

Aging Faces and Gowland's Lotion in Austen's *Persuasion* (1817)

June Oh

Sir Walter Elliot, a conceited aristocrat in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1817), takes it as a personal affront when he sees an aging face. For him, an aging face is a physical manifestation of one's lowly breed. In his obsession with youthful and "superior" looks, the concept of aging is explicitly entangled with class. Quite unlike Sir Walter's essentialist belief, the era's advancing scientific and medical knowledge of the human body began to understand aging as a material phenomenon rather than a cosmic fate. The era witnessed a thriving anti-aging skincare industry that promised ways to treat the physical signs of aging, to guard against decay, and even to restore "bloom" to all who may subscribe to its application. This article focuses on one historical anti-aging skincare product and a personal favorite of Sir Walter, Gowland's Lotion. Reading popular medical texts and beauty regimens alongside *Persuasion*, this article shows how Austen captures the significance of daily practices of anti-aging skincare routines, exposing the faltering class system in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

AGING FACE: "AN OBJECT OF DISGUST"

This article reads the concept of aging as an essential narrative contrivance of *Persuasion* (1817) employed to expose the dynamics of class mobility in Britain in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Taking Gowland's Lotion, a famous historical artifact of the era, as an analytical subject, this article shows how *Persuasion* plays with the democratizing implications and class tensions of daily subscription to anti-aging products. Throughout, I use *Persuasion* as a touchpoint to investigate how the anti-aging industry is carefully situated within a matrix of age discourses and modes of aesthetic

valuation, raising key questions about the already faltering class system of the era.

Persuasion is a narrative rich with aging metaphors. Published six months before Jane Austen's death, it features characters intent on the idea of aging. From a melancholic heroine Anne Elliot whose "bloom had vanished early," to Elizabeth who is feeling the "years of danger" approaching in her twenty-ninth year, to Sir Walter Elliot "blooming as ever," the concepts of aging, decline, and bloom permeate the narrative (11-12). Beginning with the protagonist who sees "the declining year, with declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope, and spring, all gone together" (72) and ending with a rekindled—and mature—love, *Persuasion* plays with the concept of aging structurally and thematically.

Persuasion has one character indeed obsessed with the concept of aging. This person is none other than Sir Walter Elliot, the blessed baronet of Kellynch Hall, a mirror-addicted narcissist. He is infamous for his spiteful "vanity of person and situation" (10) and—though less recognized—his particular hatred against aged looks. Sir Walter believes in essential congruities between physical appearance and rank, looks and ancestry, person and class. Having been endowed with both traits from birth, "person and situation" mirror each other for him. While there may be a hierarchy between the two—"the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy" (10)—looks and titles cannot be thought of without the other. As if entitled blood shapes the body, the superior quality of one's heritage exteriorizes itself through personal charms in the same manner that inferior births are expressed through ugly agedness.

In Sir Walter's mental world, naval men best exemplify the despicable side of this association by demonstrating how wretchedly their lowliness is embodied in their physical appearance. Quite emphatically for Sir Walter, the sailors are not just disagreeable-looking; they are *aged*, blatantly aged with their weathered faces:

The most deplorable-looking personage you can imagine; his face the colour of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree; all lines and wrinkles, nine grey hairs of a side, ... "In the name of heaven, who is that old fellow?" ... I never saw quite so wretched an example of what a sea-faring life can do; but to a degree, I know it is the same

with them all: they are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. (22)

This comment is Sir Walter's description of Admiral Baldwin, a "certain" (22) navy officer of obscure birth. Though he is mentioned only once, he makes an impression—a visibly "wretched" impression that is. As the representative of "all" men in the navy, he demonstrates a sailor's way of life. Having to make a living for oneself, laboring on board, toiling through corrosive weather, it is a life that leaves a sailor with a shockingly rugged face robbed of "a man's youth and vigour most horribly" (22). Looking like "Sixty ... or perhaps, sixty-two" when he is only "Forty!" Admiral Baldwin is a specimen of what coming from lower on the social ladder (and trying to work your way up) does: it ages you into "an object of disgust" (22).

As far as Sir Walter can see, this aged face reveals the humble struggle of all those with obscure names. The ugly tussle one had to go through to rise in society is visible on the body. On the flip side, this is also to say that the aged face bespeaks a possibility that at the heavy price of youth, an obscure person may earn an "undue" (22) distinction. An aged face is, then, the evidence of possible class mobility. It is this reality, the horrible fluidity of class, that Sir Walter takes as a personal insult. His fundamental disdain deeply rooted in their plain heritage, Sir Walter beholds the base inner nature that would never change in an aged face. Indeed, going beyond his fixated contempt for naval officers, Sir Walter perceives signs of aging as visible markers of inborn inferiority. From a poor widow whom he persistently imagines to be an "old lady" (128) to Mrs. Clay, a woman far beneath him in terms of rank and finance, with her abominably mottled face, Sir Walter's obsession with youthful beauty and contempt for agedness are symptomatic of his insistence on aristocratic value.

But in his obsession with youthful looks, Sir Walter betrays a rather curious faith in the *improvement* of such class-determined looks. His trust in anti-aging routines and beauty products allows a surprising flexibility in appearances he would not happily approve in class. Sir Walter scorns the idea of those with vulgar surnames resisting their social fate and rising in the world. But that an individual can counter the physical sign of supposedly inherent lowliness does

not seem to offend him as much as it should. In fact, his explicit trust in one particular beauty product—Gowland’s Lotion—reveals his faith in an individual’s agency over his body, looks, and beauty (i.e., person) that should have been a manifestation of one’s class (i.e., situation). When it comes to matters of aging, as this article will show, Sir Walter is subject to the irony ingrained in believing in the effectiveness of skincare products.

AGING SKIN AND THE “ART OF PRESERVING BEAUTY”

Current scholarship on skincare—especially by Restoration and Regency scholars—often examines the implication of “paint” from a gendered perspective and observes how women’s desire for more youthful looks pulled them away from female virtue to model the sin of vanity (Martin; Snook; Chico 107-31; Reichardt; Kowaleski-Wallace). Popular beauty regimens and advertised skincare products demonstrate, however, that the art of resisting aging did not simply lie in using makeup powder to cover up wrinkles. Moreover, this skincare industry was not just for women. Men were also crucial participants who employed anti-aging¹ regimens to defy the natural force of aging. Promising ways to preserve and restore health and beauty against the temporal materiality of aging, popular health regimens and skincare products spurred the hope of an individual’s control over the aging body for both sexes of wider ranks.

The anti-aging beauty industry of the late eighteenth century was situated within a larger cultural phenomenon that asked for an individual to exert their agency over the aging process. Historians including Roy Porter, Susannah Ottaway, and Ingrid Tague have observed how the Enlightenment faith in scientific progress in understanding the human body generated a health-enthused public that believed in its agency over physical well-being (Ottaway and Tague ix-xiv). The zest for science, avid consumers, and medically informed

¹ I use “anti-aging” in its broad sense to indicate a concept that sought to resist the natural process of aging, including prolongation of life (which was the most commonplace rhetoric used in the eighteenth century), extension of the so-called “green” old age, stalling the onset of old age, preservation of health, and restoration of youth.

individuals with a taste for “polite”² appearances came together to yield a flourishing market for managing the aging body. Renowned medical experts of the era such as George Cheyne, John Wesley, and William Buchan published works that sold thousands of copies (Beatty 66n12, 104n26; Yallop 18) revealing the principles of “healthy long life.” Such expectation of “green” old age³ was commercialized into products such as special diet texts, sundry medicines, and easy elixirs. With all the help now within the reach of one’s hand, healthy aging became more a matter of practical investment by an enlightened individual than, say, a cosmic fate.⁴ By the late eighteenth century, the aging body was a commodity, “a fashionable site for management” (Yallop 13), a matter subject to one’s intention. Supported by the authority of science, to control or manage the aging body was an ability that could be purchased or learned by engaging in contemporary medical discourse.

While this optimism about the power of healthcare engrossed the public, a more nuanced understanding of aging developed throughout the eighteenth century. The idea of immortality along with extreme prolongevity was challenged as medical experts learned to understand the inevitability of bodily decay. The practice of health-rules might delay aging and slow the process down but only to a certain point. As in Dr. Cheyne’s famous words that would be echoed throughout the century, “In spite of all we can do, Time and Age will fix and stiffen our Solids” (220). To note this inevitable hardening of the body was part of a rhetoric deployed to authenticate the validity of authoritative measures against what was perceived as all sorts of quackeries that proliferated in the era. The “valid” manuals professed that aging was unavoidable, “Mechanical and Necessary” (Cheyne 221). They were largely future-oriented theories that argued one’s mindful action at this present moment would impact

² For “politeness” as a key analytical concept to understand eighteenth-century culture, see Klein.

³ Pat Thane observes that there were two types of old age in the early modern period: 1. green old age, in which one is still physically and mentally capable, and 2. decrepit old age, in which one has lost that capability. See Thane 4.

⁴ Although the eighteenth century is often characterized as the age of scientific progress with its more “scientific” approaches to the human body, including investigation in anatomy and neurology, the era was a transitional period where old theories were being gradually replaced by new schemes. See Katz 27-39.

health in later years. To *restore* or to *cure* an already age-ill body was a different question. That “Old mens [sic] diseases are hard to cure, but they are easily prevented” (Hill 4) was the idea. Granted, the distinction between preserving evergreen health by continuous care and acknowledging the irrevocability of an aging body was often crude and many times incoherent.⁵ But in general, popular medical regimens were careful to admit or, at the very least, note the inevitable decline of life, nevertheless.

On the other hand, popular beauty regimens and skincare products operated on the basis of *manipulating* such inevitable decay. They professed to check signs of aging as well as to improve or cure decayed looks.⁶ The preservation and restoration of beauty was the core promise of the beauty regimen industry. In fact, “the art of preserving beauty” was a common enough phrase that its usage designated beauty manuals as a whole. From cookbooks to more medicalized beauty regimens, a range of texts summoned this art that sought to arrest, and at times, reverse the effect of time. Elizabeth Price, for instance, added a section to her cookbook that promised to divulge the secret of the “Art of preserving and improving Beauty,” in which she included at-home manuals for clear glowing—and in essence, youthful—skin (1). Antoine Le Camus’s *Abdeker: or, the Art of Preserving Beauty* claimed “to remove all those Defects that may render the Body deform’d” (7) such as skin disorders. Amelia Chambers’ regimen was specific to skincare and included guides “To preserve the Complexion, and restore such as are decayed” (154), “To take away Wrinkles” (155), and “To make a Water for giving the Countenance a most beautiful blooming Colour” (154). As indicated by vocabularies such as “preserve,” “restore,” “decayed,” “wrinkles,” or “blooming colour,” what framed these formulas was the idea of decay. Often referred to as deformities, the blemishes of the human frame, or

⁵ For discussions of the era’s understanding of aging itself as an illness—i.e., aging as beyond nature, against nature, and often avoidable and curable—as opposed to the contesting theory of aging as a natural process, see Schafer.

⁶ Unlike the broader popular medical discourse of the era, beauty regimens do not show an effective differentiation between the concept of preservation and restoration. As the following examples show, “preserving,” “improving,” “restoring,” and “removing” were most often used to indicate beauty rules and these were used almost interchangeably.

“Ravages of Time” (Chambers 2), signs of aging were something to correct, improve, and guard against.

What needed special attention in this art was the “bloom”—an amorphous concept incorporating youth, health, and beauty—that could never be expressed by the skin of a sick, aged body. Bloom was, above all, a sign of health and youth which were the prerequisites of beauty. Neatly stated in a popular beauty regimen text, it was admitted as “an incontrovertible maxim, that beauty can never exist without perfect health; healthful constitution ... is the very ground-work of beauty” (Physician 167). Skincare products and beauty manuals that promised to preserve and restore bloom were thus, in a way, claiming to care for declining health—and preserve and restore youth. Many skincare practices were less about simulating health and more about working to provide explanations and a solution for the decaying body itself.

Utilizing the medical textualization of the aging body, beauty regimens and skincare products established the ideal skin condition as young, healthy, clear, elastic, and blooming, in opposition to the old, sick, opaque, and stiff skin of a declining body. While recent studies have brought critical attention to skin as a theoretical concept ingrained with gender and racial dynamics (Woods; Rosenthal; Senior), that skin was an integral signifier of age has been largely undertheorized. The concept of aging, and particularly the medical understanding of the aging process, informed the era’s theorization of skin undergirding the fundamentals of the skincare market. Popular medical texts explained aging as a decaying process that changed the *texture* of the body. It was believed that aging brought about a gluey, dried, and hardened bodily frame that was visible on the surface of the skin. This change of body texture was defined as an intrinsic quality of the aging process. Cheyne described aging as a mechanical process of “becom[ing] firm and hard” (221). When the time comes, he declared, a body becomes dry “Solids wanting Elasticity” (206). While Cheyne’s understanding of the human body as “bundles of nerves” used tactual imagery more broadly, the reality of aging was distinctly tactile. Combined with developing medical discussions around dermis, skin was where this materiality of aging was most visibly embodied. New scientific discourse identified skin as

not just a layer but a transparent organ that signaled what's underneath (Woods 51-53). Contemporaries saw health in a youth's glowing skin as well as declining health in a wrinkled face. A clear healthy skin denoted youth whereas the dry, stiff, and opaque exterior displayed the viscid inside of an aged body. Although there were other visible signs of aging that were marked by contemporaries, such as gray hairs, altered body postures, or the way one dressed (Ottaway 44), skin played a prominent role as *the* body organ that manifested one's agedness.

While the majority of the skincare manuals and beauty products were dedicated to the female sex, men were also active participants in the market.⁷ Corporeal management was perceived as a social responsibility of a "polite" individual of both sexes, although with different kinds of exaction for men.⁸ At the same time that women were pressured to take care of their youthfulness, the health-concerned culture also expected men to be attentive regarding their bodily well-being and look the part. Men's bodies and appearances also had "social currency, a great visual immediacy" (Yallop 11). Although being too keen on physical appearances (such as wearing a wig or powdering the head) ran the risk of being considered effeminate (Withey 229), caring for the aging body or aspiring to youthfulness was not under the same kind of censure. Rather, with aging perceived as a matter of personal choice, to *not* care for the aging body was equivalent to being socially neglectful. According to one manual, "Personal negligence not only implies an insufferable indolence, but an indifference whether we please or not" (Physician 3-4), which was a dereliction of duty for an enlightened, polite, and responsible individual. Premature aging or evident signs of aging signaled a lack of social awareness and an absence of principle in a man. Anti-aging regimens and beauty products were, therefore, crucial sites of cultural engagement for both sexes.

Yet not everyone had the opportunity to relish the promise of the anti-aging goods and manuals. Despite a plethora of beauty regimens and popular skincare products that could, in theory, be taken by anyone, they were not accessible to

⁷ The male sex participated in the anti-aging industry both as consumers and producers. For men as providers of medicalized beauty products, see Martin. See Withey for an examination of men's shaving activity as part of a larger cultural engagement with the "cult of youth."

⁸ For gendered expectations of male politeness, see Cohen.

all. Some simply did not have access to the goods, the money to purchase, or the time to care. In *Persuasion*, in response to Sir Walter's violent contempt against the sailor's aged face, Mrs. Clay, an opportunistic family companion of a lower status, protests:

“Nay, Sir Walter,” cried Mrs Clay, “this is being severe indeed. Have a little mercy on the poor men. We are not all born to be handsome. . . . it is only the lot of those who are not obliged to follow any [profession], who can live in a regular way, in the country, choosing their own hours, following their own pursuits, and living on their own property, without the torment of trying for more; it is only their lot, I say, to hold the blessings of health and a good appearance to the utmost: I know no other set of men but what lose something of their personableness when they cease to be quite young.” (22-23)

Mrs. Clay points out that sailors gain aged faces because they are not aristocrats. They “lose something of their personableness” because they are not born with privileges—privileges that make blooming looks ready to be expressed. Time and money are spent on living in not “regular ways,” perhaps in the city, going about their job, spending hours following others' demands, paying rents, with all the “torment of trying for more.” Mrs. Clay goes on to explain how it is the same with other professions including soldiers, clergyman, physicians, and lawyers. They are all careworn with “a toil and a labour of the mind, if not of the body, which seldom leaves a man's looks to the natural effect of time” (22-23). They age, decay faster, and unwillingly and perhaps unknowingly, let go of their youth. “When they cease to be quite young,” they in fact stop looking young.

Sir Walter Elliot with all the gifts of beauty and dignity, far away from the torment of surviving the world, is “blooming as ever.” Unlike the ravaged agedness of the commoners, he believes his privileged blood gives him immunity from the havoc of time. Critics have noted how Sir Walter is a character who resists the idea of temporal change.⁹ He not only refuses to acknowledge the social changes taking place (for example a navy officer literally

⁹ Pam Morris, for instance, takes note of how “Sir Walter's denial of time and change within his own mental world, [is] expressed by him as contempt for those unable to resist the material deprivations of empirical temporality” (139).

replacing him, the baronet, in his family estate) and regards class mobility as “offensive” (22), but also rejects the temporality of physical change. Presumably doting on beauty products, admiring his fine features in a room of looking-glasses, Sir Walter, aged fifty-four, stays “blooming” amidst the wrecks of aging—but *not* just because of his superiority, Austen suggests.

As witnessed in his scathing remarks on the admiral’s weather-beaten face, Sir Walter seems to judge everyone (regardless of class) who does not make an effort to maintain blooming looks. The irony of his investment in skincare is, of course, that it seems precious aristocratic blood is insufficient to keep away the careworn signs of aging. The next section examines the irony of Sir Walter’s investment in the beauty industry and demonstrates how the anti-aging skincare market exploits the status of class in order to appeal to the aspiring individuals of different classes. Taking Gowland’s Lotion as a prime example, it will demonstrate that the skincare market was underpinned by faith in an individual’s control over his classed body, while resting on a class-bound framework at the same time.

GOWLAND’S LOTION: A SUPERIOR SKIN FOR ALL

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Robert Dickinson and Thomas Vincent published multiple essays on the success and value of an exalted beauty product of the era, Gowland’s Lotion.¹⁰ A celebrated “appendage to every Toilet of fashion” (*Epitome* 4) and a personal favorite of Sir Walter, one version of Gowland’s Lotion was sold for 10 shillings and 6 pence (roughly equivalent to £330),¹¹ per quart bottle in Grosvenor Square, London in 1790 (Bacon 13).

¹⁰ It is believed that John Gowland, the original inventor of Gowland’s Lotion, was disinclined to publicly advertise the product in the press. The product nevertheless gained much popularity by the mid-century. After Gowland’s death, Thomas Vincent, a close friend of Gowland, took over the business of Gowland’s Lotion with his son-in-law Robert Dickinson who worked with Vincent and later owned the business. Following a public fight over the “genuine recipe,” essays written in the 1790s almost worked like an advertisement but not precisely. Starting with the 1792 publication of *An Account of the Nature and Effects of Gowland’s Lotion*, Dickinson and Vincent published essays for the next decade, both together and separately, including *On the Power and Effects of Gowland’s Lotion* (1793) and *Epitome of a Manuscript Essay on Cutaneous Diseases* (1794) that purportedly explain the workings of the lotion. After Vincent’s death, Dickinson published solely from 1800. See Corley.

¹¹ Approximately calculated with reference to John J. McCusker’s computation system that converts past currency into modern monetary value. Because McCusker’s system is developed out of American

This extortionately priced face lotion was vouched for by more than twenty persons of quality,¹² made its inventor John Gowland a royal apothecary, and even spurred a foul family feud over the “original” recipe.¹³ Publicized as “an universal cleanser and clearer of the skin, and an improver of the common complexion” (*An Essay* 54), it promised to clear all kinds of skin malfunctions including dryness, freckles, eruptions, coarseness, paleness, redness, shingles, and scurvy among others, and to restore the ever-vague and ever-apparent “bloom.” Moneyed customers plagued Gowland and flurried over to the shop all day, Dickinson reports, to purchase this promise that came in a little bottle. Combined with the fact that the devastating side effects caused by mercury and lead that were contained in the lotion were soon to discredit its claims,¹⁴ Gowland’s Lotion is just the artifact in which Austen will have Sir Walter believe. It’s fashionable, expensive, and a sham (fig. 1 and fig. 2).

Sir Walter’s particular trust in Gowland’s Lotion is expressed when the heroine of *Persuasion*, Anne, his least favorite daughter, appears with “greatly improved” (118) looks. He sees her “less thin in her person, in her cheeks; her skin, her complexion, greatly improved; clearer, fresher” (118). Curious about how Anne managed to have “the bloom and freshness of youth restored” (87), he asks “Had she been using any thing in particular?” (118). He is not only convinced that a beauty regimen is behind this restored youth but also takes for granted that she must be using some kind of beauty product. When Anne

data, not British, and as much heated debate around this model continues, the resulted conversion remains a rough conjecture. Combined with a similar result (£320.95, if converted from 1830s into 2000 currency) from Merris and Gaskins’ calculation system, the converted monetary sum provides a rough idea of how expensive Gowland’s Lotion was.

¹² The testimonies for Gowland’s Lotion, which worked like a modern-day customer review, were first published in 1792 in the later pages of *An Account*. Later, *Epitome of a Manuscript* also published what was called “Cases” and “Testimonials” including no less than twenty-three customers vouching for the efficacy and safety of the product. *An Essay on Cutaneous Diseases* (1800) follows this format and lists a number of letters of recommendation adding new testimonies.

¹³ Vincent’s wife, Maria Elizabeth, attempted to create her own recipe for commercial purposes under the name of Mrs. Vincent and fought with Vincent publicly about whose product had the effective superiority. See Corley.

¹⁴ Though there is no physical evidence that Austen knew about Gowland’s Lotion, by the time she was writing *Persuasion*, the harmful side effects of Gowland’s Lotion were publicly known. See Correy 45 and Thomas 662.

answers that she is not using anything at all, he immediately responds “Merely Gowland” (118). “Merely Gowland” not because the product is insignificant or nugatory but because subscribing to Gowland’s Lotion is such a basic routine that it does not count for a special measure. He is genuinely surprised—“Ha!” (118)—when Anne confirms she is not using the lotion at all. Still convinced of its power, Sir Walter repeats his recommendation to Anne, “Gowland, the constant use of Gowland” (118), revealing his faith in this fashionable skincare product.¹⁵

Sir Walter, as an exigent practitioner of evergreen bloom, apparently has *codes* for resisting aging: he subscribes to daily application of Gowland’s Lotion during his retrenchment and, as shown by his sometimes passionate and sometimes blasé comments on the physical beauty or lack of it in others, he subscribes to anti-aging beauty rules that are derived from prolongevity principles. One of the repeated rules he mentions is to stay out of sharp winds and cold frosts. Fussing over his youngest daughter Mary’s red nose, he says that he would have sent her a new hat and pelisse “If I thought it would not tempt her to go out in sharp winds, and grow coarse” (116). Here, Sir Walter particularizes “sharp winds” as a cause of aging, revealing his active participation in anti-aging discourse. Popularized by prolongevity health regimens of the eighteenth century, it was a relatively widespread idea that a certain quality of air or weather ages a person.¹⁶ But for Sir Walter to name wind as the external cause for aging Mary is problematic. Not because it is wrong—as the prudent Anne seems to suggest—but because by acknowledging the power of an outside force, he is accepting a sociocultural belief that acquired qualities could override inborn heritage.

¹⁵ It might not have been unusual to see male consumers of Gowland’s Lotion. An essay written to promote it enlists many male consumers who attest to the lotion’s efficacy. These men comment on their own experiences with the effect of the lotion, how they recommended it to other male contemporaries as well as to female companions, and how they will stay devoted to the lotion (Dickinson 54-59). Another promotional essay of Gowland’s Lotion includes a section on the benefits of the lotion for gentlemen under the act of shaving (*Epitome* 2).

¹⁶ The long-held belief in Galenic six non-naturals (diet, sleep, evacuation, air, exercise, and passion) was very much revived in the eighteenth-century’s self-care regimens. This traditional theory argued that various factors of an individual’s immediate environment swayed the condition of their health and prescribed ways to balance the humoral harmony of the vital fluids.

only, and I have given proofs of the truth of this assertion; I have said, that the mode of treating them, ought to be local; and both authority, facts, and reasoning, have confirmed what I have advanced.

But whatever opinion may be entertained of this hypothesis, whatever notion the afflicted may have of the cause of their complaint, they may be completely assured, that every cutaneous disorder, from the slightest to the most distressing, will be effectually removed by this Lotion.

I confidently assert, that my Lotion is a specific for these eruptions; and I appeal to those who have experienced its efficacy, after they had been disappointed by internal means.

The following cases are selected from a number too large for the limits of this pamphlet; and several of them are published at the particular request of the parties; and their testimony, if the reader thinks proper personally to apply to them, will remove every scruple that incredulity itself could retain.

C A S E S.

The respectability of the following Names must, of course, supersede the necessity of any further remark; they cannot fail of bringing conviction to the minds of all who are open to conviction, and must at once establish the credit and efficacy of the Lotion. They are the testimonies of persons whose characters and situation place them far above the possible suspicion of their having sent them merely to favour the Proprietor, and at the expence of honour, truth, and justice, to impose upon mankind.

They are not taken from obscure or distant situations, but come from persons well known on the spot, and (more than willing) they desire to be applied to.

TESTIMONIALS

Of the Use and Efficacy of the GENUINE GOWLAND'S LOTION, prepared by ROBERT DICKINSON, Son in-law to Mr. THOMAS VINCENT,

No. 55, LONG-ACRE.

THE FOLLOWING VERY LIBERAL NOTE IS JUST RECEIVED FROM THE MUCH ADMIR'D MRS. CROUCH, OF THE THEATRE ROYAL.

"MRS. CROUCH's compliments to Mr. Dickinson, begs his acceptance of the inclosed note, as a small acknowledgment for his good-natured attention in recommending to her his Gowland's Lotion, which she has the pleasure to tell him has perfectly cured her face."

May 18, 1793, No. 20, Suffolk-street,

To

Figure 1. First page of "Cases" from *Epitome of a Manuscript transcribing letters written by customers vouching for the effect of Gowland's Lotion*. 1794. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Accessed 14 April 2020.

To Mr. VINCENT.

" SIR,

" HAVING got some bottles of your Gowland's Wash from Mr. Elder, of Edinburgh, and it being near finished, I will esteem it as a favour, if you will send me down to Bristol, four bottles, pints, at 5s. 3d. each, of the genuine Gowland's Wash.

I have found it a great cleanser and clearer of the skin, though at first it occasioned rather an alarming scurf.

" Let them be carefully packed, and sent by James Sartain James's flying waggon, for Mrs. Patterfon Anstruther, at Mr. Calder's, Apothecary, Downry Square, Hot-Wells, Bristol.

Hot Wells, Bristol,

I am, &c.

Jan. 5, 1791.

A. P. W. ANSTRUTHER."

This lady is sister-in-law to Mr. ANSTRUTHER, the Member of Parliament, and one of the Welch Judges, Lincoln's-Inn-Fields.

Mr. DICKINSON, N^o. 55, Long-Acre.

" SIR,

" I do freely permit you the use of my name in your pamphlets; and also, if you think proper, in the Hull Packet. I have a satisfaction in allowing you this privilege, as it must convince the world that my complaint proceeded neither from a foul contaminated habit, or from drinking:—a conclusion that must always be drawn from a cure's being obtained by your medicine. This accounts for the readiness with which such respectable persons grant you the use of their names, as it is a circumstance even flattering to themselves.

" For nine years I was afflicted with a very violent, painful, and disfiguring eruption, which almost covered my face. During this time, I was almost constantly taking the different medicines in use for such complaints, but without any other effect than to injure my general health: I also visited Harrogate, Scarborough, and the other watering-places, with as little success: fortunately I at length heard of your Gowland's Lotion; three bottles of it have entirely cured me; the alternate itching and burning have subsided, and my face has become perfectly smooth, cool, and comfortable, and free from any disease whatever.

" This you are at liberty to publish, both for the reasons above stated, as well as to beget a confidence in the public mind, from which they themselves may eventually benefit.

" I am your's, &c.

*Hull, Oct. 12, 1791.
High street, corner of Scute-lane.*

" FRANCIS STAINTON."

" SIR,

" So far from having any objection to your adding my name to your list, I think, with Mr. Stainton, that you are doing me a favour. I have been esteemed a drunkard, from the single circumstance of a red nose, and eruptive face; your Lotion, in curing the latter, has also freed me from the imputation of the former. Independent of this, I really wish to serve your medicine, as from the benefit I have received, I believe it a good one, and fully competent to the uses for which you recommend it.

" I am your's, &c.

Oct. 1793.

" SAMUEL DAVIES.

" Proprietor of the King's Head Inn, Beverley."

" SIR,

" HAVING received very great benefit from the use of your Gowland's Lotion, I cannot help taking this method to acknowledge: and assure you, I shall

Figure 2. Second page of "Cases" from *Epitome of a Manuscript transcribing letters written by customers vouching for the effect of Gowland's Lotion*. 1794. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Accessed 14 April 2020.

It is no coincidence that wind is picked out as aging Mary. Just like the sailors whose encounter with “every climate, and every weather” aged them, Sir Walter’s youngest daughter with his own privileged blood running through her veins is growing haggard because of harsh wind. Despite Sir Walter’s cruel evaluation of his daughter as having only an “inferior value” (11) because she merely married a country gentleman, Mary should not exhibit the same lowliness as sailors. As much as he would like to believe the opposite, there is plenty of evidence that superior blood may not result in superior “person.” To his greatest misfortune, the horrid agedness exists at home: “he could plainly see how old all the rest of his family and acquaintances were growing. Anne haggard, Mary coarse, every face in the neighbourhood worsting, and the rapid increase of the crow’s foot about Lady Russell’s temples had long been a distress to him” (12). In the aging faces of the worthier people, the dichotomy between rugged common faces and superior bloom becomes unstable. An aging face is indeed an unreliable marker of class inferiority.

It is ironic, therefore, that Sir Walter believes in *cultivating* youthful looks. His faith in Gowland’s Lotion suggests that he perceives the aging body as a responsive entity subject to an individual’s management, a concept that might be at odds with his essential belief in the congruity between “person and situation.” Taking the gist of the Enlightenment tenet of “mind over matter” (i.e., the power of an individual’s will over physical substance), beauty regimens and skincare products promoted the idea that a youthful face/body was more than ever a product of cultivation. Beauty regimens guaranteed they “may be used at any time without the least danger, ... having never been known to fail of success” (Chambers v). They often promised to “Remove the Appearance of OLD AGE AND DECAY” (Physician) and restore youthful looks for all consumers who applied proper care. Although the idea of beauty as a gift was a consistent creed, under this self-care mantra, youthful looks were effectively a physical result of an agent’s awareness and control. The aging body was to be constantly cared for and monitored regardless of class. Those born superior, even those as superior as Sir Walter, were to take care of their aging appearances and avoid irritation and external stimulus like the sharp winds. As seen in Sir

Walter's love for Gowland's Lotion, social elites purchased their way into the cultural ideal, as did the rest of society. Furthered by the simultaneous consumer revolution "making all markers of distinction available to anybody for a price" and thus "threatening to undermine—even annihilate—familiar categories of distinction and identification" (Wahrman 203, 204), a blooming skin, a physical sign of superiority, was now a cultural achievement, an earned reward of goods and care.

This is what Gowland's Lotion promised all along: to display the badge of social distinction and cultural refinement—that is, a clear, blooming skin. As a product of the Enlightenment's newly medicalized beauty regimen, Gowland's Lotion supposedly worked to cure cutaneous malfunctions or to give one "blooming" looks.¹⁷ With Gowland's Lotion, anyone who could afford it could express the look of the superior and reject the "common complexion." It was an even more subversive disruption of the markers of class than wearing luxurious clothes because it supposedly changed the body itself. It promised to alter the look of the "common" and to allow any consumer to gain a physical sign of superiority. To incorporate this highly sensitive claim, the promotional essays of Gowland's Lotion devised an interesting tactic.

Gowland's Lotion is first situated as a valid skincare product that supports existing class mentality. Robert Dickinson, the successive proprietor of the lotion, published *An Essay on Cutaneous Diseases, Impurities o[f] the Skin. And Eruptions of the Face* (1800), a two-part essay based on a text allegedly written by Gowland himself before his death. Dickinson announced that because the hype about this beauty product was generating "spurious compositions" (3), he was publishing this essay, despite his professed disinclination for public advertisement, in order to legitimately explain how Gowland's Lotion does its

¹⁷ Gowland's Lotion was specifically advertised for treating scurvy which was known to affect eighteenth-century sailors most widely. The promotional essays make explicit points about the product being useful for scurvy and *An Essay* even has a dedicated section on scurvy titled "Of the Real Scurvy," 38-41. In *An Account of Several Valuable and Excellent Genuine Patent and Public Medicines*, W. Bacon refers to the product as an effective cure for scorbutic disturbances for men and women (13). *Persuasion* does not particularly refer Gowland's Lotion to sailors. Instead, much scholarship on Gowland's Lotion examines its usage for treating venereal disease (especially syphilis) and how Mrs. Clay's application of the product insinuates her moral depravity. The fact that Sir Walter recommends it to his own daughter makes this argument rather doubtful. See Morrison 197-98.

work. He recommended the usage of Gowland's Lotion for a range of cutaneous malfunctions alongside highly medicalized explanations of the anatomy of skin. While promoting the scientifically proven benefits of the lotion, *An Essay* targets the soft spot of the fashionable wannabees. The first section of Part II begins:

It is to be lamented, and indeed is rather hard that those very persons whose skins are most delicate, and naturally best calculated to exhibit a superior degree of brilliancy and lustre, are most subject to be affected from being least competent to bear those fluctuating changes of the weather, to which in this country, we are so constantly exposed. It is, however, some consolation to know, that a very short use of the Lotion will presently display the superiority they actually possess, and which they are naturally so well intitled to exhibit. (53-54)

While mainly appealing to the female sex by summoning the “delicate” part of society, this text establishes the necessity of Gowland's Lotion based on the inborn “superiority” of possible consumers. And it strategically brings contemporary nerve theory into work. As scholars including John Mullan and Porter have well established, the idea of nerves and the degree of nervous delicacy were cultural notions that reflected existing concepts of social distinction (Mullan 201-40; Porter, Cheyne xxx; Churchill; Beatty). Delicate nerves were considered an essential part of socially elite bodies, associated with an elevated sense of one's surroundings and consequently a supreme intelligence and morality. This heightened sensibility, however, was said to make those with finer bodily frames more susceptible to various nervous disorders. *An Essay* applies this paradoxical nature of supreme nerves to skin and identifies delicate skin as both a gift and a curse. Although superior people may have finer, more delicate skin, it is also that excellency that makes them “least competent to bear” the many stimuli of the world, thus necessitating an effort to restore and preserve that superior skin.

Without seemingly upsetting the class structure and even endorsing it at times, Gowland's Lotion simultaneously democratized skincare and encouraged an individual's control over his bodily fate. And at its center lay the concept of

aging. The text shrewdly frames cutaneous malfunctions in highly analogous terms to the aging process and highlights the universality of the human body. When the promotional essays address bloom, they announce that having (or losing) bloom works “ALIKE IN ALL PERSONS; [because] its parts are universally the same in every individual” (*An Essay* 57). Bloom is here conceived as a matter of health status, a physical outcome of a healthy bodily process rather than an expression of inborn superiority. Paleness—the opposite of bloom—is likewise defined as a result of blocked circulations (*An Essay* 57-58), a dysfunctional bodily process that may occur to *any* and *all* bodies.

In fact, all skin malfunctions are treated as the material result that comes from an obstructed perspiration, an operation that very much resembles the process of aging:

This Lotion, by a gently stimulating quality re-opens the pores, dissolves the condensed perspirable matter, and excites the action of the skin to a discharge of its stagnated contents. Restores and continues its natural functions, and thereby renders, and preserves it THIN, TRANSPARENT, SOFT, and ELASTIC. (54)

An Essay here explains that Gowland’s Lotion helps cure skin disorders as it discharges the blockage which hinders the normal cutaneous operation. The text contends that skin disorders are essentially due to the pores and capillary arteries becoming condensed with “perspirable matter.” Arising from a want of energy that is used to fight off the many disturbances experienced under normal circumstances, stagnated matters get lodged up on the surface layer of the body. The skin, then, “becomes indurated, thickened, and opaque” (*An Essay* 54) with ensuing disruptions. Gowland’s Lotion tends to this operation directly, it claims. The secret of the lotion is in its ability to eliminate the “thick and turgid virus” that will “clog and thicken” the vessels and glands (*Epitome* 4). As Gowland himself explained, “Its Principle of Action,” was that “it opens the pores of the skin, excites the languid vessels to their proper action, thereby relieves obstructed perspiration” (*Epitome* 4).

Considering the lay medical culture consisted of “well-informed, public-spirited, and responsible layman” (Porter, “Lay Medical Knowledge” 163)

attuned to the languages of prolongevity self-care, Georgian contemporaries would have seen an aged body in these descriptions of malfunctioning skin. The taxonomies chosen to characterize the status of skin disorders strongly invoked the popular medical characterization of aging bodies. Indeed, obstructed perspiration and its tactile consequences were the essential medical characteristics of all aged bodies. Cheyne identified aged bodies as “unelastick, ... their Perspiration little” (207), underscoring the lack of perspiration and its hardening effects. Robert James in *A Medicinal Dictionary* (1743-1745) also defined aging as a process of damming pores. He says that “when old age begins to approach, ... the Pores are shut up, and the Vessels are too full,” and then, “the cutaneous Pores are obstructed, the several Excretions must of course be retarded” (“The Regimen for Old Age”), utilizing almost the exact terms and framework as that of the cutaneous disorders.

Moreover, the workings of Gowland’s Lotion further called upon the fundamental anti-aging mechanism of purging¹⁸—a process of discharging stagnated contents to stimulate circulations and perspirations—as it employed “purification” as its method of cure. The product’s motto to keep the skin “THIN, TRANSPARENT, SOFT, and ELASTIC” is identical to anti-aging regimens’ prescript for retaining health. Although it was considered impossible to perfectly clean and dilute (i.e., purge) the body, endeavoring to make the bodily juices “a thin, clear, insipid Fluid” (Cheyne 225) as much as possible was the grand lesson of prolongevity regimens.

Such rhetoric of the aging process rendered the cutaneous malfunctions something that all persons of every class could experience. By utilizing the decaying materiality of the aging bodies as a reference point for skin disorders, the text emphasized not only the universally negative effects of aging on the human body, but also the possibility of fixing such undesirable looks by applying this lotion. While there may be differing degrees of vulnerability for skin disorders, the basic operation of the cure functions in the same way. Just

¹⁸ Although Gowland uses this idea of purging to explain the workings of the lotion, he argues against the traditional treatment of purging like bloodletting or various methods for correcting the imbalance of the fluid. Gowland’s essay as a whole is a defense for a local remedy and a direct rebuke against the humoral therapy.

as the concept of aging applies to all human bodies, this beauty product works in the same way for everyone, benefiting all bodies of various classes. As Dickinson points out in a forceful way, “persons of every description and of every rank in life” will see the results of Gowland’s Lotion (*An Essay* 4), presumably, if its extortionate price were not an issue.

Gowland’s Lotion was thus an item for *general* use.¹⁹ It was an “improver of the common complexion,” a “general cleanser and clearer of the skin” (*An Essay* 12). The common looks such as coarseness, dryness, agedness, or darkness—the typical characteristics of the working class²⁰—could be “purged.” The impurities of one’s body could be cured. Those other than the aristocracy could very well reject the look of the common and display the look of the superior. Gowland’s Lotion, in essence, was a beauty product that spurred the hopes of an individual’s control over his class-determined bodily fate.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how popular beauty regimens and advertised skincare products interacted with the dynamics of class mobility in the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century. Introducing Gowland’s Lotion as a favorite skincare item of the vain aristocrat Sir Walter, *Persuasion* demonstrates how his essentialist belief in class-determined looks is debunked by his obsession with youthful—and superior—looks. Austen’s *Persuasion*, particularly the repeated references to Gowland’s Lotion by Sir Walter Elliot, offers insight into how the era’s investment in daily skincare practices tied to aging was a discursive process that fueled the democratization

¹⁹ The collection of essays for Gowland’s Lotion investigated in this article is curiously rather timid about addressing cutaneous signs of aging as its focal point. While they take bloom as the evidence of youthful health and the lack of it as pathological, they rarely make explicit comments about signs of aging that would appear on the skin of the face such as wrinkles. Perhaps it was a strategy devised to appeal to the larger population of younger customers, or, as implied in the exaggerated emphasis on the product’s scientific validity, it could be that it was to avoid being branded as a quackish item promising evergreen youth.

²⁰ Woods notes that “working men and women generally displayed darker complexions than members of the aristocracy, gentry and merchant and professional classes. This was because, unlike the elite, working people spent a large amount of time outdoors, exposed to the sun” (59).

of the body. Satirizing Sir Walter's trust in class-determined youthfulness and revealing the sociocultural attitude behind the daily practices for superior bloom, Austen captures the historical moment when the aging body became a material result of self-care and consumption, a subject of acculturation, and an individualized matter flexible under cultivation. As the aging process became a manageable product commodified under promising regimens and rosy beauty products, to read class distinction in the body was already invalid. Sir Walter's anti-aging codes as well as his recommendation of the product demonstrate, perhaps to his surprise and to Austen's point, that the promises of skincare products—i.e., preservation and restoration of blooming skin—are disruptive to the existing social distinctions of class.

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