

The Cult of Youth

In this major new study, James F. Stark provides the first historical account of the most dominant ideas, practices and material cultures associated with anti-ageing and rejuvenation in modern Britain. With a focus on the interwar period, his study uncovers the role of the commercial world in influencing attitudes towards ageing and youth. Stark argues that the technologies of anti-ageing, their commercialisation and their consumption made rejuvenation a possible and desirable aim in a period of sociopolitical instability, mechanised conflict and extending lifespans. Ultimately, Stark offers an innovative historical account which draws together bodies, gender, science, medicine, advertising and ageing, and shows how the quest for youth was transformed by social anxieties about an ageing population and economic crisis.

JAMES F. STARK is an historian of modern medicine and science and is Associate Professor of Medical Humanities at the University of Leeds.

The Cult of Youth

Anti-Ageing in Modern Britain

James F. Stark

University of Leeds



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-1-108-70597-4 — The Cult of Youth: Anti-Ageing in Modern Britain
 James F. Stark
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108705974

DOI: 10.1017/9781108695428

© James F. Stark 2020

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2020
 First paperback edition 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Names: Stark, James F., author.

Title: The cult of youth : anti-ageing in modern Britain / James F. Stark.

Description: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2020. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019038306 (print) | LCCN 2019038307 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781108484152 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108705974 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781108695428 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Aging—Prevention—History. | Aging—Great Britain—History. |

Youthfulness—Great Britain—History. | Medical innovations—Great Britain—History.

Classification: LCC RA776.75 .S773 2020 (print) | LCC RA776.75 (ebook) |

DDC 612.6/70941—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019038306>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019038307>

ISBN 978-1-108-48415-2 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-70597-4 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
1 Introduction	1
2 Hormones, 1918–1929	24
3 Diet, 1918–1929	68
4 Electrotherapy, 1925–1932	106
5 Exercise, 1930–1939	138
6 Skin Care, 1930 and Beyond	170
7 Conclusion	205
8 Postscript	214
<i>Bibliography</i>	218
<i>Index</i>	248

Figures

- | | | |
|-----|--|--------|
| 1.1 | 'The Rejuvenator', as presented in the 1937 Blackpool Illuminations. (Bolton Council Records, 1993.83.04.35.) | page 3 |
| 1.2 | Elderly, infirm and disabled figures awaiting rejuvenation in the 1937 Blackpool Illuminations. (Bolton Council Records, 1993.83.04.36.) | 4 |
| 2.1 | Before-and-after images of two patients featured in the Steinach Film. (Peter Schmidt, <i>The Conquest of Old Age</i> , 1931, plate XXXV.) | 43 |
| 2.2 | Before-and-after images of a thirty-four-year-old technician, one of Peter Schmidt's patients. (Peter Schmidt, <i>The Conquest of Old Age</i> , 1931, plate XXXVII.) | 44 |
| 2.3 | An imagination of the social consequence of rejuvenation in a number of contexts, from the pen of the illustrator Will Owen (1869–1957). ('When All the World Is Young', <i>The Sketch</i> , 15 October 1919, 75.) | 46 |
| 2.4 | A rejuvenated old man, bearing a striking resemblance to an aged Charles Darwin, dances with a young flapper on the cover illustration of the satirical song, 'Be Rejuvenated'. (Annie Salter and W. R. Barwick, <i>Be Rejuvenated</i> . Sydney: W. M. Nash, 1925, front cover.) | 52 |
| 2.5 | A sketch printed as one of the 'Prize Jokes' in the <i>Ballymena Weekly Telegraph</i> . ('Prize Jokes' <i>Ballymena Weekly Telegraph</i> , 2 February 1929, 5.) | 56 |
| 3.1 | An advertisement for Yeast-Vite demonstrating its supposed effects, promoting models of both male and female health, happiness and, crucially, productivity. ('Yeast-Vite and <u>YOUR</u> health register', <i>Aberdeen Press and Journal</i> , 19 October 1929, 5.) | 96 |
| 4.1 | Patent images showing Otto Overbeck's US patent for an electric body comb. (Otto Overbeck, 'Electric Body Comb', US Patent 1,638, 407, 9 August 1927.) | 116 |
| 4.2 | An outline of a large-scale, clinical electrotherapy device. (Chisholm Williams, <i>High-Frequency Currents in the Treatment of Some Diseases</i> . New York: Rebman Company, 1903, 130.) | 121 |

List of Figures	vii
4.3 Violet Ray was also the stage name of a popular singer during the 1920s. ('An old lady asking her doctor about "Violet Ray" referring to high-frequency rays. Reproduction of a drawing after H.M. Brock, 1925', reproduced by permission of the Wellcome Collection CC BY.)	125
4.4 Peter Schmidt included images of various rejuvenation devices, including the Vienna Youth Mask, which deployed similar techniques to those used in the female Steinach Operation. (Peter Schmidt, <i>The Conquest of Old Age: Methods to Effect Rejuvenation and to Increase Functional Activity</i> . London: George Routledge & Son, 1931, plate XXXIX.)	130
5.1 Muller's family were typically included as demonstrators of the stretches, in a manner later mirrored by mother and daughter, Mary and Prunella Bagot Stack, in the context of the Women's League of Health and Beauty. (J. P. Muller, <i>My System: 15 Minutes' Exercise a Day for Health's Sake</i> . London: Athletic Publications Ltd., c.1925, 67.)	143
5.2 Abplanalp's devices were marketed as a way of extending his exercise regimen rather than an essential component. (Arthur Abplanalp, 'Exercising Apparatus for use in a Lying Position', US Patent 1,144,085, 22 June 1915, 1.)	147
5.3 Brochures outlining beauty regimes often contextualised these within a broader sweep of lifestyle habits which were also said to influence the complexion. ('Beauty', 1935, 1, WBA/BT/11/40/4/1/1, Boots Company Archive.)	163
6.1 Advertisement for Aspinall's Neigeline highlighting its beneficial action on the complexion and rejuvenating effects. ('Aspinall's "Neigeline"', (March 1895), Beauty Parlour 3 (33) – Cosmetics, John Johnson Collection, available online at: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:jjohnson:&rft_dat=xri:jjohnson:rec:20080218142229kw , accessed 26 January 2018)	173
6.2 The first British advertisement for Helena Rubinstein's Hormone Twin Youthifiers. ('An Amazing Discovery – A Triumph of Beauty Science', <i>The Bystander</i> , 4 May 1932, 245.)	180
6.3 A 1936 advertisement for Dubarry's Nuglandin Cream, printed in the high-end British periodical <i>The Tatler</i> . ('Nuglandin Cream', <i>The Tatler</i> , 4 March 1936, 35.)	184
6.4 A typical advertisement in the British press for Number Seven products. ('Loveliness that Defeats the Years', WBA/BT/11/45/1/1/10, c.1938, Boots Company Archive).	188

Acknowledgements

There are too many people to thank.

My colleagues, past and present, in the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science at the University of Leeds, particularly those in the Centre for the History and Philosophy of Science, have been singularly supportive, and the best critical friends. I thank particularly Graeme Gooday, Jon Topham, Greg Radick, Claire Jones, Adrian Wilson and Mike Finn, whose insightful contributions have helped to shape my ideas in ways which I would never have considered.

Over the course of the last few years, countless fellow researchers have offered helpful and hugely constructive suggestions, comments and critiques when I took this material on the road. I am grateful to all who attended sessions at meetings around the world, and especially to my compatriots on the New Generations in Medical Humanities programme, who put up with periodic babbling about skin creams and testicle transplants for a year when the project was in its germinal stages.

I have been fortunate enough to secure support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Wellcome Trust, whose financial assistance has been critical in enabling this programme of research. Further support from the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science covered reproduction rights for the images so critical to this story.

Staff at the Boots Company Archive – in particular Sophie Clapp and Judith Wright – have been unfailing in their support for this research, guiding me through their collections and offering that winning combination of expertise and tea so generously. Similarly, I would like to thank Alan Humphries and Joanne Bartholomew from the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds, whose insight into their electrotherapy collections first inspired me to pursue the topic. As ever, librarians and archivists at Wellcome Library, Unilever Archives, the Mass Observation Archive, British Library and National Library of Scotland have made the process of research incredibly enjoyable.

There are too many others whose ideas and suggestions have been instrumental in shaping this book for the better, but at the risk of omission I would

like to thank Nick Hopwood, Mark Jackson, Vanessa Heggie and Iwan Morus for their reflections, all of which opened up productive new avenues of inquiry.

I would also like to thank Lucy Rhymer, Emily Sharp, Lisa Carter and their colleagues at Cambridge University Press for being enthused by the project from the outset, and for their patience during the completion of the manuscript, as well as two anonymous readers who provided detailed and extremely constructive suggestions for improvement.

Finally, the book would have come nowhere near completion without the love and support of my family, especially my partner, Kristina, my mum, Gillian, and my son, Elliot, who gives joyous, daily reminders about what real youthfulness looks like. Thank you.