 126-127). He conspires to keep his real age concealed by prevaricating how long it had been since he had lived in the castle she works in, obscuring his previous relationships with her grandmother and mother, and by taking “evening promenades” by moonlight, which allow him to continue to feel he can pass as a viable love interest.113

Unsurprisingly, both versions of the novel present a dim view of such age-obscuring behavior. And, perhaps these are the moments that inspire critics both contemporary and modern to consider this novel a lesser or “minor” work in Hardy’s oeuvre (Irwin 45). For example, critic Annie Escuret characterizes Pierston’s quest for his Well-Beloved as “no more than buffoonery” (210). Indeed, the narrator calls

113 An unsigned notice from the Atheneum connects his improbably youthful experience to his seeming lack of sexual experience – something he also shares with the monkish Whittlestaff: “On the physical size of passion, he knows a little as any man so susceptible [to female beauty] can do. As a result, he retains his youth, and the pathos of his wooing at sixty is hardly disturbed by any such suggestion of the ludicrous as a similar spectacle would ordinarily arouse” (318).
Pearston “that ancient youth” and describes his romantic interest as the “desultory courtship of a young girl by an old boy,” both of which cast a pathetic and incongruous light on his romantic interest (Hardy 128, 130). The 1897 version takes the characterization of his attraction as pitiable further by suggesting that Pierston does not have the “courage” to face her in the daytime because he worries that he might lose the “advantage that he had already gained, or fancied he had gained,” cuing readers that his desire of gaining romantic ground with the third Avice is likely the work of hopeful imagination (298). Pearston himself feels “almost ashamed of the brightness of his ardour for her,” suggesting that even he realizes that the intensity of his passion for the third Avice is unseemly or inappropriate (Hardy 129). And, by Victorian standards, many would have indeed classified his passion for Avice as problematic. As Kay Heath, scholar of Victorian literary representations of aging, points out, at Pierston’s age “he would have been considered elderly in Victorian England but sees himself as a much younger man,” which makes Pearston’s desire to mask his age and court the very young Avice all the more troubling, even if he can pass for younger (163).

Like Whittlestaff, Pearston directly considers his aged looks in evaluating the suitability of his feelings for a much younger woman. While the third Avice may have conceived of Pearston’s age as one that fits with his slim and agile contours, this conception cannot stand up to the harsh scrutiny of sunlight. The critic Michael Ryan argues that “Hardy mocks Pierston’s agelessness,” showing it as “illusory” and that “Pierston only appears to be eternally young” (181, 183). On the other hand, Heath

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114 Additional critiques include characterizations of Hardy’s novel as “bizarre” (Ingham “Provisional” 55), as well as an “oddity,” “curious,” and “unusual” (Taylor 147, 148, 169). This novel is almost universally considered something of a puzzle and was long neglected in criticism of Hardy’s novels.
claims, Pearston’s “youthfulness is not depicted as a sham or ridiculous self-deception but instead as authentic and the basis of genuine attractions,” which hardly seems to be borne out by Hardy’s narration (165). Indeed, the sunlight shows the largely illusory quality of Pearston’s “eternally young” appearance, showing how this character’s appearance and psyche are at odds at this point in the novel. As the narrator intones, “The person he appeared, by daylight, being chronologically so far in advance of the person he felt himself to be, Pearston did not care to regard that figure who now confronted himself so mockingly” (Hardy 134). The mocking quality of his reflection is intensified by his judgment that “never had he seemed so aged by a score of years as he was represented in the glass in that cold grey morning light,” as if the anticipation of fully revealing his appearance to the third Avice has accelerated his aging (Hardy 134). Though Pearston attempts to qualify his age as “not exactly old,” knows he looks “considerably younger” than his true age, and can pass as even younger by moonlight, he also sees “history in his face – distinct chapters of it” (Hardy 129). Hardy’s language here makes clear the difference between how an aging man sees himself and how others see him – for while Pearston thinks he can obscure the imprint of “history,” as the novel shows, he cannot. Heath argues that this mirror scene illustrates the “extent to which male age boundaries can be stretched and shows that eventually even the most insistent youthful self-image is defeated,” and certainly, as Victorian medical writers make clear, a “youthful self-image” has no defense against the impact of aging (163). Though as he puts it “his soul was what it was,” it has become “encumbered with that withering carcase” (Hardy 134). With this rather grim characterization, the third Avice
unsurprisingly reacts with shock to the “distinct chapters” of “history” in Pearston’s appearance.

Hardy presents Pearston’s interest in marriage to the third Avice in such a way that underscores the futility of his desires to win her love. While he is “overjoyed” at the prospect of marrying young Avice, it quickly becomes clear that like with Trollope’s Mary Lawrie, practical considerations, rather than desire and love, predominate for other characters when considering this union (Hardy 125). As he puts it to the second Avice, through marriage he can finance and “indulge” her daughter’s “every whim” while living, and can provide financial support as well as freedom after his death (Hardy 125). Though Avice’s mother initially demurs, “I would rather have her marry a younger man,” concern over her failing health inspire her to seek to get the marriage “settled” (Hardy 126). He replies to her inquiry regarding his marital interest in a moment of clarity, “With all my soul! But she doesn’t want me” – however, the second Avice’s urgency to arrange their marriage leaves concerns for what the third Avice might want disregarded. She tells her daughter that despite their difference in age, “you will ever get a better husband I don’t believe. . . . Come, he is a good man and a clever man, and a rich man. I want you much to be his wife” (Hardy 133). Indeed Pearston does wish to be Avice’s husband—with “all” his “soul,” as he had put it—but her first objection affirms his fears:

115 The 1897 version intensifies the mother’s involvement in this marriage, describing it as being “brought about by her mother’s contrivance” (Hardy 301). The well-meaning but mercenary machinations of Avice the second is echoed in other Victorian fiction. In George Meredith’s *Ordeal Of Richard Feverel* (1859), Clare’s mother, Mrs. Doria, tells her former flame, “I’ll do the wooing for you,” in her bid to have her daughter comfortably married (327). This age-disparate “common-sense marriage” (331), like so many others in fiction, does not lead to wedded bliss – instead, Clare dies soon after.
“I thought Mr. Pearston was younger” (Hardy 133). Her mother reassures her that "that counts for little" when you “think of his position,” and Avice, who “did not care to argue,” demurs, “I think I can agree to marry him . . . I see that it would be a wise thing to do, and that you wish it and that Mr. Pearston really does – like me” and that she "suppose[s] it was necessary" (Hardy 133, 138). Pearston and her mother, driven by differing, and what critic Anne C. Pilgrim calls “doubtful” (132), motivations unrelated to Avice’s emotional well-being or desires, do not hear the young woman’s “think,” “see,” and “suppose” and understand that while she may agree that their marriage would be necessary it will not be based upon genuine affection and compatibility. With such description, critics like Patricia Ingham have characterized this relationship as Pearston’s “hijacking of the unwilling girl forty years his junior” (Ingham “Introduction” xxvi) and the third Avice as a “virginal creature forced into a loveless marriage and sexual relations” with her “elderly” prospective husband (Ingham “Provisional” 54, 58) – a description that Caird, Corelli, and others would agree with. The gap between the third Avice’s feelings and desires, and those of her much older fiancé and her mother, support the era’s spirited condemnation of age-disparate marriage as resembling prostitution.

Hardy uses Avice and Pearston’s marriage in the 1892 version of the novel to reinforce and emphasize the couple’s unbreachable emotional and physical divide. As

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116 The lack of reciprocal romantic interest is heightened when Avice discovers just how much older her aged suitor is. When she sees him indoors the first time, she "hardly seem[s] to recognize him," exclaiming with "evident surprise": “I thought Mr. Pearston was’—What she had thought he was did not pass her lips, and it remained a riddle for Pearston until a new departure in her manner towards him showed that the words ‘much younger’ would have accurately ended the sentence (Hardy 132-133). Hardy makes her so disturbed by the revelation of his age—and likely she has no idea of his true age since he does not look his chronological age—that she seems near fainting, leaves the room to compose herself, and returns “visibly pale” (Hardy 135).
the narrator observes of their wedding morning: “Avice, with a curious access of modesty, had stood somewhat behind the door, and she vented a constrained little laugh when he kissed her on the cheek. There was only time to speak in business-like tones of the formal matters in hand” (Hardy 137). Rather than the joy one would hope would characterize that day, their union is instead “business-like” and “formal,” very much what one would expect from “the modern marriage market.” And, as with Whittlestaff and Mary, Avice repels physical affection from Pearston, responding to his show of affection with laughter and keeping the door between them as buffer to his advances. This distance is maintained after they move to London, where the narrator describes Avice as “charming, even if a little cold” (Hardy 139). Her coldness does not at first do more than slightly disquiet Pearston. In time, however, it becomes obvious that Avice’s feelings for him will not thaw. For example, when Pearson comes home to his sleeping wife, Hardy characterizes her reaction with vivid language: “his light awoke her; she started up as if from a troubulous dream, and regarded him with something in her open eye and large pupils that was not unlike dread. It was so unmistakable that Pearston felt half paralysed. . . . All of sudden he felt that he had no moral right to go further. He had no business there” (Hardy 141). If she found kissing her husband laughable, the prospect of deeper intimacy fills her with fear. Pearston’s realization that he only has access to her “corporeal frame” and recognition of Avice’s revulsion of intimacy leaves him with no moral certitude to claim his marital rights.¹¹⁷ Later in the novel, the emotional gulf becomes more firmly a physical gulf, with the narrator

¹¹⁷ Legally, Pearston was indeed entitled to claim his rights to marital affection without the third Avice’s consent, marital rape not being outlawed in England until 1991.
describing their walk as “onward together – that is, side by side – with a lineal yard between them, for she was never too ready to take his arm” (Hardy 145). The narrator cannot describe them as “together” without equivocating that they are not a pair joined in affection, but rather two people near each other with “a lineal yard between them.” With such literal and metaphorical space, Pearston cannot ignore that their marriage has become a pursuit that has ultimately become frustrated.

Avice’s horror at the prospect of intimacy with the much older Pearston escalates with his confession that he has courted both Avice’s grandmother and mother, leading him to withdraw his romantic interests in her. In the 1892 version, Pearston confesses after their marriage that he was not only her mother’s lover but engaged to her grandmother. Avice does not quite believe he could be old enough, and asks, “Why, how old are you? – you have never told me,” to which he replies, not fully answering her question: “I am very old” (Hardy 142). In a moment the critic Richard H. Taylor has described as touched by “grim farce” (167), Avice then asks whether he had also courted her great-grandmother. “‘No not your great-grandmother’s [lover].’ He winced at that question, unreflecting as it had been put. . . . ‘But I am very old.’ ’I did not know it was so much!’ she said, in an appalled murmur. ‘You do not look so, and I thought that what you looked you were.’ ‘No; I am very old. . . . And you – you are very young’” (Hardy 142). That acknowledgment of their apparently appalling “contrasts” in age closes their conversation (Hardy 142). Pearston’s sympathy for her misery and his recognition that they had “crossed” the “division, on which they had long trembled” makes their marriage very much like a “nightmare” (Hardy 142-143). The 1897 version of the novel intensifies Avice’s horror, with Hardy adding to their conversation, “‘My
mother’s, and my grandmother’s’ [young man] said she, looking at him no longer as a possible husband but as a strange fossilized relic in human form. Pierston saw it, but meaning to give up the game he did not care to spare himself” (Hardy 306). Avice’s existing discomfort with Pierston’s aged appearance is amplified once she realizes just how old he truly is: not her mother’s peer, but her dead grandmother’s. He is no longer a man but a “strange fossilized relic in human form,” something that belongs in a museum or tale of horror, and not anything a beautiful young woman should be paired with. After his confession—which “troubled” Avice, who sat “regarding him now and then with something in her open eyes and large pupils that might have been sympathy or nervousness”—Pierston decides to give up the idea of marriage to the younger woman (Hardy 306).

In an echo of An Old Man’s Love, Pearston and Avice’s tenuous romantic connection is also completely undone by the reappearance of her first and age-matched love. After his return to the island, Pearston learns that a young man who Avice had received a letter from in London has come to see her. She tells him that she had been with her lover—a “handsome young man”—who had returned to “claim” her in marriage (Hardy 153). He asks, in anguish over this predicament, “Why in the name of common-sense, didn’t you marry him before you ever saw me?” (Hardy 151). However, in another parallel to the Trollope novel, Avice and Henri Leverre did not marry because the young man did not have the funding necessary. And, even though Leverre knows she is now married, he returned to the island because, in her words, “he couldn’t help it,

118 The Well-Beloved does not end with a regretful (and regretted) marriage, and Hardy instead places Pierston’s confession prior to his, Avice, and her mother’s visit to London in anticipation of the upcoming nuptials.
because he kept thinking of me!” (Hardy 152). In contrast to the disparity of attachment and affection that marks the marriage of Pearston and Avice, this couple blushes at seeing each other (Hardy 155). Like Mary Lawrie, Avice pledges to “forget” her love, “as I ought to do, I know,” but it is clear that her emotional connection to and passion for the younger man will never be successfully supplanted by the older (Hardy 152). In the face of Avice’s preference for Leverre, Pearston transforms his role from husband to paternal figure. He knows that through marriage he has acquired legal rights to the young woman—“licensed as it might be by engrossings, fees, stamps and ceremonies” (Hardy 156)—but Hardy makes clear that he believes he has no moral rights where love does not exist. As the narrator explains, “The conviction grew that, whatever the rights with which the civil law had empowered him, by no law of nature, of reason, had he any right to partnership with Avice against her evident will” (Hardy 144). As with Trollope’s novel, their disparity in age becomes a way to expose and magnify the question of these rights. In the face of Avice’s utter lack of desire for the older man, he gives way.

Hardy also reflects the era’s prohibitions against aging desire and marriage devoid of mutual passion by affirming Avice’s preference for Leverre as natural and understandable. For example, when an older servant calls Avice a “sly girl” and “ungrateful,” he responds with an “even and characterless voice”: “Don’t blame her” (Hardy 320). He can even accept the “possible ridicule that would result to him from the events of the day”—“He perceived that the younger maids were secretly on Avice’s side” (Hardy 320)—because he believes his motivations are noble and that hers are blameless. For, while “his attraction to the third Avice would be regarded by the world as the selfish designs of an elderly man on a maid,” Pierston sees himself as motivated by
a “sentiment” of “cordial loving-kindness – which had lain behind what had seemed to him the enraptured fulfilment of a pleasing destiny postponed for forty years” (Hardy 324-325). By novel’s end, this “loving-kindness” becomes transmuted from sexual into paternal interest, and in the face of Avice’s lack of regard or interest for her aged suitor, and with an age-matched rival competing for her love, he comes to accept and internalize the version of himself others see, relinquishing his carefully held perception of himself as preternaturally youth. While he once sought physical affection from Avice, he instead “could not help kissing her forehead in pure sympathy, as if she were a child under his care” (Hardy 153). Further, as Pearston tells Leverre, he will fund the younger man’s marriage to Avice, explaining “a large sum of money – a fortune in short – has been settled upon her within the last few days, and upon any possible children of hers” (Hardy 159-160). As in the example of Whittlestaff, Pearston not only sacrifices his desires but also ensures the happiness of his young love. This sentiment is further reinforced in the 1897 version, when Marcia Bencomb\textsuperscript{119} bemoans Avice and Leverre’s impending marriage and Pierston replies that this outcome is “so much the better” for, as he puts it, “I have lived a day too long” (Hardy 328). Hardy’s protagonist cannot justify standing in the way of love, nor depriving Avice of the riches she would have experienced as his wife. He has “lived a day too long” and must make way for the younger generation.

Hardy further cements Pearston’s paternal role by intensifying his aging. Exhausted and aged by all he has lost—which Hardy intensifies through illness—

\textsuperscript{119} Marcia is Leverre’s stepmother, and depending on the version of the novel, the protagonist’s first wife or lover he left the first Avice for.
Pearston loses his ability to pass as younger, no matter the lighting. He is, as the narrator puts it, “the now aged man,” whose “whose worn and dried-up face now fully indexed his age, and indeed more than his age” (Hardy 160, 159). He tells an old friend, Somers, “I am no longer spirited: I am weak. My youth, so faithful to me, so enduring, so long regarded as my curse, has incontinenti departed with the last few weeks” – and in the face of such loss, he attempts to kill himself (Hardy 162). The 1897 version takes his romantic and physical loss further, presenting the former great artist as a man who has lost the ability to appreciate any beauty. While he “survives his illness,” the “physical and emotional stress have combined to precipitate a late-life crisis” (Irwin 48) that causes Pierston to lose his “sentiment” regarding beauty, which at first appalls and then relieves him (Hardy 330). Though Marcia tries to comfort him that his “artistic sense” would return, Pierson says he feels very differently, explaining that he does not “regret” the passing of the “curse” as “fever has killed a faculty which has, after all, brought me my greatest sorrows, if a few little pleasures. . . . Thank Heaven I am old at last” (Hardy 330, 332), a claim, along with his choice to retire and disperse his sculptures, that shows the thoroughness of his transformation.

**Conclusion: from Fiancé to Father-Figure, or “I Can No Longer Love”**

By novel’s end, Whittlestaff’s transformation from love interest to paternal figure is complete. Mary’s unhappiness at the prospect of spending her life married to Croker’s Hall and its owner transmutes into a deep and lasting gratitude to the man who financially rescues her not once but twice. She tells Gordon that they owe their happiness to the “inexpressible goodness” of the older man: “Have you thought what I
owe—what you and I owe—to Mr Whittlestaff?” (Trollope 264). Of herself, she says, “How can I be thankful as I ought? . . . What man has loved as he has done? Who has brought himself so to abandon to another the reward he had thought it worth his while to wish for? You must not count the value of the thing. . . . I was to be the comfort of his life to come” (Trollope 261). Mixed in with all this talk of love is the language of finance and exchange—gratitude, owe, count, reward—transforming love into money, just as Whittlestaff himself is forced to do. An Old Man’s Love provides no encouragement or recommendation for age-disparate marriage, instead suggesting that the only way an aging man can retain his dignity is to make way for young love. Karen Chase suggests, “The prospect of marriage ages him, because it is not after all what he most needs. . . . He thinks he wants a wife and adheres blindly to this conventional formulation of desire, but what the novel shows throughout is that his need for friendship exceeds romantic desire” (68, 69). In fact, Whittlestaff’s heartbreak at losing Mary would suggest that he indeed possesses the “romantic desire” necessary to pursue marriage if not for the interference of his age. Assuming a paternal role may be what Whittlestaff resolves to do, but it is not what he truly desires.

Pierston, too, is unhappily impacted by the loss of Avice. The same man who

120 He does, as revealed in his letter to Mary after Whittlestaff’s visit to London: “His devotion to you is the most beautiful expression of self-abnegation that I have ever met” (Trollope 244).

121 Chase also argues that in facilitating Mary’s marriage to Gordon, Whittlestaff assumes a key though peripheral role, becoming the “elderly ‘friend’ who becomes the confirming supplement to the romance of the young . . . as if youthful love can only fulfill itself when it escapes confinement and diverts some of the affective current to the receptive and sanctioning perspective of age” (69). Certainly, Whittlestaff acts as a key “supplement” to Mary and Gordon’s marriage, though Chase’s reading does not fully acknowledge the loss Whittlestaff experiences by being reduced from love interest to “elderly ‘friend.’” Other critics have also considered the meaning of Whittlestaff’s sacrifice. Esther Liu Godfrey writes that in sacrificing himself, “Whittlestaff assumes a feminized position” (193), which affirms Whittlestaff’s loss as real, both in terms of love and in terms of masculinity. In addition, Bill Overton suggests, Whittlestaff “fulfills himself more satisfactorily by denying himself for the sake of the girl he loves than he could have done by marrying her” (87) – though really, such an ending must fall short of satisfactory fulfillment for Whittlestaff.

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only a short time (and a few pages) earlier offered the ill Leverre his walking stick as he
did not truly need it, fully embraces being “old at last” by dressing in simple and old
fashioned clothes, and growing an old man’s beard and wispy pate (Hardy 333-334).
Not only has the once youthful-by-moonlight Pierston grown old in two years’ time, he
has aged beyond his years into a “passive death-in-life” (Gilmartin 237) and state of
“feebleness” (Irwin 55). This rapid and complete aging refutes the idea that Pierston
truly feels peace with losing Avice, instead suggesting he has been permanently
debilitated by her sexual rejection. As the narrator explains in the 1892 version, “with
the loss of this woman, his third Avice, he had not much left in his life to care for.
Pleasant illusions have one by one been dissipated; he could see the black framework
where the flaring jets of the illumination had once dazzled his eyes” (Hardy 156). For
Hardy’s protagonist, aging offers debilitation, a loss of sexuality, and even the loss of
“pleasant illusions,” leaving him with only the “black framework” of his own aging
existence to contemplate. Left without his sense of self as sexual and desired through
the spurning of “his third Avice,” Pierston suffers precipitously aggressive aging. By
acting so completely “out of his age” by the era’s standards, his unnatural youthfulness
is succeeded by unnatural debility.

As Helen Small says of An Old Man’s Love, “To be ‘old’ is, in this novel, primarily
an expression of exclusion from a fulfilled domestic life” (“Old” 70) – an assertion true
for both novels, which indeed affirms the era’s “exclusion” of aging men from domestic
happiness and fulfillment if it is via marriage to young women. In fact, both Trollope and
Hardy cement their protagonists’ transformations from seemingly liminally aged or
ageless to fully aged by pairing them platonically with women who are close to their own
ages. Trollope leaves Whittlestaff, not with, to use that character’s words, the woman who “would have made beautiful for me my future downward steps,” but alone in his country home with his elderly housekeeper Mrs. Baggett for company (249) – the scenario that marked his bleakly quiet life at the novel’s opening before Mary arrived. Hardy, too, platonically pairs his aging protagonist with a wife his own age. The 1897 ending of *The Well-Beloved* offers Pierston the companionship of his peer Marcia, who is as she puts it, “as old as yourself; and I look it” (Hardy 331-332). As Pierston explains of pursuing their marriage, “I can no longer love; but I admire you from my soul!”, and is sure to remind her that “he has no love to give. . . . But such friendship as I am capable of is yours till the end” (Hardy 332, 335). Hardy’s word choice—that Pierston is now incapable of love and can only pursue passionless friendship—makes clear that this character has lost his claims to passionate love. Pierston’s embrace of being “old at last” seems to convey a sense of peace and acceptance of the changes associated with aging. However, this interpretation is undermined by the narrator, who observes that there was “something pathetic in this announcement” of the loss of his artistic sense (Hardy 330). Indeed, critics have consistently seen his transformation as representing loss, aided by Hardy’s linking of Pierston’s artistic and sexual impulses.122 While he may claim, “thank Heaven I am old at last,” Hardy’s novel provides clear argument that

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122 Gilmartin suggests “his artistic faculty” is “connected with his faculty for love” (236). As John Kucich explains, “Pierston’s funneling of eroticism into aesthetic form,” means that the loss of one, his “eroticism,” signals the death of the other, his “aesthetic” and artistic sense (228). Kay Heath suggests, “having lost his appreciation for beauty, he now inhabits a reduced and insipid world, no longer able to create art of pursue love” (167). Further, as Sophie Gilmartin argues, unlike other Hardy novels, “for Jocelyn it is not the woman who had died, but his own love” and “part of the lover dies with the death of love” (236). J. Hillis Miller explains, “Jocelyn’s artistic creativity is a further displacement of his sexual desire” (*Fiction* 159) while Michael Irwin claims, “Pierston’s art may be seen as merely a by-product of sexual disappointment . . . his art is intrinsic to his erotic life, but this is merely at the level of sublimation” (49).
Pierston’s loss of his sense of his own desirability, and transformation into a paternal figure, is devastating.

And, indeed, as the final dialogue of Trollope’s novel—an exchange between Mary and Whittlestaff after her wedding—affirms, these older male characters’ losses are deeply felt: “‘Oh, my darling! you have made me so happy.’ ‘You will find me better when you come back, though I shall never cease to regret all that I have lost’” (264-265). This dialogue denotes the bargain that both Trollope and Hardy’s characters have made: while Whittlestaff and Pearston/Pierston have ensured Mary and Avice’s happiness with the men they desire and love, both have indeed lost much in terms of how they see themselves and their awareness of how others see them and their romantic desires. As these novels make clear, and the era’s marital and medical writing dictate, these older male characters have only one choice in the face of the reality of their aging and the impact it has on their desirability and rights to desire: to make way for young love. The plight of these two aging protagonists and the young women who spurn them for age-matched love is not the whole story, however. Just as, over the course of the Victorian era, people came to value the role of desire in women’s marital choices, so too arose an awareness that not all women could afford to hold out for that ideal. As the next chapter affirms, age-disparate attraction can indeed lead to marriage and be presented as successful when it affirms the era’s valuing of selflessness in aging men.
As explored in previous chapters, age-disparate marriage has largely been represented as disastrous in Victorian novels. These novelists narrated aging male desire as problematic in some way, arguing, as the era’s thinking did, that aging men must release their claims to romance with younger women or they and the object of their desire will suffer a variety of painful outcomes, including heartbreak, debility, madness, and death. Luckily for the plight of fictional older male characters who fall for young women, Charlotte Yonge, Wilkie Collins, and Thomas Hardy had a more inclusive romantic vision. Their novels—*The Clever Woman of the Family*, *Man and Wife*, and *The Hand of Ethelberta*, respectively—provide an alternative and happier vision for age-disparate marriage. As this chapter illustrates, the desire of older male characters for younger women can lead to marital happiness if they offer financial and social rescue. Looking at these three very different novels as rescue narratives reveals the ways that age-disparate pairings are justified and made socially acceptable. Each author makes these young female characters vulnerable in some way: Fanny’s marriage to Sir Stephen is framed as a rescue from the start by Yonge, ensuring that the fatherless and portionless young beauty is protected; Collins’s Anne Silvester is literally in peril, with Sir Patrick freeing her from a marriage that threatened not only her happiness but also her life, and then ensuring her lasting happiness with marriage; and, Ethelberta’s marriage in Hardy’s novel secures and cements her rise from lower-class status while also preserving the financial and physical health of her much older husband, Lord Mountclere. In effect, marriage to older men erases these young female characters’ vulnerabilities and solidifies their previously undermined status. And, while
each of the young women secures stability via marriage, the marriages featured in this chapter can also offer true affection and love. Despite the era’s precepts against age-disparate marriage—the female characters are in their 20s and younger when married and the male characters are in their mid 60s and 70s—these three examples suggest that where the right intentions align, there can be marital happiness.

Examining these three novels in the context of when they were published in the 1860s and ’70s illustrates the ways in which age-disparate marriage was overjustified—or rationalized with justification different from that which was meant to inspire marriage, such as love, passion, or procreation—in order to be read as successful. This chapter will explore the ways in which Victorians saw aging men as having the potential for greater spirituality and paternal (and therefore more disinterested) impulses, illustrating that these characters represent one possible way that aging could be seen as offering both dignity and happiness. As will be shown, this thinking reifies aging desire as potentially less selfish and more caring than that of younger men, suggesting that age-disparity does not have to be a barrier to—and can, in fact, promote—marital happiness. As a result, these marriages can be seen as affirming a masculinity of a certain sort, offering a venue for an aging man to retain status without complete self-sacrifice (as in the examples of Chapter 6). An additional rationale for why the young female characters need rescue can be located within the larger context of the time, as the novels either criticize marriage laws (Collins) or comment on the surplus woman problem (Yonge and Hardy). As such, marriage to older men can offer an antidote to women’s dwindling access to good marriages. As men aged, their worldly interests were believed to evolve along more nurturing lines, allowing them to meet the needs of these
vulnerable young women. Considering both aging men’s supposed increase in spirituality in tandem with larger social issues facing women illustrates the ways in which the era’s writers sought to rationalize aging desire.

In effect, age-disparate marriages had to be justified on multiple fronts in order to be narrated as successful. While in the previous chapters an older man’s desire must be repulsed, rejected, and supplanted, as this chapter shows, it must be subsumed under other more selfless interests. At first glance, Yonge, Collins, and Hardy’s novels seem to offer portraits of marital happiness that overcome the literary prohibitions against age-disparate pairings. However, marriage is only a possibility for these older men if it offers financial and social rescue for the woman and that rescue is the predominating impulse for the relationship. As a result, these novels no more celebrate the rights of aging men to pursue their desires than any of the others examined in this project. To contextualize this project’s reading of the novels, this chapter first draws upon recent gerontological research. As sociologist David O. Moberg affirms, “very little attention is given to religion and spirituality in gerontological and geriatric education” (7), and this chapter seeks to add to a developing body of research on historical conceptions of aging and spirituality. It also includes Victorian-era writing that considers surplus women and the marriage laws of Great Britain – both assist with establishing why these female characters require rescue via marriage to much older men. While critics have read Collins’s novel through the lens of Victorian marriage laws and have also explored Ethelberta’s marriage (little exists on the Yonge novel), this criticism has not closely considered how the vast difference in each couple’s ages illuminates the era’s conceptions of aging masculinity. This chapter sheds light on the gaps left by
these critics to reveal the cost aging exacts upon older men’s rights to their desires, showing how the justification offered by these three novels “unmanned” (to use one of Collins’s words) these characters. Reciprocity of affection and marital happiness cannot trump the limitations Victorians dictated regarding the impact of aging – even a loving marriage to a young and beautiful woman cannot erase the damage of age upon a character’s masculinity.

*The Clever Woman of the Family, Man and Wife, and The Hand of Ethelberta* were written over a ten-year span, with Yonge’s novel published in 1865, Collins’s published serially in 1869-1870 and as a novel in 1870, and Hardy’s published serially in 1875-1876 and as a novel in 1876. Each novel in some way traces the motivations and impact of three very different age-disparate marital pairings. Charlotte Yonge’s novel primarily focuses on Rachel Curtis, the misguided and not-so-clever woman of the novel’s title. Her social travails and their resulting disasters are periodically interwoven with the story of her cousin, Fanny Temple. Fanny is the mother of six small children and recent widow of the much older Sir Stephen, who married her at after the death of her father and rescued her from a penniless future. Upon her return to England from India where her husband served as a General, she raises her children with the help of her family and friends, fends off marriage proposals, and emerges as a sweetly quiet domestic heroine. In addition, Wilkie Collins uses the plight of Anne Silvester to illustrate how British women were left unprotected by the era’s inequitable marital laws. Seduced by the villainous Delamayn, Anne is left ruined by his attempts to shuck her off to pursue a more socially advantageous marriage, until it turns out that they are in fact married due to the vagaries of Scotch marriage laws. The much older Sir Patrick’s
spirited attempts to rescue Anne from a disastrous (and potentially fatal) marriage lead to what promises to be a very happy age-disparate marriage. Finally, Thomas Hardy’s novel traces the marital aspirations and success of Ethelberta. A former governess who is also the daughter of a butler, she nearly cements her social validity through an advantageous marriage that ends early. Ethelberta juggles multiple suitors until the events of the novel make clear that her best prospect is the besotted and much older Lord Mountclere, whom by novel’s end she reforms through marriage, while also ensuring the stability of both herself and her family. These novels do not offer a standard story – all show age-disparate marriage and the motivations for them differently and even reflect some of the same themes that were shown as disastrous in previous chapters (such as female ambition, unrequited affection, etc.). In addition, the era’s readers would not necessarily have applauded Fanny’s choice to not remarry in Yonge, or Ethelberta’s choice to pursue an ambitious marriage without love in Hardy. However, these three very different young female characters all find financial and social rescue via marriage to much older male characters, and this commonality is fruitful to consider.

“Autumn Rose” Love: Antidote to Desire, That “Savage and Furious Taskmaster”

As this section’s examination of mid-century medical writing illustrates, Victorian physicians were concerned with the spiritual health of their patients. And, one sure avenue to spiritual (as well as bodily) health was to rechannel passionate love along more paternal lines. “The Fourth Period—Advanced Age,” a chapter from Victorian physician William Acton’s widely read 1857 text, opens with his suggestions as to how aging men can “husband” their “sexual powers” (Acton 244). The primary strategy that older men should embrace is to transmute their romantic interests to an “autumn rose”
kind of love for younger women – nineteenth-century physician Joseph-Henri Réveillé-Parise’s term for the chaste sweetness and platonic companionship aging men should seek to enhance their waning years. As Réveillé-Parise explains,

Love, at the decline of life, should take quite a moral character, freed from its animal propensities. In the elderly man it is paternal, conjugal, patriotic attachment, which, without being so energetic as the love experienced in youth, still warms old hearts and old age. . . . These autumn roses are not without perfume—perhaps less intoxicating than that arising from first love, but presenting none of its dangers. (qtd. in Acton 244-245)

As an antidote to the multitude of dangers and humiliations promised by pursuing age-disparate desire, mid-nineteenth-century medical privileged the “autumn rose” mode of love for older men, suggesting that the natural desire that a man who happens to be aging feels for a beautiful, young woman should instead be sublimated into a spiritual, paternal regard. While, as Chapter 2 details, Victorian physicians claimed that men older than sixty should abandon their passions due to their dangers, they also asserted that aging men could rechannel them. This section details how mid-nineteenth-century physicians and medical writers like Acton, along with Réveillé-Parise, Marie Jean Pierre Flourens, George Napheys, and David Maclachlan, privileged spirituality for aging men, as well touches upon the insights of gerontologists, historians, and literary critics.

Aging was believed to lead to greater spirituality for a multitude of reasons. As Helen Small, critic of representations of aging, explains, “The old are expected to be philosophical. This is commonly little more than a wish that a life nearing the end of its possible biological span should be reconciled to the proximity and inevitability of death” (Small The Long 1). The era’s belief in the aged’s “proximity” to death is expressed by Flourens who called these later years “the sacred age,” terming it as such because these are the years “in which the soul feels itself nearer to God” (Small “The unquiet”
Historian Paul Johnson affirms the long-standing association between aging and spirituality, delineating how medieval writers who “emphasised the negative character traits of old age did not dismiss the final stage of life as meaningless” – instead old age was seen as an opportunity for “possible spiritual elevation as the individual could be brought closer to God by means of his or her weak and ailing body” (Johnson 14).

Further, as critic Devoney Looser affirms, during the era, “old age was seen as a virtuous life stage because passions had been exhausted in youth, leaving only moderation and wisdom in their wake” (15). The connection between the impact of aging—in the form of invalidism, infirmity, and long-term illness—and “spiritual elevation” was affirmed by some religious thinkers and writers of the Victorian era, who believed that older people “existed outside of the competitive struggles for wealth, status and worldly pleasure,” leaving them free to focus on less “worldly” concerns (Cole and Edwards 254). Maclachlan, for example, claimed that as the aging were “approaching the termination of their earthly career, and looking peacefully and hopefully forward to the great future . . . the virtuous, placid character of their minds and habits is conducive to further length of years. Age then presents itself in its most attractive forms, and sheds a lustre and a blessing around it” (15-16). Maclachlan affirms that aging can indeed offer benefits, albeit along prescribed lines, quoting eighteenth-century Scottish theologian Blair, who argues, “temperate mirth is not

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123 Recent research has also affirmed the connection between aging and an increase in spirituality. Geropsychiatrist Harold G. Koenig explains that amidst the stresses of ailing health and “insults to self-esteem brought on by loss of social roles in family and community,” religion offers an antidote, as “it can help persons transcend their situations and provide hope” (Koenig 9, 10). Gerontologist William M. Clements also connects aging with an increase in spirituality. As he explains, “The years between 55 and 75 are full of events with developmental implications for the human spirit” including what Clements calls the “crisis of meaning” associated with advancing age, one that provides a “particular opportunity for spiritual growth” (60, 56).
extinguished by advanced years” as “the mild pleasures of domestic life still cheer the
heart” (15). The pleasures afforded the aging then, should be cheerful and mild, clearly
indicating that more worldly and sensual concerns are beyond the aging man’s purview.

The era’s prescription for non-romantic love for aging men is one supported by
multiple Victorian physicians. Réveillé-Parise’s assertion that an aging man’s love
should be moral rather than romantic is echoed by physician and medical writer, George
Napheys. To support his argument that aging men should embrace chaste rather than
passionate love, he quotes Cicero “who, when asked in old age if he ever indulged in
the pleasures of love, replied, ‘Heaven forbid! I have forsworn it as I would a savage
and furious taskmaster’” (39).124 Desire, that “savage and furious taskmaster,” is not for
the aging. Instead, Napheys argues that love “should at the decline of life be freed from
animal propensities, assume a purely moral character, and be directed toward the
younger generations, the children and grandchildren” (39). Love for the aging man,
then, is one best freed from the “animal propensities” (a term used by both Réveillé-
Parise and Napheys) associated with physical passion. Instead, older men should be (to
again draw upon the wording of Réveillé-Parise and Napheys) paternal and inspired by
love that is not tainted by self-interest, but instead is pure and “warms old hearts and old
age.” Nineteenth-century French physiologist Marie Jean Pierre Flourens’s “La
Longévité Humaine” (1854)—who was “widely read in Britain” (Small “The unquiet"
71)—also affirms the idea that the love older men feel should have a “moral character.”

As he argues, “Age has a much greater effect on physiological than on sentimental love,

124 The leather cover of Napheys’s The Transmission of Life: Counsels on the Nature and Hygiene of the
Masculine Function (1870) is beautifully embossed with a gold seal that says, “Knowledge is SAFETY,”
giving a clear signal of the purpose and tone of this text.
as the latter has less need of physical force or juvenile exaltation. There are men who, always young in heart and imagination, have towards this pure love a constant devotion which, ever renewing itself seems to reanimate itself rather than exhausting the vital principle” (qtd. in Acton 245). As this quote makes clear, due to physiological impact of aging, an older man must surrender bodily expressions of love and desires—with their sapping heights of “juvenile exaltation”—and instead enjoy the solely feelings-based variety. The “perfume” of this pure “autumn rose” sort of love is one that can sweeten and revitalize a man’s waning years.

The era’s medical writers posited that aging men’s embrace of moral and sentimental love provides not only individual but also larger social benefits. Réveillé-Parise’s claim that an aging man’s love should take on a paternal and patriotic shape is echoed by other writers of the era who shared the perspective that old age offers the chance to continue a life of meaning and productivity. For example, Maclachlan writes, “gray hairs have ever been emblematical of gravity and wisdom” and that “the closing years of life may not only be passed comfortably and agreeably, but usefully,” making it clear that old age does not doom one to complete social invisibility (15). In fact, the aged can provide a deeply positive impact, as with minds “enlightened by experience and elevated by religion,” the “have higher enjoyments in meditation and reflection” and are “sagacious, prescient, contemplative, cheerful, and indulgent to the innocent pleasures of another age; unambitious, calm and sedate, peacemakers” (Maclachlan 15). This approving attitude towards the potential value of the aged is presented, albeit in a more prescriptive fashion, by other mid-century medical writers, with Napheys arguing that love “should find its proper sphere of activity in philanthropic endeavor and
patriotic attachment” (39), and Acton describing old age as a “time when the passions should have given way to reason” (249). Rather than seeking romance, Acton suggests to his elderly clients, “there are other and higher enjoyments and duties which their position in society warrants and demands” (251). This consistent privileging of larger social benefits—those involving philanthropy and patriotism, and other reason-based and “higher” endeavors—makes clear that by embracing “autumn rose” love, an aging man can make a positive impact. Though the aging man was not encouraged to marry and to directly contribute to the next generations via procreation, he could still provide a positive impact – in effect, displacing his personal desires outwards to benefit not only his community, but also his country. This move is one that can be rooted in the “Darwinian notions of communal survival versus individual independence” (Kaye 119). As Darwin explains in *The Descent of Man*, “social animals are impelled partly by a wish to aid the members of their community.” As encouraged by the Darwinian concept that being part of society means that one does not merely act for his own interests, an aging man, then, has the potential to offer the greatest social good since he can more completely relinquish his own interests, or wishes, for those of his community.

With the associations between aging and potential individual and social benefits, many Victorians unsurprisingly placed a high value on supporting the spirituality of the aging sector of their population. For example, humanistic gerontologist Thomas R. Cole and Claudia Edwards’s recent chapter on nineteenth-century representations of aging and the aged details how the era’s medical providers often saw their role as not only focusing on bodily care, but also offering spiritual counsel, with one early nineteenth-century booklet encouraging patients to use their retirement to “contemplate their past
failings and to practise their Christian faith” including, “daily reading from the Bible, praying, attending sermons and taking spiritual guidance from a clergyman” (250). The “spiritual welfare” of aging patients was considered “attainable through religious belief and moral behavior,” and was not seen as “merely the individual’s responsibility, but was considered an integral part of any service delivered to those receiving material and physical support . . . responsibility for the body was combined with the opportunity to save the soul” (Cole and Edwards 252). As Cole and Edwards explain, not only did the era’s medical practitioners often support the spiritual development of those who were past mid-life, but they considered it their duty to “save” both body and soul. As the writing of Acton, Napheys, Maclachlan and others makes clear, saving older men meant rechanneling their desires to an “autumn rose” purity.

“Husbands Is Rare”: Surplus Women, Yonge, and Hardy

Concerns over Britain’s surplus women arose after the census of 1851. As historian Judith Worsnop explains, “The 1851 Census for the first time in the century published figures on the age, sex, and ‘conjugal condition’ of the population. This development served to make women particularly visible in terms of both their sex and marital status” (22). The visibility of these demographic categories illuminated just how much of the population was composed of women, illustrating a wide gender disparity. Critic Susan Balée outlines the wideness of that gap, explaining that “by the late 1850s, single women outnumbered single men significantly: in 1851 in Great Britain there were 2,765,000 single women aged fifteen and over; by 1861, the figure was 2,956,000; by 1871, it would reach 3,228,700” (202). These numbers meant that “large numbers of women would never be able to get married” (Balée 202). As a result, the “findings of this Census made the surplus of women into a public issue” (Worsnop 21-22) – one
concerned with just what to do with these many unmarried and unmarriageable women, who as critic Sandra Stanley Holton puts it, “had shown themselves superfluous to the needs of society, in failing to find a husband, and in being otherwise without the means to maintain their middle-class status” (7). The “astounding circumstances,” as Margaret Oliphant termed it in 1858, of these surplus women indeed concerned many Victorians (551).

This concern was in part rooted in an awareness of the devastating social and financial consequences of being a surplus woman. As critic Mary Lyndon Shanley explains, “The pressures on women to marry were enormous in nineteenth-century England. . . . The plight of a woman who did not marry, who in the parlance of the age was ‘left on the shelf,’ could be economically as well as socially disastrous” (10). Remaining unmarried would not lead to “social marginality and economic vulnerability, if not extreme hardship” (Holton 8) if a woman had the protection of a male relative; however, that scenario was not a given. As Harriet Martineau wrote, the “supposition” that “every woman is supported – by her father, her brother, or her husband” is “false” (qtd. in Worsnop 25). Indeed, many of the hundreds of thousands of surplus women faced a difficult choice – either pursue marriage to a dwindling supply of suitors or seek to support themselves. Nineteenth-century social reformer and writer Frances Power Cobbe argues: “The old assumption that marriage was the sole destiny of woman, and that it was business of her husband to afford her support, is brought up short by the statement the one woman in four is certain not to marry, and that three millions of women earn their own living at this moment in England” (qtd. in Bauer and Ritt 72). As these writers make clear, the plight of those women who could not to marry was deeply
unsettling to Victorians. In fact, the census report defined the gender “disparity” as “unnatural,” an attitude that others of the era shared (Worsnop 22). As a solution to this unnatural situation, some suggested (and at times with heavily satirical overtones) that England emigrate the surplus women.\textsuperscript{125} For example, W. R. Greg’s 1862 article published in the \textit{National Review}, “Why Women are Redundant,” “suggests that the surplus women should be persuaded and enabled to emigrate to the Colonies and mate with the surplus males living abroad” (Worsnop 28).\textsuperscript{126} In essence, as critics Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt note of Greg’s argument,

\begin{quote}
 attempts to invest the life of the single female with purpose and dignity, to prepare her for a useful role in society, and to create for her a meaningful and satisfactory existence, were bound to fail because they were hopelessly wrongheaded. . . . The only acceptable career for women, in short, was marriage – if not at home, then in the colonies. (55-56)
\end{quote}

For a Victorian woman to remain unmarried—being surplus, in other words—created difficulties that only marriage could truly resolve, leaving many of the era in an impossible position.

Both \textit{The Hand of Ethelberta} and \textit{The Clever Woman of the Family} in some way draw upon the surplus woman problem. Hardy’s novel touches upon this theme in two moments connected to Ethelberta’s family’s encouragement for her to seek an advantageous marriage. As her brother, Joey, says, “Husbands is rare; and a promising courter who means business will fetch his price in these times, big or small, I assure ’ee” (Hardy 179). Ethelberta’s mother shares Joey’s awareness that husbands are rare

\textsuperscript{125} As the \textit{Westminster Review} noted, emigration was the only practical remedy, since ‘we cannot put our 500,000 surplus women to death’” (Bauer and Ritt 54).

\textsuperscript{126} Greg’s suggestion was rebutted in British publications by writers such as Frances Power Cobb and Jessie Boucherette (Bauer and Ritt provide examples).
in the era of surplus women. In a letter in which she encourages Ethelberta to accept Lord Mountclere’s proposal, Mrs. Chickerell muses: “I heave a sigh of relief sometimes at the thought that I, at any rate, found a husband before the present man-famine began. Don’t refuse him this time, there’s a dear, or, mark my words, you’ll have cause to rue it” (Hardy 228). Their comments illustrate how an aging and, as will be shown, seemingly problematic suitor like Lord Mountclere might be seen as an antidote to the plight of young women, like Ethelberta, who are suffering in the “present man-famine.” Yonge, too, draws upon the gender disparity revealed by the 1851 census for her novel. In her introduction to *The Clever Woman of the Family*, Clare A. Simmons describes the novel as “Yonge’s response to the ‘Surplus Women’ controversy” (13). As Simmons put it, “If, as had generally been assumed, a woman’s chief objective in life should be to marry and raise a family, what was to become of the many women who would never marry? . . . Since the disproportion was partly caused by male immigration, some,” like the previously mentioned Greg, “advocated shipping women off to India (where they could marry soldiers or civil servants)” (13). The plight of Fanny Temple, genteel but penniless and sent back to India at sixteen, is part of that “response.” Though beautiful, Fanny’s lack of fortune or title make her return to India to find a fellow-emigrant husband unsurprising. Yonge and Collins’s characters indeed illustrate that the surplus woman problem had infiltrated fictional representations of courtship and marriage by in the 1860s and ‘70s.

The troubling surplus of women in Britain was believed to have occurred for a few reasons. “There had always been slightly more women than men,” Bauer and Ritt argue, though “by the middle of the nineteenth-century, because of emigration and the
disinclination of men to marry at an early age, the discrepancy had grown” (53). The rising demands on men to secure financial stability prior to marriage (as delineated in Chapter 3) and the numbers of men who had emigrated to the colonies and perished during wars (such as the Napoleonic and Crimean Wars), as Simmons touches upon, left hundreds of thousands of women in a state of unmarriageability. The reality of this deficiency of marital prospects was intensified by an additional reality of the era: the demands of Victorian standards of domestic femininity (as detailed in Chapter 4). These “new aspirations to gentility” meant women could not longer work outside the home; further, most venues to “middle-class occupations,” such as education, were largely not available to those women who might seek employment (Holton 8) – a scenario some have argued led to the mid-century rise in feminism.127 This clash between the financial realities of many surplus women and the standards that dictated they should avoid seeking something as undermining to “gentility” as employment—a situation exacerbated by the reality that the “surplus is predominantly middle-class unmarried women” (Worsnop 23)—created a space in which age-disparate marriage could be affirmed as a positive form of rescue.

Collins’s “Undisguised and Unashamed Social Propaganda” Against Great Britain’s Marriage Laws

Like Yonge and Hardy, Collins incorporated social tensions connected to concerns regarding the lot of Victorian women in his novel – in his case, how the laws of Great Britain could impinge on the marital happiness of women. In fact, this awareness was

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127 As Bauer and Ritt argue, “Thus, it was not a coincidence that the feminist movement arose in the late 1850s and 60’s, precisely the time both when demographic changes prevented thousands of women from filling the role of wife and mother, and when new social ideals had robbed many middle-class women of the satisfaction of being economically useful” (55).
his explicit motivation for writing the novel. According to critic Lillian Nayder, Collins’s
*Man and Wife* was the “first of his novels with an explicitly stated social purpose—to
expose the injustices of the marriage laws of Great Britain” (13). In fact, as this section
details, Collins drew upon anxiety regarding a number of laws in Great Britain that
dictated whether one was married and the rights of women after marriage. As critic
Dougald B. Maceachen put it, “In a single novel he attacked English marriage laws for
Ireland, Scotch irregular marriages, and the legal status of a married woman in England.
*Man and Wife* was really undisguised and unashamed social propaganda” (126). In fact,
Collins’s social propaganda regarding the inequities caused by Victorian marriage laws
is conveyed by the novel’s title: “The very title of the novel announces its focus; the
phrase *Man and Wife* reverberates through the text with varying degrees of irony”
(Lawson 125). Indeed, as this chapter illustrates, Collins sought to illustrate the painful
(and potentially lethal) consequences of the era’s Scotch and English marriage laws—of
what can happen after one becomes man and wife—creating an opening for aging men
to provide an antidote to those consequences.

Scotch marriage laws were long seen as problematic in England. These “irregular,
but perfectly legal marriages,” as critic Anne Longmuir terms them, can occur “by the
mutual consent of the couple, by a public declaration followed by consummation, or by
cohabitation and repute” – no ceremony, witnesses, or official registration necessary
(170).128 These laws (which stood until 1939) were “designed to protect seduced
women against desertion” but in effect “makes these women legally and permanently

128 Critic Scott A. G. M. Crawford describes them similarly as a “feudal statute whereby there was a
legitimate ‘Marriage by consent.’ Quite simply the Scottish law means that ‘consent makes marriage’”
(89).
dependent on those who have betrayed them,” as critic Lillian Nayder explains (95) – a truth that the example of Anne Silvester certainly illustrates. Collins uses Anne’s marital plight to illustrate the evils that could be caused by these “irregular” marriages, explaining in the Preface to his novel that he wanted to make “it clear that this is a ‘fiction founded on facts’” (Taylor 81) regarding politicians’ failure to reform this law and the negative consequences of not doing so – a situation that concerned others in Britain. As Maceachen explains, “When Collins denounced the state of the Scotch and Irish marriage laws in *Man and Wife*, he was merely further publicizing a situation that had been before the British public for some time” (129). In fact, during the time of the novel’s writing, efforts to amend Scotch and Irish marriage laws were underway, with the *Westminster Review* and *Cornhill* writing on the topic and advocating for reform and a Royal Commission being “appointed to inquire into the state of marriage law in Great Britain” starting in 1865 and publishing that report in 1868 (Maceachen 130). In addition, famous cases such as Yelverton vs. Yelverton exposed a “legal contradiction within the same ‘united kingdom’” and illustrated the “contradictions in the union or the law or marriage or all three” (Poovey 57). The “thorny problem” of these “dangerously loose” marriages (Maceachen 127, 129) was indeed one that pinches at Collins’s character, Anne. As she reflects the morning after she finds out she is indeed married to Delamayn: “There were outrages which her husband was privileged to commit, under the sanction of marriage, at the bare thought of which her blood ran cold. Could Sir

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129 The vagaries between Irish and English marriage laws are illustrated by the plight of Anne Silvester’s mother, as detailed in the Prologue of *Man and Wife*.

Patrick protect her? Absurd! Law and Society armed her husband with his conjugal rights. Law and Society had but one answer to give, if she appealed to them—You are his wife” (Collins 550). The “sanction” afforded by these irregular Scotch marriages is intensified by another legal evil that concerned Collins and motivated the writing of *Man and Wife*.

In addition to Scotch marriage laws, *Man and Wife*’s female characters are imperiled by another threat: English marriage laws. Beginning in 1857, activists and lawmakers sought to pass a series of marriage, divorce, and child-custody laws that would seek to “equalize the grounds of divorce for men and women, enact married women’s property law, expand the custody rights of women, allow battered wives to separate from their husbands, and give magistrates the authority to issue support and maintenance orders to deserted and abused women” (Shanley 17). Prior to that, the reality, as explained by Sir William Blackstone, was that “the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything, and she is there called in our law a *feme covert*” (qtd. in Nayder 73). Becoming a *feme covert* after marriage led to a woman’s “civic death” (Nayder 74) – or “as the popular saying went, ‘husband and wife are one person, and that person is the husband’” (Yalom 185). The result was, as Victorian activist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon described “in her 1854 summary of English marriage laws,” a married woman was, no matter her age, “again considered an infant” (qtd. in Nayder 73). Anne, then, is doubly damned – trapped by Scotch marriage laws and then disenfranchised (or, ultimately, considered legally nonexistent) after that marriage by English marriage laws. The “unhappy state of
marriage” (Balée 207) for Anne (and Hester Dethridge) reflects Collins’s concern for the largely non-existent rights of married women. In fact, Collins used the 1868 Report of the Royal Commission on the Laws of Marriage as “a primary source for Man and Wife” (Nayder 93), making the novel, in the words of critic Lisa Surridge, “topical in the extreme” (103). As the surplus women problem illustrates, a young unmarried women was potentially a figure of tension within Victorian society. However, if she could manage to get married, she was again in peril, as Collins represents in his novel. The paternal—disinterested, caring, and gentle—love of an aging man could indeed offer an antidote to the social troubles fictionalized by Yonge, Collins, and Hardy.

“As if Anybody Could Leave Off Loving One’s Husband!”: Age-Disparate Marriage as Rescue in Yonge

The Clever Woman of the Family’s Fanny Temple possesses a degree of vulnerable girlishness that easily justifies her need for rescue through marriage. Married at sixteen to a man of sixty, and widowed at age twenty-four with seven children (six of which, to hammer home her husband’s aged virility, are boys), she is, as becomes quickly clear, not the “clever woman” of the title. Despite being twenty-five and the

131 Collins’s concern with “women’s lack of control over their property” after marriage (Taylor 81) is particularly connected to this character’s plight. The example of Hester—who as a “mute domestic servant” could “epitomize wifely oppression” (Nayder 97)—allows Collins to use the novel as a “criticism” of “institutionalized marital violence” (Wagner “Violating” 37).

132 In the novel’s appendix, Collins presented a “list of exact citations from the report so that he might check on Collins’s sources for himself” (Maceachen 126). As historian Lesley A. Hall explains, the “Married Women’s Property Act was passed in 1870 after several years of active campaigning” (12), which would indeed offer Hester some degree of hope, further illustrating the topicality of his novel.

133 Sir Stephens’ still-strong virility and active sex life with Fanny are clearly affirmed by the size of their family. However, despite their apparent happiness, the wide disparity of their ages marks their intimacy as problematic. As Valerie Sanders argues, “Fanny’s odd family of countless small boys seems to confirm the sexual unnaturalness of her union” (29) – an assertion Victorian medical writers (as detailed in Chapter 2) would clearly support. And in fact, Sir Stephen’s demise seems to affirm the unnaturality of their marriage and its associated intimacy.
mother of seven, description through much of the novel emphasizes her child-like qualities – as shown, for example, when Fanny’s aunt, Mrs. Curtis, says of her, “Poor darling! She seems but a child herself” in both manner and appearance (Yonge 39). In fact, Fanny’s girlish ways were preserved through the care of her mother and much older husband. As Yonge’s narrator explains, as soon as she was married to the “kind old General,” he “regarded the young mother of his children as almost as much of a baby herself” – and, in response, both he and her mother made her life in India “almost a prolonged childhood” (Yonge 67, 68). Critic Valerie Sanders describes Fanny’s marriage to Sir Stephen, a “man old enough to be her grandfather,” as “one of Yonge’s most grotesque,” with Fanny “becoming a generational amalgam of parent and child: grown-up enough to have children of her own, but still an infantilized pet to her husband and mother” (Sanders 32, 29). Indeed, because she was continually pregnant and “additionally languid and helpless” due to the climate, her mother managed her household duties for her, leaving her with “absolutely no care, no duty at all but to be affectionate and grateful, and to be pretty and gracious at dinner-parties” (Yonge 67). Fanny’s extreme youth at marriage and largely carefree existence, makes her habit of “always” calling Sir Stephen “dear papa” (Yonge 170, 133) both revealing and unsurprising, and other characters recognize the paternal overtones inherent in Sir Stephen’s relationship with his young wife.\footnote{Mrs. Curtis, for example, characterizes Fanny’s loss of her husband as “more like the loss of her own father than of the father of her children,” making her feel as if she is caring more for a “girl than of a widow” (Yonge 68-69).} Yonge’s description of Fanny highlights two things. First, her vulnerability, showing her as truly needing the protection her “dear papa” offers through (and after) marriage. Second, this description also illustrates that
(highly active sex life aside), Sir Stephen seems to embody the gentle paternalism valorized by the era’s medical writers – he is more her father than her husband.

While the General’s protective impulse to rescue young Fanny from a life of poverty and obscurity after the death of her father is indeed a core component of their relationship, their marriage was also motivated and bonded by love. Raised and educated in England, Fanny is summoned at sixteen to meet her father in Africa. There she finds her father dying, and though her family was ready “to receive, almost to maintain, his widow and daughter,” instead, “they were electrified by the tidings that the gentle little Fanny, at sixteen, had become the wife of Sir Stephen Temple, at sixty” (Yonge 40). Though her father is a Colonel, Yonge makes clear that Fanny and her mother would be left unprotected by his death, making her marriage to Sir Stephen—one described by the narrator as one between the “very young” and the “very old” (Yonge 66)—a means to financial and social protection, and saving her from joining the ranks of the era’s surplus women. And though her family is initially “electrified” by learning that Fanny is marrying a man forty-four years her senior, as Yonge’s narrative makes clear, theirs is a marriage of real feeling. As Colonel Keith observes, having known Fanny throughout her marriage, he was “aware of the quiet force of the love that had grown up with her, so entirely a thread in her being as to crave little expression, and too reverent to be violent even in her grief” (Yonge 250). Fanny’s love for her husband, a “reverent” and “quiet force” that was “entirely a thread in her being”—wording that suggests that her love is true and complete—remains (as Colonel Keith observes) “unchanged” even after his death (Yonge 250).
Even after Fanny is widowed, Sir Stephen ensures she does not descend into the social and financial vulnerability that characterized her life before marriage. Just as he cared for his young wife while alive, his protective impulse continues after his death through his friend and eventual surrogate guardian to his family, Colonel Keith. After the “good old general” is thrown from his horse “while on a round of inspection” (dying literally with his boots on), on his deathbed he dictates a new will that would more adequately protect the interests of his young wife and his many children and commits them not only to the care of “their Father in heaven” but also his “friend” and military secretary, Colonel Keith (Yonge 68). Along with Mrs. Curtis and her daughter, the rather inept though seemingly clever Rachel, the Colonel (a Major at the start of Yonge’s novel) figures strongly as a protective force for Fanny and her children – as one of Yonge’s characters observes, “everything was referred to him, both by mother and children” (87). In response to her aunt’s cautions regarding the potential impropriety of her relationship to the unmarried Colonel Keith, she sobs, “My husband had confidence in him more than in any one. He told him to take care of me and look after the boys. I couldn’t hold aloof from him without transgressing those wishes” (Yonge 151). Her dependence on and deference to Colonel Keith, then, is a continuation of her relationship with her protective and father-like husband – illustrating that even when he is gone, Sir Stephen figures strongly in his young wife’s life, though in a mode that is completely devoid of romance or sexuality. For, despite her aunt’s fears, the Colonel’s relationship to Sir Stephen further desexualizes their relationship; as he himself explains it, “good old Sir Stephen Temple . . . was like a father to me,” making him very much a “brotherly friend” to Fanny (Yonge 120, 382). Yonge also firmly establishes Colonel
Keith’s lack of romantic interest in Fanny, by giving him a back story of passionate but thwarted love with Ermine Williams that he successfully pursues to marriage by novel’s end though she has become disabled after a fiery accident.

Fanny’s ability to inspire the protective impulse of her father-like husband and then her brother-like surrogate husband is in part due to her submission and dependence – qualities celebrated by most Victorians in women (Chapter 4 offers additional information on these values of femininity). These qualities are easily cued not only by Fanny’s pretty and protected youthfulness but also her recent loss of her husband. The “poor little widow,” a description that emphasizes the pathos of her position as well as her diminutive girlishness, possesses an “air of dependence almost beseeching protection” and a “winning . . . meek, submissive gentleness” (Yonge 121, 45, 168). Fanny’s innate possession of what were seen as infinitely feminine qualities of submission—what critic Tamara S. Wagner calls that Yonge’s “hallowing of selflessness” (“Marriage” 142)—make the loss of her much older husband particularly devastating. As Yonge describes early in her novel, “poor Fanny fell into an uncontrollable fit of weeping at the sense of her own desolation and helplessness,” overwhelmed by the responsibility she now bears once bereft of her husband’s guidance and support (Yonge 60). As a result, as Fanny’s aunt suggests, “perhaps too

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135 Though Charlotte Yonge enjoyed significant popularity during the nineteenth century, her novels have only recently received focused critical attention. The Clever Woman of the Family is no exception and criticism that focuses on Fanny and her much older husband are rarer still. For example, critic Myra C. Stark explores the novel within the context of the era’s Evangelical “cult of family” orthodoxy, and mainly focuses on Rachel Curtis (13). Cindy LaCom considers how Yonge’s depiction of her character, Ermine Williams, “disrupts cultural expectation” by becoming both a mother and a writer — both of which subverts Victorian “cultural attitudes toward women, infirmity, and disability” (198, 196). Further, Audrey Fessler uses the novel to delineate how it illustrates that the “real and awful suffering of Victorian women and children” is caused by “problems in the patriarchy” (46). Finally, Tamara S. Wagner considers how Yonge uses the “figure of the fake clergyman” to “situate[e] the construction of secret identities within a set of crimes generated by modern finance capitalism” (“Detecting” 116).
much must not be expected of her” (Yonge 66) in terms of her ability to make decisions, such as how to educate her sons or the like. After her “happy, albeit infantalising, marriage to an old general,” as Wagner describes their relationship (“Marriage” 145), “meek” and “submissive” Fanny appears to be unprepared to face life without the paternal protection that her much-older husband offers both during marriage and after his death.

Marriage to Sir Stephen offers Fanny social relevance, even after his death. As Simmons explains, “While independent-minded women such as Rachel Curtis might scorn her lack of intelligence, her reliance upon others, and her insistence on judging situations by instinctive feelings, Fanny does have her own identity which remains even after her husband’s death: she is the widow of a man she loved and the mother of seven children” (14). Though Rachel (and some modern readers) may disparage Fanny’s soft helplessness, she nonetheless possesses a formidable social marker – her identity as loved wife and mother is one that gives her high status by the standards of the day, particularly in the face of the competition to secure that status (i.e., the surplus women problem). Further, as the General’s wife (and then widow), she possesses additional status – in India, as one character puts it, she was a “person of much more consideration than she was made” in England (Yonge 149). While Fanny patiently suffers Rachel’s kind-hearted bullying upon her return to England, there she was the “petted creature” of her mother and husband, and “almost always the first lady in the place, and latterly with a colonial court of her own” (Yonge 169). With both her status as a General’s wife and her “innocent, soft, helpless dignity,” she was the “Queen of the East” to the soldiers and their wives, with “Sir Stephen for the first of her vassals,” as
the Colonel describes it (Yonge 286). This charming description illustrates both the esteem with which Fanny was held upon her marriage to Sir Stephen and that she is indeed a successful surplus-woman-turned-emigrant story – first a penniless young beauty, after marriage, she is a queen amongst the English officers and their wives in India.

Yonge illustrates the enduring protection Fanny’s marriage to Sir Stephen offers by providing a threat in a seemingly benevolent form: a proposal of marriage. Though at one point in the novel, Rachel muses, the “grand passion” of Fanny’s “life is yet to come,” she has no interest in pursuing another chapter of romance (Yonge 66). The “pretty little widow” with “various sons,” as she is called, has no interest in relinquishing that title, and states, “she would never marry again” (Yonge 85, 260). She is, for example, grieved and horrified at Lord Keith’s (Colonel Keith’s older brother) proposal of marriage. Colonel Keith finds her in an “agony of crying” and she says the proposal was “too preposterous to be dreamt of by any one. At his age, too, one would have thought he might have known better” (Yonge 247).136 This description illustrates the flexibility of age as well as the importance of intention, for while Lord Keith calls her a “pretty, gracious, lady-like woman” and a “pretty young widow,” his pursuit of her is shown in poor lights (Yonge 251). As Lord Keith makes clear to his brother, his interest in Fanny is mercenary (and due to her prettiness, likely sexual, though Yonge does not hint along those lines), as shown by his questions regarding Fanny’s “money matters,” having learned that she controlled her own fortune and his heartless suggestions that the

136 Lord Keith is described as “little past fifty,” making him still marriageable, but because his desire for the young widow is unwelcome and not in the best interest of her or her children, she sees him in derisive terms: as her “ancient suitor” (Yonge 280).
nuisance of Fanny’s passel of children will be solved by shipping them off to boarding school though some are still quite young (Yonge 250). As the Colonel observes, Fanny “regard[ed] what had just passed as an insult to her husband and an attack on the freedom of all her sons,” leaving her filled “with indignation” at this lack of “respect for dear, dear Sir Stephen,” illustrating her enduring love and respect for her much older husband. In addition, Fanny’s furious panic at feeling “unprotected by her husband’s name” illustrates her continuing reliance on the protection that being Sir Stephen’s wife offers (Yonge 247-248).

Protected by her status as widow of Sir Stephen and mother to their brood, Fanny evolves from “languid and helpless” to a paragon of Victorian feminine capability. Early in the novel, Fanny is shown to be both a loving and responsive mother and highly attuned to social niceties. As the novel progresses, the child-like qualities that had concerned and worried other characters are shown to be a source of admiration and comfort. The narrator describes her as possessing “tender pensive quietness” that “could not fail to be refreshment to the strained spirits, and wearied physical powers” (Yonge 534). Yonge also reveals her ability to nurture and protect others beyond her seven children. For example, she handily rescues the abused child lacemakers, Lovedy and Mary, and it is her softness and simplicity that ensures her success: “A woman of thrice Fanny’s energy and capacity would not have effected her purpose so simple, and made the virago in the matron so entirely quail. She swept forth with such a consciousness of power and ease that few could have had assurance enough to gainsay her” (338). Fanny is also said to have acted like a “heroine” during the diphtheria outbreak that nearly kills several of her sons (Yonge 376). Through the
trauma of these experiences, she is shown, in the words of Rachel, to be “dearer and sweeter than ever . . . no one who has not seen her now can guess half what she is!” (Yonge 379). All these accolades establish that Fanny has been worthy of her much older husband’s adoration and the protection he ensured even beyond his lifetime. Though she is initially seen as an “innocent creature, provided she was not spoilt,” making it a “duty” of her family “to guard her innocence,” as The Clever Woman of the Family unfolds, she is shown to be “unspoilable” (Yonge 111, 286). Fanny is indeed worthy of Sir Stephen’s loving rescue via marriage, illustrating the era’s privileging of the paternalistic mode of love an aging man should feel for a woman, even a wife, who is much younger than him.

“It Is Wonderful What Can Be Done with an Old Man When You are His Darling”: Age-Disparate Marriage as Mutual Rescue in Hardy

Left essentially penniless after the death of her young upper-class husband and then his parents, Ethelberta spends much of the novel seeking ways to overcome her financial and social precariousness – a position that signals her need for her own kind of rescue via marriage to a much older, paternal love interest. The narrator describes her as a “woman so delicately poised upon the social globe,” while one of her brothers calls her “so lofty—so very lofty!” and her sister cautions her to marry quickly “if you mean to marry high” (Hardy 145, 88, 144) – all of which emphasizes that Ethelberta is in a position of “vulnerability” (Fisher 72). However, Ethelberta’s concern is not merely for her own delicate position but that of her nine older and younger siblings, who are a “great cause of uneasiness,” declaring: “It is my duty, at all risk and all sacrifice of sentiment, to educate and provide for them” (103-104). This sense of responsibility and “fondly protective attitude” (Roberts 88)—she is described in motherly terms and as a
“surrogate” for her parents (O’Toole 120)—as well as her sense that “her own individual
destiny cannot be separated from those of others she loves” (Mistichelli 94) is largely
seen by readers in a positive light. Unfortunately, while telling her “tales”—her term
for the lively and seemingly autobiographical stories she performs in salons for wealthy
audiences—produces popularity for a time, it begins to wane as a reliable source of
income, leading her to decide that “the way of marriage” is the only way to “manage” her
discomfort over their collective predicament (Hardy 143-144). As the narrator explains
of the reasoning for her decision: “Here were bright little minds ready for a training,
which without money and influence she could never give them” (Hardy 153). With her
“bread-winning” headed for failure, she asks herself, “would not a well-contrived
marriage be of service” in her dreams for her family’s social ascendancy (Hardy
153)? Ethelberta’s sense of duty and desire for her siblings to develop greater
wisdom and social elevation are indeed admirable qualities, which makes her eventual
decision to pursue a “well-contrived marriage” appear perhaps even laudable and unlike
the hardened striving of an adventuress.

Hardy provides additional evidence that Ethelberta is worthy of rescue by cuing
both her desire for artistic expression and her discomfort with her social aspirations.

Ethelberta is mindful that she wants to marry carefully as she wants to “find some man

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137 Critic Peggy Boumelha offers a rare dissenting view, arguing that Ethelberta’s supposed sense of
“duty” to improve the lot of her family is undermined by her “father’s insistence that he is happy to stay in
service” (which by novel’s end is proven to be untrue) and that her “ambition must be accepted for what it is,
not as disguised self-sacrifice, but simply as ambition” (250).

138 When Ethelberta discovers that Picotee loves her own first love Christopher she readily—in a display
of her “tenderness of sisterly affection” (Dutta “Ambivalence” 27)—sacrifices her own romantic interests to
further her sister’s happiness: “her foremost feeling was less one of hope for her own love than of
championship for Picotee’s” (Hardy 134). The narrator remarks on her “heroism” and “compassion” in
ceding to her sister’s feelings (Hardy 135).
she might respect” and who can also free her to focus on her writing – for, as she puts it, “plenty of saleable originality was left in her as yet, but it was getting crushed under the rubbish of her necessities” (Hardy 176). These artistic aspirations are a second indicator that Ethelberta’s marital aspirations are made of loftier stuff than mere financial and social grasping. Further, Ethelberta desires not only to explore more fully her artistic expression, but also to assume financial responsibility for her family after her marriage.

In a further affirmation of Ethelberta’s essential goodness, the weight of her need to masquerade as a woman of status so as to marry “high” comes to feel like a burden. As she explains of her discomfort at aspiring significantly beyond the class she was born to, “I sleep at night as if I had committed a murder: I start up and see processions of people, audiences, battalions of lovers obtained under false pretences—all denouncing me with the finger of ridicule. . . . I don’t want to marry a second time among people who would regard me as an upstart or intruder” (Hardy 246). Despite the burden of her performance, encouraged by her family and sense of duty, Ethelberta indeed decides to aspire to marry in a manner favorable to both her family and herself – though she would do it honestly and reveal the truth of her under-class roots to Lord Mountclere before accepting his proposal (Hardy 249).

It is perhaps these impulses along with her familial love that moved literary critic W. D. Howells to write in 1901 that he saw Ethelberta as “one of the highest-minded of Mr Hardy’s women” and “one of the most delightful as well as the most respectable of his heroines” (qtd. in Lennon 49), though he is apparently alone in his admiration – Hardy himself acknowledged that “reviews tended to be rather lukewarm and lacking in enthusiasm” (Ward 38).

In fact, Lord Mountclere feels only delighted amusement at discovering he is pursuing marriage to a lower-class woman, calling her a “clever little puss” for her “hoodwink,” and admiring “her education—how finished; and her beauty—so seldom that I meet with such a woman. . . . To interest me in her on the right side instead of the wrong was strange” (Hardy 215). His surprise, beyond being impressed with the manners and beauty of a butler’s daughter, is that he is interested not merely in seducing her (“the wrong”) but marrying her (“the right side”).

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140 In fact, Lord Mountclere feels only delighted amusement at discovering he is pursuing marriage to a lower-class woman, calling her a “clever little puss” for her “hoodwink,” and admiring “her education—how finished; and her beauty—so seldom that I meet with such a woman. . . . To interest me in her on the right side instead of the wrong was strange” (Hardy 215). His surprise, beyond being impressed with the manners and beauty of a butler’s daughter, is that he is interested not merely in seducing her (“the wrong”) but marrying her (“the right side”).
guilt about the falseness of her position provide further evidence that despite her goals towards loftiness, she deserves the much older Lord Mountclere’s rescue (though, as will be explored, there is some dispute as to whether Lord Mountclere actually deserves the rescue she offers). However, despite this character’s multiple, admirable motivations for seeking marriage, the extensive proof, or justification, Hardy offers ultimately serves to evacuate her eventual marriage to Lord Mountclere of any romantic overtones.

To reinforce the necessity of her rescue by aging Lord Mountclere, Hardy gives Ethelberta few age-matched options for marriage. While Neigh (35), as well as Ladywell and Christopher Julian (in their mid-20s), all wish to marry Ethelberta, Hardy clearly indicates they are unworthy to marry her. Christopher, for example, is described as “being in point of fact a complete bundle of nerves and nothing else, his thin figure shook like a harp-string in painful excitement at a contretemps which would scarcely have quickened the pulse of an ordinary man,” a description that thoroughly undermines his masculine credibility (Hardy 131). And, though he loves Ethelberta and she has long returned his feelings, he is impoverished and has an “impractical and unenterprising character” (Schweik 248) and is “lacking ambition and drive” (Dutta “Ambivalence” 28). Further, he is consistently referred to by his first name, unlike the other male characters – perhaps suggesting his intimacy with the family, but also making him seem still boyish. In addition, Ethelberta’s other age-matched and wealthy marital prospects are similarly unsuitable – a situation that serves to reinforce the precarious situation of the surplus woman determined to marry well. Ladywell, though a talented artist, also lacks the masculine resolve and steadiness Ethelberta requires, having been described as a “perfumed piece of a man . . . with the high eyebrows arched like a girl’s” (Hardy 32).
Finally, Neigh is described by Hardy as a “terrible hater of women . . . particularly the lower class” whose new money wealth—with its “façade of breeding” and “superiority” (Widdowson 82)—would make the “antipathy of resemblance” between her roots and his “ineradicable” (158). For a variety of reasons, each of these more age-matched love interests is just not the right man to rescue Ethelberta via marriage – further illustrating how Hardy justifies the aging Lord Mountclere as necessary.

Ethelberta’s best option in the era’s “man-famine” has his own vulnerabilities requiring rescue – those relating to his age. As Ethelberta’s father puts it to his daughter, “you are young and healthy, and youth and health are power” (Hardy 52). And indeed, the narrator seems to agree that youth is indeed “power,” describing Lord Mountclere as “toddling,” “shuffling,” and losing his breath while climbing to the top of a cathedral with Ethelberta, which ends with him sinking “down on one of the steps, panting out, ‘Dear me, dear me!’” (Hardy 210, 222, 230). The novel also features a moment that directly emphasizes the couple’s significant disparity in age. Lord Mountclere offers her his arm as they walk down a hill and “Ethelberta, taking pity upon him, took it; but the assistance was all on her side; she stood like a statue amid his slips and totterings, some of which taxed her strength heavily, and her ingenuity more, to appear as the supported and not the supporter” (Hardy 208-209). Critic Robert Mistichelli reads this moment as revealing the clarity of Ethelberta’s understanding of her eventual husband’s advanced age and its associated “decrepitude,” as her masked assistance of Lord Mountclere shows that “she sees from the start what she is getting” (100). Despite such seemingly damaging characterizations of Lord Mountclere’s elderly “totterings,” we can also read his age as remarkably flexible. When Picotee complains,
he is “such an old man . . . old enough to be my grandfather, and yours too,” Ethelberta responds contradictorily, “Indeed he is not; he is only middle-aged. . . . He may or may not be [sixty-five]; and if he is, it is not old. He is so entertaining that one forgets all about age in connection with him” (Hardy 195). Lord Mountclere works through the question of his age in a hilarious back and forth with his valet that culminates in Lord Mountclere denying he is in fact old at all; though he is indeed “oldish” in comparison to a young man, his “knowledge of the world” makes his life experience (i.e., his chronological age) an asset (Hardy 216-217). Further, Lord Mountclere’s humorous assertion that he is “not a very old man after all” shows that though he is aging his sense of self as vibrant is durable against the assertions of others (Hardy 216). However, that durability is delusional—he is in fact elderly by Victorian standards—exposing Lord Mountclere’s pursuit of marriage to a much younger woman he desires as potentially problematic.

Hardy further undermines Lord Mountclere’s ability to offer Ethelberta gentle and paternalistic rescue with description of his aging sexuality, suggesting that his interest in Ethelberta may perhaps be, in fact, predatory. Despite his age, Lord Mountclere is consistently portrayed as possessing a large degree of “vivacity and humour” (Hardy 229). The narrator calls him an “old yet sly and somewhat merry-faced Englishman” and comments, “the dignified aspect which he wore to a gazer at a distance became depreciated to jocund slyness upon nearer view” (Hardy 222, 204) – a description redolent with roguish mischief. The narrator’s description of the “clearness” of his eye and his “arch old mouth”—what critic George Wing describes as the “Mephistophelean dissipation written on his countenance” (574)—make it unsurprising that the still-
besotted Christopher is not fully at peace with Ethelberta’s decision to marry the much older man (Hardy 204). He observes that Lord Mountclere does not possess “the sort of sexagenarianism beside which a young woman’s happiness can sometimes contrive to keep itself alive in a quiet sleepy way” (Hardy 217, 280). Hardly “quiet and sleepy,” instead Lord Mountclere is jocund, jolly, and “jovial,” with Christopher detecting “lively,” “merry,” and “erotic” energy in the older man (Hardy 280-281). Critics, too, almost universally find Lord Mountclere’s aging sexuality troubling or objectionable – interestingly, more so than contemporary reviewers of the novel. As Mistichelli bluntly puts it: Lord Mountclere “besides being triple her age, is portrayed as unattractive in body and mind and rapidly deteriorating” (100).\footnote{Critics have also described Lord Mountclere as a “roué” (Widdowson 47, Wing 578, Radford 69); a “reprobate” (Roberts 88); “dissolute” (Neill 36, Ball 30); “wholly abominable” (Blishen 184); “something of a ‘sex fiend’” (Neill 39); and, finally, both “grotesque and corrupt” (Boumelha 249) and, by virtue of his age, the “grotesque lead in this comedy of chapters” (Wing 573).} However, as Wing rather wincingly observes, Lord Mountclere’s “obsession” with Ethelberta “has gone beyond the morbidity of lascivious senility” (577). And indeed, as Hardy’s novel shows, Lord Mountclere has honorable feelings for Ethelberta, treating her “gallantly” and with “extreme tenderness” (Hardy 262, 207). As Picotee observes, Lord Mountclere “likes you better than any young man would take the trouble to do” (305) – suggesting that though he has not yet fully embraced the “autumn rose” mode of love, he may indeed be capable of offering Ethelberta rescue.

Hardy provides further evidence that not only does Lord Mountclere have real feelings for Ethelberta, but also that marriage to her could offer its own kind of rescue via the rejuvenation of his attraction for her. Strangely enough, the restorative potential
of Lord Mountclere’s love for Ethelberta is illustrated through his jealousy. He attempts to uncover whether Ethelberta has romantic feelings for Christopher but is outsmarted by her quickness of mind. Realizing he is “in an agony of trouble,” Lord Mountclere begs her forgiveness in a manner that reveals both his adoration for her as well as his awareness of the disparity in their ages, “remembering it was her June against his November” (Hardy 269, 267). He begs his “dearest” to “forgive” him and explains his doubts made him “beside [him]self. . . . An old man—who is not very old—naturally torments himself with fears of losing—” a beautiful and much younger woman (to finish his thought), pleading with her to not “desert” him as it would “kill” him (Hardy 267-268).

In these scenes, Hardy emphasizes both Ethelberta’s upper hand as well as Lord Mountclere’s genuine and deeply felt desire (desperation, even) to marry her. Interestingly, the prospect of marrying Ethelberta is uplifting, even rejuvenating, for Lord Mountclere. For example, when he decides to pursue marrying Ethelberta, the narrator describes his travel to his hotel as a “gleeful” moment; he “paced irregularly along, turned the corner, and went towards his inn, nearing which his tread grew lighter, till he scarcely seemed to touch the ground” (Hardy 233). Finally, when Ethelberta agrees to marry him, he is described as having “warmed from surface to centre as if he had drunk of hippocras, and, after holding her hand for some moments, raised it gently to his lips,” as though her assent were medicinal to him (Hardy 274).\[^{142}\]

Hardy affirms Ethelberta and Lord Mountclere’s marriage as positive by illustrating how she reforms his previously non-age appropriate impulses. Her reform brings him

\[^{142}\] Just being near Ethelberta has a rejuvenating effect on the older man: “By this time Lord Mountclere had noticed Ethelberta’s presence, and straightening himself to ten years younger, he lifted his hat in answer to her smile, and came up jauntily” (Hardy 204).
back into balance with the era’s spiritual ideals and effects a positive and rejuvenating change in the formerly unrepentantly sly older man. Under Ethelberta’s care, Lord Mountclere has a “rejuvenation in old age” (Mistichelli 102) and, as such, will “live to be a hundred. Never such a change as has come over the man of late years . . . they say he’d have been dead in five years if he had gone on as he was going . . . ’tis said here and there that marrying her was the best day’s work that he ever did in his life” (Hardy 353). Ethelberta affects this positive change by attending to her older husband’s financial, spiritual, and physical health – changes that are “all her doings” as she is said to “hold the reins” and is “lord and my lady both” (Hardy 353). Ethelberta’s “will of iron” and dominance over her husband is further illustrated not only in the positive results she effects on the estate and on the health of her husband, but by the characterization that, as Hardy puts it, her “little finger” was of more substance that her husband’s “loins” (Hardy 353). Ethelberta’s influence over her husband is further supported by description that the former “wicked old man,” “old dog,” and “bad man” who once “ruled womankind,” suffers a “great set-down” (as critic Edward Neill puts it, 40), and now has a wife who “lead[s] him in a string whether he will or no” (Hardy 85, 290, 332). This description might suggest that Ethelberta is the stereotypical tyrannical younger wife, but for two points. First, her care has resulted in such positive results. Lord Mountclere will live thirty years longer than expected and is financially solvent and spiritually sound for the first time in his life – making their marriage a means to bring him within the era’s standards for aging masculinity (as outlined in Chapter 2). Second, he

143 Under her influence, Lord Mountclere is no longer pursuing the path to bankruptcy himself by “lay[ing] out money in new presents than pay[ing] it in old debts,” goes to church and reads the family prayers, and is limited to “three glasses of wine a day.”
genuinely loves her. As her parents acknowledge of the man whom they dreaded their
daughter marrying: “‘All ended better than I expected. He’s fond of her.’ ‘And it is
wonderful what can be done with an old man when you are his darling’” (Hardy 356). In
fact, Lord Mountclere refers to himself as Ethelberta’s “adorer and slave” and exclaims
she is his “mistress and queen,” illustrating his willingness and even enthusiasm to be
ruled by her (Hardy 349).

Lest the marriage solely seem a pitiable act of sacrifice on Ethelberta’s part, Hardy
also details the ways in which marriage to Lord Mountclere ultimately offers her multiple
benefits. She is indeed able to help her parents and siblings rise financially and socially,
just as she had agonized and strategized for over the course of the novel. 144 In addition,
she is indeed able “further organize her talent,” for she is at work on an epic poem and
reported to live “mostly in the library” – the same one she eagerly anticipated enjoying
after marriage: “Such a splendid library as there is at Enckworth, Picotee—quartos,
folios, history, verse, Elzevirs, Caxtons . . . with such companions I can do without all
other sorts of happiness” (Hardy 176, 357, 275). Despite the seemingly resounding
success of their union, many have seen Ethelberta’s fate as Lady Mountclere as a
tragedy; Mary Rimmer gives a characteristic reading: “Hardy’s plot gives Ethelberta a
parody of success in a wealthy, loveless marriage to a decrepit rake” (145). However,
this view ignores the thoroughly positive results of this marriage and Ethelberta’s
acceptance of the loveless nature of her feelings for her much older husband. This

144 Christopher finds Ethelberta’s father, mother, and sister living comfortably. In addition, she “set up” her
older brothers as builders, which allowed them to sign “a contract to build a hospital for twenty thousand
pounds,” while her two older sisters have married and moved to Australia, and her younger brother and
sister are at boarding school, while another brother is to become a “parson” (Hardy 357). Picotee gets to
marry the man she loves, with a marriage settlement courtesy of Lord Mountclere.
perspective is affirmed by Robert Schweik who takes issue with critics who “ignore Hardy’s advice to read *The Hand of Ethelberta* with ‘lightness of mood,’” arguing, “Hers is not an unmixed bliss . . . but she is no more depicted as a ‘loser’ or ‘victim’” than any other character in the novel (Schweik 240, 252).145 Further, as Mistichelli points out, marriage to any of her more age-matched suitors would have undermined her artistic expression “which otherwise might have been threatened by her commitment to motherhood, or the demands made by a young husband in a more traditional marriage” (101). In the end, this age-disparate marriage indeed offers rescue for both Ethelberta and Lord Mountclere.

“Beyond the Reach of Ridicule or Reproach”: Age-Disparate Marriage as Rescue in Collins

*Man and Wife* provides an extensive back-story to establish how the heroine of the novel, Anne Sylvester, came to be so unprotected and deserving of rescue by marriage to the much older Sir Patrick. Anne’s mother, a former actress, was born poor, but was intelligent and beautiful; and, while her father is described as handsome, he has an “inbred falseness” (Collins 20). Her father uses England’s questionable marriage laws to abandon his first wife so that he can marry a woman of social position and influence. Anne’s mother’s dying words to her childhood friend, Lady Lundie—after extracting a promise that Anne will never go on the stage and will instead “get her bread” as a governess—are, “She is Anne Silvester—as I was? Will she end like Me?” (Collins 41,

145 Schweik argues against seeing Ethelberta as a “defeated victim”—quoting critics who see the marriage as “voluntary crucifixion” and a “debasement and self-defeat,” and see Ethelberta as a “loser” and both “victor and the victim of social class”—or her marriage as an “achievement of her own ambitions” and a way to “destroy the myth of woman’s limited character and sphere of action” (245-246). According to Schweik, both perspectives miss the clear signals the novel provides that all characters are comedic.
42). The rest of the novel hangs on Anne’s mother’s fears that her daughter will end like her: poor, touched by scandal, and abandoned by a cruel man. Lady Lundie vows to protect Anne, but dies, leaving her further vulnerable. And though poorly treated by the second Lady Lundie, Anne works as governess for the first Lady Lundie’s daughter, Blanche – with their relationship illustrating Anne’s essential goodness. For example, during the meeting of lawyers that establishes Anne has been married to Delamayn all along (rather than Blanche’s husband, Arnold, as Delamayn had schemed to arrange), Collins directs us to look at her reaction: “Anne's eyes . . . rested on Blanche. They never moved—they never for an instant lost their tender sadness” for her “sister of the unforgotten days of old” (Collins 506). Though she faces deep unhappiness (and it turns out, great danger), Anne only feels “tender sadness” for the predicament of Blanche and nobly puts aside thoughts of her own well-being to secure the happiness of her “sister.” And, as this section of the chapter explores, though it indeed appears that Anne will suffer her mother’s fate, her own fortitude and the spirited cleverness of the much older Sir Patrick secures her rescue from that fate.

The man whom Collins positions as likely to lead Anne to her mother’s fate is the “brawny” Delamayn, who in the words of the narrator is a “magnificent human animal” (Collins 61). Tellingly, Sir Patrick takes an immediate dislike to Delamayn, saying that while he is “big and strong,” there is “far too much glorification in England, just now, of the mere physical qualities which an Englishman shares with the savage and the brute”

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146 Anne’s mother, also named Anne, resumed using her maiden name for her daughter and herself after her husband’s abandonment – hence, both Anne Vanboroughs become Anne Silvester. Lawson and Shakinovsky see this moment as suggesting that the second Anne, perhaps an “uncanny double of the mother and the mother’s experience . . . appears to be destined . . . to be haunted by the pattern of her mother’s life” (127).
(Collins 68). He doubtfully wonders if being “physically-wholesome” necessarily equals being “morally-wholesome” (Collins 69), and indeed critics have written extensively on the implications of Collins’s muscled but amoral athlete character. And in fact, Collins easily persuades us that Delamayn lacks moral wholesomeness – as shown when he kicks a dog and breaks its ribs and agrees to “sell himself” for a respectable (i.e., socially advantageous) marriage (Collins 171, 417). Blanche calls him a “brute,” an assessment even his own father agrees with: “His stomach is generally full, and his skin is covered with linen and cloth, instead of red ochre and oil. So far, certainly, your brother is civilized. In all other respects your brother is a savage” (Collins 107, 177).

Interestingly, Delamayn’s athleticism is what attracts Anne into a disastrous secret engagement (and their later, equally disastrous Scotch marriage). However, in a further critique of Delamayn’s savage muscles, this “modern Hercules” (Collins 216) wears himself out with his overtraining, which ultimately leads to his death at the hands of an old woman. Like Hardy, Collins magnifies Anne’s need for the paternal love of an aging man by presenting the age-matched option as so thoroughly unworthy.

147 As Robert Ashley asserts, Delamayn “represents” the “athlete as brute,” whose “sole virtue” is paying “betting debts promptly; otherwise, he is completely without moral sense” and “his mental powers are no higher” (6). Richard L. Newby argues that this “villainous” character offers a “ringing indictment of athleticism” (52, 53), while Scott A. G. M. Crawford suggests his “magnificent physique” is a rebuke against the “excesses of ‘muscular Christianity’ and the cult of athleticism” (89). Anne Longmuir considers how “Delamayn epitomizes Victorian fears of the rise of the savage” that could “threaten the psychic wholeness of the civilized individual and nation” (172). Finally, Stephanie King argues that Delamayn’s gambling and pattern of seduction marks him as a “fallen man, an agent of discord” who “troubles Victorian gender roles and threatens paradigms of masculinity” (2, 6).

148 Delamayn’s brutality is further affirmed by the reason for Anne’s urgency to marry him: he made her pregnant and then abandons her, which the reader discovers when Anne flees to Glasgow, bears a still-born child, and almost dies in the process and during the recovery (326). His lack of regard for both Anne and his then-unborn child puts his already undermined masculinity on even shakier ground.

149 Stephanie King reads this character’s ending as affirming Delamayn’s “fallen” status – he “dies a fallen man literally (by falling on the ground) and figuratively (weakened by his moral decay)” (9).
Collins offers a surprising antidote to Delamayn’s savagery and rival for Anne’s affection: the much older Sir Patrick. Upon his first appearance, Collins provides details that establish that not only is Sir Patrick aged, he is old fashioned, further accentuating his advanced age. He describes this character as a “gentleman of the bygone time” with the “courtly manner of the old school,” as identified by his “pliant grace and courtesy unknown to the present generation” and his out of fashion (but still dapper) dress, including a cravat and “nankeen trousers with gaiters to match,” along with an ivory cane topped with a snuffbox (Collins 57, 63). However, his old-fashioned appearance also visually indicates he “represents the values of a better time (O’Neill 132), making his visibly advanced age, in effect, a signal that he possesses a better sort of masculinity than the much younger Delamayn. This gallant “old gentleman” (as he is almost always referred to within the novel, 23 times to be exact) may be of the “old school,” but at seventy he still has a vibrant physicality. Though at one point the narrator comments on Sir Patrick’s “white, wrinkled old fingers,” little is made of the negative impact of his age (Collins 69). As Collins describes him: “he was little and wiry and slim—with a bright white head, and sparkling black eyes, and a wry twist of humor curling sharply at the corners of his lips” (Collins 57). The cane he uses is not in concession to his age, but owes to his “club-foot,” but like all that relates to Sir Patrick, he is not burdened by what was seen as a “deformity”: “he carried his lameness, as he carried his years, gaily” (Collins 57-58). Though at seventy, Sir Patrick is elderly, his

150 As critic Philip O’Neill further details, “To illustrate the corruptions of the 1860s has Sir Patrick play a figure from the past . . . whose manner contrasts sharply with the hollow virtues of the present day” (136).

151 Sir Patrick’s main acknowledgement of his age is to respect the needs of his aging digestion system (which would have been highly approved by the physicians quoted in Chapter 2): “It had been said that Sir Patrick had reached the age of seventy—it is, therefore, needless to add that he politely declined to
gallantness and vibrancy suggest that he does not carry his years as a burden – an
ergy he uses to great effect in rescuing Anne.

While Sir Patrick’s “bygone time” manners mark him as made of superior stuff to Delamayn’s generation, so does his ready wit and sharp mind. As Collins describes him: “The talk of this gentleman ran in an easy flow—revealing an independent habit of mind, and exhibiting a carefully-polished capacity for satirical retort” and “fatal knack of hitting smartly on the weakest place” (Collins 57, 58). The description of Sir Patrick as “independent” with a “carefully-polished” intellect shows that unlike many younger men featured in Collins’s novel, he is intellectually formidable. Sir Patrick is also known as a wit, which makes him “dreaded and disliked by the present generation” – as much a testament to his intelligence as it is to the inferiority of the “present generation,” of whom Delamayn is one notable example (Collins 58). Critics have indeed described Sir Patrick as a “pointed contrast” to the much younger man (Wagner “Violating” 48), with Stephanie King suggesting that Collins’s novel is “centered on the authority of Sir Patrick Lundie,” who possesses a formidable “sense of justice, with his unflinching sense of right and wrong” (2, 5). Indeed, Sir Patrick’s “moral voice” (King 9) and “old-fashioned chivalry” (Wagner “Violating” 48) makes his character a direct contrast and rebuke to Delamayn – and illustrate that he indeed possesses the qualities necessary to rescue the young woman he comes to love. In effect, Sir Patrick represents the ideal of the aging man who draws upon a lifetime of experience to serve the needs of the younger generation. Though Sir Stephen’s rescue of Fanny predates Yonge’s narrative

commit an unprovoked outrage on his own stomach” by ingesting buttery plum cake (Collins 258). As he hilariously puts it, “At my age, nothing is serious—except indigestion” (Collins 91). Such commentary suggests that age is manageable with self-control.
and Hardy’s Lord Mountclere needs his own rescuing, Sir Patrick stands as a consummate example of the positive effect an aging man can have in the life of a younger woman.

When Sir Patrick’s interest in Anne transmutes from self-interested to selfless, he experiences rejuvenating results. Sir Patrick first sees Anne as a “poor lady” for whom he feels “pain and anxiety” and who inspires in him a spirited desire to set things right (Collins 261, 295). Sir Patrick’s feelings for Anne deepen as he reads her letters, leading him to develop an “unfeigned respect for the woman who had written” them (Collins 384). As the novel unfolds, Sir Patrick’s admiration for her beauty, grace, and intelligence comes to deeply impact him. As Collins explains, “A vague distrust stole over him, at the appearance of Miss Silvester’s name. . . . Some indescribable influence was at work in him, which shook his nerves, and made him feel the infirmities of his age (as it seemed) on a sudden” (378). Though he “carried his years gaily” (to use the narrator’s description), his attraction to Anne is initially unsettling and makes him feel the weight of his years. However, this reaction is short lived, and he becomes energized by his desire to put to right Anne’s situation. As the narrator explains, “Sir Patrick read the correspondence with breathless attention to the end. At the last lines of the last letter, he did what he had not done for twenty years past—he sprang to his feet at a bound; and he crossed a room, without the help of his ivory cane” (Collins 482). While he had previously felt shaken and infirm when faced with his feelings for Anne, his desire to selflessly intercede on her behalf rejuvenates and energizes him.

Anne’s determination to sacrifice herself to ensure Blanche’s happiness very much moves Sir Patrick – revealing that he admires qualities more substantial and meaningful
than her beauty and bearing. As the narrator observes: “She rose, and offered him her hand. Sir Patrick lifted it to his lips in silence. . . . It was no moment to let her see that she had completely unmanned him. . . . He rallied his courage—he forced himself to face the horror of the situation calmly” (Collins 520-521). Her willingness to sacrifice her own interests parallels his gallantry and protective impulse, illustrating how well they are matched. The kiss to her hand illustrates Sir Patrick’s gallantry and regard for Anne, while the depth of his emotion for her is revealed in Collins’s word choice that “had completely unmanned him.” However, as he did previously, Sir Patrick rebounds from his supposed unmanning and spiritedly directs his energies to assisting her. From that moment on, Sir Patrick devotes himself to freeing Anne from her marital plight, telling her, “Rely on me!” (Collins 525). His will to protect the “noblest woman I have ever met with” is supported by other characters’ recognition of her goodness – even her former enemies, Delamayn’s mother and brother, come to see Anne in that light, a shift that indicates not only her worthiness of rescue but her brawny age-matched first husband’s comparative lack of worth (Collins 529).152

Anne comes to develop her own romantic regard for her chivalrous rescuer, illustrating that this age-disparate pairing is devoid of predatory overtones. For example, Collins uses Blanche’s letter to Anne to disclose Sir Patrick’s true feelings for not just her plight but her as a woman. Blanche reveals the “interest that you have roused in my uncle” who is “quite as wretched and quite as anxious about you as I am” (Collins 609). Blanche assures Anne that her uncle will “find out a way of his own—lawful or not, he

152 Delamayn’s brother “agree[s] with Sir Patrick in thinking her a very interesting person” (a description that also nicely highlights Sir Patrick’s feelings) (Collins 559), while Lady Holchester changes from thinking Anne is an “impudent adventuress” to calling her a “poor creature!” (Collins 529, 560).
doesn’t care—for rescuing” her and prompts her to keep her faith: “Courage, dearest! There are two people in the world to whom you are inestimably precious, and who are determined not to let your happiness be sacrificed. I am one of them, and . . . Sir Patrick is the other” (Collins 609). As Blanche makes clear, and Anne comes to understand, Sir Patrick’s energetic gallantry are not merely inspired by a sense of justice but by love. Collins further affirms the nature of his feelings when Sir Patrick comes to visit Anne while she’s imprisoned, and he takes “her hand in silence. For the first time in Anne’s experience of him, the bright, resolute, self-reliant old man was, for the moment, at a loss what to say, at a loss what to do. His eyes, resting on her in mute sympathy and interest, said plainly, ‘In your husband’s presence, I must not trust myself to speak’” (Collins 613). Collins offers a moving inversion of the usual fear of age-disparate marriages, with the older man, rather than the young one, winning the affections of the young woman. In these examples, Sir Patrick’s age, rather than being seen as a liability or sign or debility, highlights his bravery and resolution to persist in a manner “lawful or not” to free the woman he has come to love. And, in a further revision of the usual age-disparate romantic norms, Anne returns Sir Patrick’s feelings. We can see this when Anne finds out from Blanche that “Sir Patrick spoke of you in terms of admiration” and this elicits “bright tears” while “one of her hands was toying nervously with something hidden (possibly Sir Patrick’s letter) in the bosom of her dress,” which leads her to say,

153 Lisa Surridge comments on Anne’s “almost total reliance on Sir Patrick for advice on what to do,” coming across as impatient with what she calls Anne’s “sublime—almost unbelievable—acceptance of suffering” and “willing suffering” (119, 122).
“I thank him with my whole heart” (Collins 575).154 Collins further affirms that Anne shares Sir Patrick’s feelings, describing her as “absorbed in the letter, and in the conflict of opposite feelings which it roused—her color rising when it turned her thoughts inward on herself” (Collins 609), making clear that Anne indeed shares Sir Patrick’s romantic regard.

By the end of *Man and Wife*, Collins rewards Anne and Sir Patrick for their mutual goodness and love with marital happiness. Though as with the other pairings in this chapter, the response to their marriage is mixed—the horrible Lady Lundie scoffs that Sir Patrick is marrying “at his age!” and then decides that he is likely marrying a “young girl, of course”—most other characters see their pairing as positive. As Lady Holchester explains by way of justification, Sir Patrick is “not only a very clever and a very agreeable man,” but is “also, in all his habits and ways (as you well know), a man younger than his years—who still possesses many of the qualities which seldom fail to attract women” (Collins 641). As he is “younger than his years,” it is easy to image that not only does he still desire women, but that he is attractive to them as well. Further, though “plenty of men marry at Sir Patrick’s age,” his is not a dangerous infatuation: “In his case, it is only due to him to say that his motive raises him beyond the reach of ridicule or reproach. His marriage is a good action, in the highest sense of the word. It does honour to him, as well as to the lady who shares his position and his name” (Collins 642). Though Lady Holchester once saw Anne as an “adventuress” because she had seemingly trapped her son in a Scotch marriage, she now sees her as “a

154 Tamara S. Wagner convincingly argues that this move has romantic implications: “Sir Patrick’s supportive letter to Anne is sentimentally carried in the bosom of her dress, foreshadowing their marriage at the end of the novel” (“Violating” 48).
woman who has been tried by no common suffering, and who has borne her hard lot nobly” and now “deserves” a “calmer and the happier life” – an outcome that Sir Patrick can indeed offer her due to his position and finances, as well as his goodness and gallantry (Collins 642). Sir Patrick’s honorable motives, those that raise “him beyond the reach of ridicule or reproach,” make their marriage a “good action,” and one that allows Anne to leave behind her penniless and tragic past. Critics have also seen their marriage in a positive light, with Lillian Nayder, for example, commenting that Anne’s “happiness” with Sir Patrick “compensates her for the cruelty of her first” marriage (98), and Stephanie King, observing that Collins “frees” Anne from her earlier unhappiness to “enjoy a life of agency, wealth, and respectability” (10). Finally, in a further affirmation that Sir Patrick’s motives are indeed motivated by both “honour” and love, after their marriage, Sir Patrick is said to be “younger than ever,” indicating that their marriage has indeed been a “good action,” as rather than undermining or taxing the older man, it has been a source of rejuvenation (Collins 641). Rescue by marriage has led to what promises to be lasting and real happiness for both Anne and her much older husband.

**Conclusion: “I Thought a Woman Must Not Marry Her Grandfather”**

Interestingly, both Collins and Yonge also include overtly bad age-disparate marriages in their novels, while Hardy does so in a later novel (as shown in Chapter 6). For example, Yonge’s Bessie Keith marries the eager-to-wed Lord Keith and cheerfully

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Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinowski have an opposing perspective, suggesting that while through her second marriage, “Anne finds a home and position once again,” her “marriage to Sir Patrick is the only way in which she can escape the prison of Fulham,” suggesting a mercenary component to the relationship that does not appear to be supported by Collins’s narrative (144). Lisa Surridge also critiques “the novel’s ending, which celebrates the happy remarriage of Anne to Sir Patrick Lundie,” but in fact “reinserts her into the very relationship through which she has been so abused” (121) – but this perspective ignores that though Collins critiques Victorian marital laws, he does not condemn marriage wholesale in this novel.
neglects her injured and long-suffering older husband (whom Rachel calls “that poor old man” and Bessie herself calls “my poor old Lord Keith” 463, 472) and carries on lovemaking with an old boyfriend while pregnant.\footnote{Unsurprisingly, Bessie has been read as "naturally bad and beyond redemption" and described as "almost a murderer" of her husband (Wheatley 906). This character has also been read as an "incarnation of the Devil" for bringing "death and destruction with her wherever she goes." (Sandbach-Dahlstrom qtd. in Wheatley 905).} As Lord Keith first sought marriage to Fanny, in a manner both precipitous and cold, his second proposal appears suspect, while Bessie has her own agenda. After her death, the masses of debt that are discovered do much in “explain[ing] the marriage” (Yonge 510). For her bad wifery, she is punished with death at age 23, after a trip over a croquet hoop causes a “fatal injury” (Yonge 471).\footnote{Valerie Sanders describes Lord Keith and Bessie’s marriage as “even more grotesque than Fanny’s with Sir Stephen Temple,” and as such "ends as most unsuitable marriages do in Yonge’s novels — in the death of both parties” (29-30).} Their disparity in age and visible lack of romantic regard for each other inspire one of Fanny’s sons to hilariously say of Lord Keith and Bessie, “I thought a woman must not marry her grandfather” (Yonge 300). Though their disparity in age was less pronounced than that of Sir Stephen and Fanny, even a child can see they are not marrying for the right reasons. Collins, too, offers a counterpoint example to the happy Anne and Sir Patrick. Mrs. Glenarm (Delamayn’s intended for an advantageous marriage) has an unhappy-for-him first marriage to a much older husband, one in which she was a “chartered tyrant”: “In the brief six month of her marriage life with the man, whose granddaughter she might have been—and ought to have been—she had only to lift her finger to be obeyed. The doting old husband was the willing slave of the petulant young wife’s slightest caprice” (Collins 337). Both examples strongly affirm that where there is no real feelings or mutual respect, the age-disparate should stay unwed – as

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Blanche puts it: “marriage without love [is] no marriage at all” (Collins 388). As these examples illustrate, the era’s overriding attitude towards the marriage of young women and much older men is condemnatory.

However, as this chapter has shown, these thoroughly negative examples of age-disparate marriage do not necessarily offer a direct contrast to the ones explored in this chapter’s analysis. Despite the appearance of success of the age-disparate pairings analyzed in previous sections, each novel ultimately undermines the rights of aging men to their desires. True, the age-disparate marriages explored in this chapter indeed feature happy endings. For example, Sir Stephen is still reverently and deeply loved, and his wife and their children are financially and socially secure; Lord Mountclere adores Ethelberta and offers financial and social stability to his wife and her family, while finding his own stability through marriage; and Sir Patrick valiantly persists in winning Anne’s safety and, as a result, a marriage that promises great mutual happiness. However, despite these positive results, as this chapter has shown, these happily-ever-after endings mask a persistently upheld truth (as expressed by both the era’s fiction and non-fiction) regarding the era’s attitudes desires of aging men. Ultimately, the desires of these aging male characters are narrated out of each novel, whether through death, domestic management, or a mission. While an aging man can first be attracted to a young woman based upon her beauty, as each of the male characters are, over the course of each novel, that desire evaporates and is replaced by a higher, more spiritual, and age-appropriate mission of rescue and assistance. The justification offered by each novel leading up to each age-disparate marriage—Fanny is newly fatherless and impoverished at only sixteen while far from England; Ethelberta is
a butler’s daughter performing as a person of “quality” and seeking to rescue not only herself but ten other members of her family; and Anne is not only penniless and genteel of bearing and education, but literally in peril at the hands of her enraged age-matched husband—in effect simultaneously affirms and undermines these age-disparate marriages. Whether the marriage is thoroughly unsuccessful (as those featured in Chapters 1-3), avoided altogether (see Chapter 4), or seemingly happy (as those featured in this chapter are), for an aging male character—no matter what motivations and qualities the author gives characters as varied as Bounderby, Casaubon, Haggard, Whittlestaff, Pearston, Sir Stephen, Lord Mountclere, or Sir Patrick—there can be no true happily-ever-after ending that allows him to retain and express his sexual desires.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Bleakney received a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. After graduation, she worked in technical communications, during which Victorian literature was far from her mind – until it wasn’t. Inspired by her realization of her deep and abiding love for literature and a hunch she would love teaching, Sarah pursued a Master of Arts in Victorian Studies at the University of Florida. She continued her graduate studies at UF, where she received the Kirkland Fellowship. Sarah discovered she indeed loves teaching literature, composition, and communications, in the process earning a Graduate Student Teaching Award. Sarah looks forward to whatever is next for her both in the classroom and in her exploration of the oft-problematic intersections of aging, masculinities, and age-disparate marriage in Victorian literature.