

book lacks a reflection on the ways youth cultures are integrating technology into their daily practices, such as the use of social media in the punk community. Further, while many authors suggest that it is the media who repeatedly construct these groups as being primarily youth oriented, there is little consideration of how these mediated constructions influence older members' feelings of belonging. While this collection focuses on youth-culture groups oriented around music, this investigation could easily be expanded to study other youth cultures oriented around politics, gaming, or sports. For example, consider the primarily young membership of Occupy Wall Street. Similar to the groups studied here, non-music youth cultures often include older adults who complicate the idea of what it means to be a member. A clearer explanation of what makes musical youth cultures important or different would help highlight the significance of the work.

Also missing from the volume is a consideration of the protest nature of many of these youth cultures. Because these groups are counter-cultural, they offer members an alternative mode of being and behaving. In *Youth in Revolt*, Henry A. Giroux defines behaviors and memberships within these groups as acts of protest (against government, popular culture, and mainstream norms), and argues it is critically important that we study these acts to understand the new nature and meaning of "youth" in the twenty-first century. It would be helpful if this volume explored the various cultures in the context of protest as a means to illuminate the relationships among youth, adults, and culture.

Despite these oversights, this edited volume has many implications for the work of age and humanities scholars. First, it provides a thorough and detailed investigation of youth cultures, conceptualizing the category to include members of various age groups. This is helpful because it serves as a theoretical background for the study of membership. Second, through twelve case studies of various musical and stylistic cultures, it provides ample evidence of the changing position of age in contemporary society. Researchers interested in exploring the most popular musical youth cultures will find this volume a good resource. By integrating age studies and the study of musical counter-cultures, Bennett and Hodkinson's collection offers a much-needed perspective in age scholarship.

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***Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*. Kay Heath. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 247. \$75.00 (hardcover) \$24.95 (paperback and electronic).**

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There is general agreement that "middle age" has thus far been the most neglected life stage in aging studies scholarship. This is particularly the case in histories of aging. What

“middle age” meant—what features were believed to characterize it in past centuries—has gone largely unmarked and unremarked, as we have focused more sustained attention to the history of childhood or old age. Trailblazing work by Margaret Morganroth Gullette (*Declining to Decline*), John Benson (*Prime Time*), and Richard Shweder (*Welcome to Middle Age!*) joins a spate of popular books (e.g. Stephanie Dolgoff’s *My Formerly Hot Life*) that chart what “middle age” means and has meant over the past handful of generations. But in looking prior to 1900, we have had very little to go on to determine what “middle age” was in its various historical, gendered, economic, and cultural contexts.

This relative dearth of scholarship makes Kay Heath’s *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain* both a welcome and an important addition to aging studies in the humanities. As Heath argues, “the concept of midlife itself especially is difficult to define because it lacks clear cultural or biological markers of onset and cessation” (5). Despite this important caveat, Heath considers “sources such as medical literature, demographic data, advertisements,” and especially “Victorian novels” to understand this “liminal space between youth and age” (3). Her thesis is that, in Great Britain, it was the Victorians (the latter half of the nineteenth century, when Queen Victoria reigned [1837-1901]) who conceived of midlife as a period of trauma and crisis, as “an inevitable and calamitous decline” (1). She argues that examples from Victorian fiction are “representative of many more texts that present a similar preoccupation” (17). With thematically organized chapters considering dozens of novels by Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, H. Rider Haggard, Thomas Hardy, Frances and Anthony Trollope, and Oscar Wilde, among others, Heath shows us that Victorian fiction presented midlife as “an embattled frontier between youth and elderhood that announced the first onslaughts of decline” (17).

In each chapter, Heath considers several authors and novels, dividing her study by themes and types of midlife characters. Chapter One looks at what she calls the “rise of midlife” in Victorian Britain. An able summary of previous scholarship in aging studies (particularly the groundbreaking contributions of Teresa Mangum and Jill Quadagno) and of demographic data from the period, Heath’s introduction also lays out her argument about the “invention” of midlife in the nineteenth century. There is a tendency throughout the book to overstate the new-ness of this life stage. Heath focuses on the use of the term “midlife” as new, for instance, but prior to the nineteenth century the term “middle period” of life was the dominant phrase. It carried many similar connotations. But whether the Victorians invented midlife or not, Heath’s book demonstrates persuasively how “midlife” came to be described using repeated cultural patterns. As Heath puts it, “literary evidence consistently demonstrates that women were aged into midlife earlier than men due in particular to the concept of spinsterhood and medical theories of reproduction” (9). A quotation from one of Anthony Trollope’s characters that “a woman at forty is quite old, whereas a man at 40 is young” is borne out in Heath’s impressive assemblage of fictional details and cultural stereotypes in *Aging by the Book* (10).

Subsequent chapters look at age anxiety in male midlife marriage plots; female

desexualization at midlife; remarrying widows; what Heath calls the “specular self”; and age anxiety in late Victorian advertisements. Heath contributes several tour de force close readings of familiar texts, compelling us to see them anew. For instance, she gives us new ways to understand Brontë’s “madwoman in the attic,” Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre*, as demonstrating some of her culture’s worst fears and stereotypes about menopausal dementia (77). She also argues that we ought to see Rochester as an exemplar of reclaimed masculine mid-life virility and marriageability (41). Miss Havisham in Dickens’s *Great Expectations* has rarely been so clearly explicated in age-inflected terms, despite our long understanding her as stereotypically embittered spinster. Heath shows her to be “aged far in excess of actual years,” as portraying midlife “hyperbolically, as a monstrous living death” (87). Of course, Dickens was hardly the worst offender for writing women off as monsters in midlife, as Heath’s reading of H. Rider Haggard’s *She* demonstrates, with its youthful-ancient Ayesha as a “hideous,” “animal-like monster” (111).

If Dickens and Haggard give us versions of Victorian female midlife as a degenerating and dehumanizing period, Anthony Trollope was by contrast more sensitive in his depictions of midlife, Heath argues. Trollope, “of all Victorian novelists” “shows most interest in and sensitivity toward midlife issues,” Heath claims (19). He becomes a central figure in her study, one who demonstrates the possibility of “empowerment of midlife women” (21), particularly in the case of privileged, remarrying widows. As Heath puts it, Anthony Trollope (perhaps due to sensitivity fostered by his author-mother Frances Trollope) produced “versions of midlife [that] suggest new freedoms that women of all ages would slowly acquire, liberties with special significance for those doubly marginalized in Victorian culture by prejudices against their gender and their age” (143). Giving us the opportunity to envision the wide range of sympathy for and demonization of Victorian women in midlife is a signal contribution of this book.

Heath’s primary focus on fiction does produce some blind spots. As she herself acknowledges, she has assembled but a “small sampling of Victorian fiction” (71). Her chosen examples do not lead her to scrutinize Victorian mid-life in cross-cultural terms, although she perhaps loses an opportunity to say more in the case of *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha Mason. Issues of gender are well documented here, but class is more often under-examined, as the canonical Victorian authors and texts chosen tend to present characters who are in a “middle station” or above. Of course, these middle-class characters are often down on their luck, struggling with genteel poverty, but they are usually redeemed economically at novel’s end. In terms of the evidence Heath assembles beyond that of fiction, there are also class implications. Advertisements were, of course, pitched to those who could afford to buy. Whether definitions and experiences of “midlife” functioned differently for the Victorian working class population is left largely unexplored in this book.

That said, Heath’s final chapter on Victorian advertisements and consumer culture (focusing on soap ads) is fascinating. These ads illuminate the era’s “new ways of thinking about time as a limited commodity” (15). Heath argues that this phenomenon “formed the basis for a new anxiety, that at midlife one’s time and therefore opportunities were

running out” (15-16). Heath shows that anti-aging advertisements were “aimed in particular at a female audience, as advertisers capitalized on their culturally compelled desire to appear young” (182). *Aging by the Book* reproduces images of advertisements and offers close readings of their messages and cultural functions. Some ads hardly seem to require much analysis. The most stunning one is a soap advertisement from 1887, featuring the infamous Mrs. Georgina Weldon, using the slogan, “I am 50 today, but thanks to Pears’ Soap, my complexion is only 17” (184). As Heath argues, in a statement that typifies all that is impressive about this book, Victorian constructions of midlife cut both ways:

While manufacturers used age apprehension to increase the market for their products, they also raised age consciousness to new levels, further augmenting the unacceptability of the first signs of senescence at midlife. However, though advertisements increased age anxiety, they also suggested new possibilities, promising to put age defiance in the control of individual consumers. (198)

In nuanced close readings, Heath shows us how Victorian midlife was constructed in ways we would now call ageist. At the same time, she provides further examples that offered new and more positive possibilities. She ultimately argues that the Victorians paved the way for the twentieth-century term “midlife crisis” (199). Today, as Heath puts it, “age is becoming a negotiation, and we may feel forced to consider and reconsider options and attitudes, running from one pole of narcissism to another as we try to find healthy ground between ageist defeat and delusional artificiality” (202). The great value of *Aging by the Book* is in its proving that these are by no means new cultural conundrums. Heath’s book gives us a strong foundation for building future historical and cultural studies of middle age.

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