

# The New Criterion

## Manners & morals

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### Marriage in our time

by [Kenneth Minogue](#)

On matrimony in a culture of convenience.

One of the excitements of growing older in the contemporary West is the recognition that the moral basis of life has flipped. It happens in every generation. Consider the position of Lord Melbourne in 1837, kissing hands as prime minister with that delightful but formidable girl who had just been crowned Queen Victoria. This Regency rake, a real swinger in his time, suddenly had to recognize that he had blundered by longevity into a very serious and engaged moral environment. It was to be called “Victorian.” He adapted very well, especially to the Queen, but he knew he was in a different world.

Think again of those same Victorians at the end of the nineteenth century, when Oscar Wilde and the Café Royal set were just beginning to attach a sneer to the very idea of respectability, an attachment that became increasingly explicit as the twentieth century wore on. Respectability is, no do ...

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