THOUGH AT TIMES THE ENERGY MAY BE A LITTLE MISAPPLIED, THE CAUSE IS A GOOD ONE, AS ANY WHO SUFFER SHOULD REMEMBER

AN ANTI-CHOLERA SPECIFIC: WASHING THE STREETS ROUND COVENT GARDEN

DRAWN BY HENRI LANOS

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Those few of us who have made our careers by contemplating Victorian notions of contagion were, perhaps, surprised to find the public suddenly hungry for the topic in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic's beginnings. Not that the topic was ever a seemingly esoteric choice to those of us who selected it as our field specialty, but while most academic research is by definition found amid niche topics, to be a self-avowed 'contagious disease scholar' before COVID-19 was typically met with surprise, even from other niche academics. Thus, while the relevance of contagion to society was always, perhaps, clear to those of us 'niche' specialists, we were not, generally, wont to find *others* so keenly aware of the relevance of our studies to modern life.

I begin with these musings, because prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, introductions to special issues on the topic had to be carefully laid out, to demonstrate the—possibly inscrutable—relevance of this topic to readers, even academic ones. Now, conversely, years after the pandemic began, it feels almost hackneyed to connect the relevance of one's research topic to the pandemic. It seems every scholar feels their realm of research has something to say about, or was affected in meaningful ways by, the pandemic. For scholars *of* epidemics and pandemics, this is a disorienting turn. For to us, this has always been a foundational truth to our work: disease affects *everything,* and its effect on everything reveals infinite layers of meaning in regards to how we make meaning in the world.

While our own sense of the relevance has remained constant, in other words, our external positionality as humanists in a field which was always struggled to prove its relevance in a utilitarian world has thus shifted from struggling to prove our even less recognised relevance, to risking the appearance of trite associative claims that everyone, the world over, is making.

COVID-19 may indeed have made discussing the relevance of disease to human society a matter of course, but be that as it may, it is worth naming the relevance that Victorian disease scholars have highlighted for many years, if only *because* relating everything under the sun to COVID has become so banal a topic

that is at risk of shifting far too rapidly from invisible connection to taking on the tone of mere pleasantries, like mentioning the weather.

In simplest terms, contagious disease matters because disease is us. By this I mean, first, that disease wouldn't matter to us if it weren't that it affected our livelihoods and indeed our very lives so directly. Far too easily, even in a post-COVID world, disease can become an abstract concept, reduced to statistics and climbing graph lines. Yet, the reason we concoct all these numbers displayed in different visual formats is, of course, because of our concern that these numbers will have some real impact on our very lives—or those of our loved ones. Even diseases that are not zoonotic and do not affect humans only matter to any of us, usually, because of anthropocentric, and ego-centric, concerns. Avian flu likely matters to most people because of rising egg and chicken prices, or for its secondary or tertiary impact on other supply chains.

'Disease is us' also applies in less utilitarian terms. Our existential understandings of who 'we' are, rely, as Julia Kristeva so aptly demonstrated in her 1980 *Powers of Horror,* on how we craft a scheme of 'not us'.[1] Disease, for its threat to the very biological life-support system of our selves, is perhaps the most categorically 'not me' schema that could ever exist. For her part, Kristeva suggests that death is the most foundational 'not I' category to be found, and yet disease and debility precedes the state of death in all but sudden, accidental death cases.

In spite of increasing evidence demonstrating that we are not bounded individuals at all, but vast aggregations of microbiological life—perhaps, in fact, more bacteria than human cells making up our forms, this notion of self/other still hinges—for most people, in their everyday assumptions—on a binary that separates our humanness from those viruses and diseases we perceive as on the other side of some categorical binary. As Kristeva, and her other poststructuralist forebears have long since demonstrated, these schema against which we define something, in fact provide the very outlines for that something which it is posited as mutually exclusive of.

Moving even beyond microbiological drivers of disease, of course, 'disease' is its own categorical concept. What conditions do we note as relevant outside of some baseline state of existence? Why do we consider, for instance, cholera a disease, but not acne? Why are some infirmities deemed as such, and

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[1] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Columbia, NY: Columbia UP, 1990.

other bodily states comfortably grouped in with so-called normativity in the public imaginary?

Of course, here, it must be mentioned that not all 'disease' is contagious. Heart disease, cancer, and epilepsy are just some of any number of conditions not caused by contagious vectors. But for their causal role in inculcating disease states, microbial pathogens are doubly outside of our self-conceptions, as it were. It is an Other, writ large (though invisible to the naked eye, which makes the threat feel pervasive), which transforms our very selves into an Other we defined ourselves against. Whereas 'diseases of the self,' such as cancers and autoimmune disorders certainly present existential challenges to self-conception (how can 'I' be attacking myself or inducing my own destruction?), the existential threat of pathogenic vectors is that it maps onto all of our most foundational senses of self versus other and makes it possible to operationalise hypervigilance and martialistic thinking against some perceived external force. Such attitudes have, then, real impact on the environment and also ourselves, for example, in the way we have weaponised antibiotics so often as our collective and individual saviour that we now face a future reality.

Thus, disease is 'us' in so many ways. Disease vectors have literally constructed us, as bacteria live within, among, and on us, and viruses constitute possibly the origins of human DNA itself. Disease is also us insofar as it sketches out the limits of how we conceptualise the boundaries of our self, physically and symbolically. Disease is us, because it shapes the lives that live and die around us, including our own. Disease is us as we weaponise tools to 'kill' pathogens, which then have rebound effects on our antibiotic toolkit. And disease is us insofar as it shapes the limits of what we imagine as the normative and even the human.

The authors in this issue aptly tackle this concept from just as many diverse angles, elucidating nicely the broad relevance of contagion, not simply as some distanced Victorian topic in the pre-antibiotic age, but as a matter of continued concern to readers today.

Sarah Frühwirth's essay, 'Sin, Disease, and Religious Fervour in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866) and Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1867)' approaches the topic of Victorian contagion from what is in many ways a traditional approach—highlighting the ways in which contagion or contamination was used as a literary metaphor for moral contamination or evil. However, Frühwirth contributes a unique take to interpreting this well-known trope. In her essay, Frühwirth analyses the presence of religious figures *in* literary

texts as a lens through which to assess the notion of contamination and contagion in the text. This stands in contrast to the traditional paradigmatic approach to this topic, which assumes an external reader as the metric for a sort of vague, middle-class morality. In an interesting turn, then, Frühwirth resists anachronistic assumptions about Victorian moralising (which might universally assume moral taint and pathogenic taint to be metonymically linked), and instead reveals that popular *belief* in these moral systems was its own taint. To this end, Frühwirth highlights a character who is destroyed not by his moral taint through his father, but by his religious fanaticism that causes him to *believe* he is doomed to be destroyed by generational sin and retribution. Frühwirth points out that the 'taint' in this family is in fact syphilis, but the affected parties are unable to see this, because of the simultaneous contamination of religious fervour which causes them to mis-read these signs, much as an uncareful scholar might misread the moral message at the heart of *Armadale*. By using intratextual clues as to the text's own moral compass, Frühwirth not only provides a new and useful approach to concepts of morality and contagion in Victorian literature, but she provides a helpful methodological approach for scholars of new historicism more generally.

Moving nicely on from the topic of religious characters in texts about moral and actual contagion, Molly Ryder's article, '"every door might be Death's Door": Narrating Mortality in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, considers death and gravesite representation in Victorian novels, namely *Bleak House.* By focusing on death—the far too common outcome of contagion in the Victorian Era—Ryder also clearly demonstrates just what the stakes of contagion were for Victorians. As a way into the topic, Ryder begins with a consideration of mortuary architecture as a means of sanitary reform in graveyards, revealing just how intimately built spaces have always been seen as a means of separating the I/not I (as Kristeva would have it), and of expanding the boundaries of the self outward, as it were, while maintaining the categorical binaries humans are so fond of between 'us' (humans) and 'them' (microbes, or microbe-infested human bodies). In so doing, this essay provides, like Frühwirth's before it, a useful overview of the topic which readers newer to the field will appreciate.

Also, in line with Frühwirth, Ryder approaches the main topic of death in *Bleak House* (and *Bleak House* is indeed riddled with death from contagion) from a novel perspective. In the course of her analysis, she also assesses the foundations of the narrative mode of the book as a whole, in considering why a novel so riddled with death necessitates the use of the first-person narrative voice,

as well as the paradoxical notion of *how* a novel about death can be narrated by some, apparently living first-person who has avoided death's maw. She reveals, as scholars have done with the narrator H.F. in Daniel Defoe's *Journal of a Plague Year,* that the survivor-narrator plays an important role embodying the time of the reader who they are speaking to and the other characters amongst whom they lived, essentially weaving temporality and life-states together with their words. Arguing that Esther Summerson is a 'Persephone-like figure,' this essay reconsiders Esther as a character, as well as her unfinished sentence that famously concludes the novel.

Finally, Suzanne Bode's essay, 'Pre-Raphaelite Art and the Influence of Opium on Ways of Seeing', rounds out the issue with an assessment of how disease cures can sometimes be as infectious—and as deadly—as the disease themselves. In a riveting portrayal of how opium usage affected artistic visual schemas in the Victorian Era, as well as the artists inhabiting that community themselves, Bode provides yet another angle from which to consider disease, treatments, and what sort of entities we define as pathogenic to begin with. Bode astutely lays out how Millais's entanglements with opium are revealed in surprising ways in his painting of Ophelia, using both careful analysis of the images and their specific departures from other paintings, as well as the biopsychology of opium effects to make the argument. Bode's essay also provokes necessary and moving re-examination of Elizabeth Siddal's role as an artist and human—not merely an ancillary figure of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. This alone makes for an invigorating and important read. Instead, Bode's essay turns the analytical eye back to the reader, asking if we scholars have been ourselves contaminated with Victorians' views of women's capabilities, agency, and indeed, stigmatising assumptions about drug dependent people.

In keeping in line with the liminal space that Victorian scholarship on contagion finds itself—simultaneously understudied and yet seemingly omnipresent in a post-COVID context—each of these essays simultaneously lifts age-old issues of continued importance in contagion studies**,** while also asking readers to completely reconsider adjacent concepts they may have thus far taken for granted, as disease concepts themselves do for each and every one of us.

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Sensational Contagion: Sin, Disease and Religious Fervour in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866) and Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1867)

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Abstract

This article explores the intersections and conceptual links between sin, disease and religious fervour in the critical discourse surrounding sensation fiction in the 1860s and 1870s as well as two representatives of genre, Wilkie Collins's Armadale *(1866) and Rhoda Broughton's* Not Wisely, but Too Well *(1867). It aims to show that although the two novels under consideration replicate the discourse of disease and contagion that pervaded the mid-nineteenth-century sensation debate, they do so to a different end. This paper will argue that instead of moralising, their use of the rhetoric of disease and contagion allowed the authors of these works to challenge and negotiate notions of what constituted sinful behaviour and, at the same time, pass criticism on excessive religiosity. Moreover, it will demonstrate that the two novels' rhetorical construction of religious fervour as a disease is well-grounded in the medical literature of the time, which considered religious enthusiasm an important exciting cause of a range of mental diseases.*

The threat of contagion was part of Victorian everyday life. Despite the era's progress in medicine, health and hygiene, Victorian Britain still faced epidemical waves of contagious diseases like cholera, smallpox, typhus and scarlet fever. The concept of contagion also figured prominently in the reception of nineteenth-century sensation fiction. Although Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) was not the first sensation novel to be ever written, it was undoubtedly this novel that created the 'sensational mania' that characterised the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century. After the book's publication, sensationalism swept through the country like a wildfire, leading contemporary reviewers to compare the demand for sensation fiction to a contagious disease:

> Just as in the Middle Ages people were afflicted with the Dancing Mania and Lycanthropy, sometimes barking like dogs, and sometimes mewing like cats, so now we have a Sensational Mania. Just, too, as those diseases always occurred in seasons of dearth and poverty, and attacked only the poor, so does the Sensational Mania in Literature burst out only in times of

mental poverty and afflict only the most poverty-stricken minds. From an epidemic, however, it has lately changed into an endemic. Its virus is spreading in all directions, from the penny journal to the shilling magazine, and from the shilling magazine to the thirty shillings volume.[1]

Besides being a damning indictment of contemporary culture and society, this excerpt from an 1866 article in the *Westminster Review* is representative of the nineteenth-century critical attitude towards sensationalism and reveals the critical anxieties pertaining to it by taking up various themes that proliferated within the critical discourse surrounding sensation fiction. On the one hand, the identification of the demand for sensation fiction as a form of 'mania' as well as the discursive construction of the genre itself as a 'virus' highlight the speed with which sensationalism spread and drove other genres out of the market, which was a common theme in contemporary reviews. On the other hand, the fact that the author of the article remarks that the 'epidemic' of sensation fictions 'has lately changed into an endemic' seems to imply that the initially erratic spread of the disease is over. However, as the review implies, this circumstance did not make sensation fiction less threatening; if anything it made one of the critics' worst fears regarding the genre come true, i.e., that sensationalism was not just a passing fad but would become a constant presence in the Victorian literary landscape.

Another noteworthy aspect of the above-quoted passage are its repeated references to 'poverty', which represent unveiled criticism of sensation fiction's 'low' origins and, at the same time, betray a fear of contamination from 'below'. As the last sentence of the quotation indicates, it was a common belief among nineteenth-century reviewers that the sensation novel had originated from penny publications, which were tailored to the tastes of the working class. This view was echoed by Henry Mansel, who in an oft-quoted diatribe against sensation fiction identified penny publications as 'the original germ, the primitive monad, to which all the varieties of sensation literature may be referred'.[2] Since sensation novels, unlike penny publications, were popular with readers from all social classes, sensation fiction posed a danger to established class boundaries, leading critics to discursively construct the genre as a disease. After all, as Pamela K.

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[1] [J. R. Wise,] 'Belles Lettres', *The Westminster Review*, 86 (July 1866), 125-32 (p. 126).
[2] [Henry Mansel,] 'Sensation Novels', *The Quarterly Review*, 113 (April 1863), 482-514 (p. 505). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Gilbert has noted, like sensation fiction, 'germs […] redefined class boundaries'[3] by affecting people indiscriminately of their class status.

Besides their 'seemingly contagious diffusion across the literary marketplace'[4] and their blurring of class boundaries, sensation novels also possessed other properties that made them liable to being rhetorically constructed as a disease. As Bradley Deane has noted, reviewers also used the 'rhetoric of disease' to 'describe the unhealthy consumption of these novels' (p. 70) and their harmful effect on the reader's body. Like pathogens, which after causing sufficient damage to their host's body produce symptoms of disease, the detrimental effects of sensation fiction were believed to manifest themselves in certain physical responses in the reader. According to the author of an 1864 review of *Wondrous Strange* by C. J. Newby in the *Athenaeum*, sensation novels, like the novel under review, 'curdle their [readers'] blood, cause their hair to stand on end, give them "pins and needles" in the region of the heart, and fix their eyes with a rigid stare for at least twenty-four hours'[5], thus echoing an 1863 satirical article in *Punch*, which claimed that sensation novels were dedicated to 'Harrowing the Mind, Making the Flesh Creep, Causing the Hair to Stand on End, [and] Giving Shocks to the Nervous System'.[6]

Most reviewers agreed that the 'excitement' and the resultant bodily responses in the reader's body that sensation novels caused were 'unwholesome' or 'unhealthy'. In fact, a number of reviewers believed that the human body's response to sensation fiction was similar to a fever. The reading of sensation novels was thought to create a 'feverish sensation'[7] in the reader. However, not only the physical effect of sensation fiction was equated with fever, but also the same metaphor was used by critics and reviewers when referring to the production and consumption of sensation fiction. For example, in an 1867 article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Margaret Oliphant referred to sensation novels as 'feverish productions',[8] thus implying that sensation fiction not only

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[3] Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 39. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[4] Bradley Deane, *Making of the Victorian Novelist: Anxieties of Authorship in the Mass Market* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), p. 70. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[5] 'New Novels', *The Athenaeum* (6 August 1864), 177-8 (p. 178).

[6] 'The Sensation Times', *Punch*, 44 (9 May 1863), 193 (p. 193).

[7] 'Philosophy of "Sensation"', *St James's Magazine*, 5 (October 1862), 340-6 (p. 346).

[8] [Margaret Oliphant,] 'Novels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 102 (September 1867), 275-80 (p. 275). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

produced symptoms of disease, it was also the product of a febrile delirium in the author. This view was shared by Henry Fothergill Chorley, who in an 1866 review of Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* in the *Athenaeum* argued that such novels were the product of 'diseased invention'.[9]

Other critics, however, believed that the main portion of the blame rested with the Victorian reading public, whose 'morbid failings and cravings'[10] had given rise to the genre of sensation fiction in the first place:

> Precisely as certain diseased conditions of the body give rise to a craving after unnatural food, so do certain morbid conditions of the mind produce an appetite for literary food which a sound mental organization would reject. Individual instances of such morbid affections are fit subjects of study for the physician only […] [b]ut that such books have a very large and increasing circulation should be a matter of painful interest to every decent man and woman in England.[11]

As suggested by the above quotation, some critics including Vincent E. H. Murray, believed that the origin of the 'disease' of sensation fiction could be traced back to the reading public's 'morbid' appetite. Interestingly, some reviewers claimed that sensation fiction was not only the symptom but also the underlying cause of this morbidity of literary taste. According to Henry Mansel, both demand for and supply of sensation fiction had created a vicious cycle:

> works of this class manifest themselves as belonging, some more, some less, but all to some extent, to the morbid phenomena of literature – indications of a wide-spread corruption, of which they are in part both the effect and the cause; called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite, and contributing themselves to foster the disease, and to stimulate the want which they supply. (pp. 482-3)

Many scholars have drawn attention to this rhetoric on the part of the reviewers that equated sensation novels with disease and have put forth various theories regarding the reasons behind this rhetorical strategy. According to Deane, 'the trope of disease was only one element of a broader rhetorical strategy to discredit

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[9] [Henry Fothergill Chorley,] 'New Novels', *The Athenaeum* (2 June 1866), 732-3 (p. 732).

[10] 'Not a New "Sensation"', *All the Year Round*, 9 (25 July 1863), 517-20 (p. 517).

[11] Vincent E. H. Murray, 'Ouida's Novels', *The Contemporary Review*, 22 (1873), 921-35 (p. 935).

sensation fiction' (p. 70). Others, like Gilbert, believe that this rhetoric bespeaks a variety of anxieties relating to 'the disintegration of the physical and social body' (p. 18). According to Gilbert, by using the rhetoric of disease '[t]he critic aligns him/herself with the sanitary inspectors whose purpose it is to police consumption and make the commodity safe for the middle classes' (p. 77). This view is echoed by Barbara Leckie, who has argued that the critics' disease metaphors 'highlighted the reviewers' anxiety with the reading body'.[12] By rhetorically aligning sensation fiction with disease, i.e. something that causes harm to the body, nineteenth-century reviewers were able to express concerns for the safety of readers of sensation novels and at the same time, as Henry Mansel put it, give a diagnosis regarding 'the state of health of the body in which they appear', reading sensation novels as 'by no means favourable symptoms of the conditions of the body of society' (p. 512).

Moreover, the rhetoric of disease and contagion in connection with sensation fiction enabled nineteenth-century reviewers to pass moral criticism on both the genre and the Victorian reading public. Due to their vivid depiction of transgressive behaviour, sensation novels were believed to pose a threat to public morals. Since a large part of the Victorian readership were supposedly highly impressionable women, many nineteenth-century reviewers feared that readers of sensation fiction might conflate the characters' thoughts and opinions with their own, leading them to adopt undesirable attitudes towards morality or engage in immoral behaviour themselves. According to Henry Mansel, sensation fiction played 'no inconsiderable part in moulding the minds and forming the habits and tastes of its generation', so much so that sensation fiction had usurped 'a portion of the preacher's office' (p. 482). However, in direct contravention to the duties of a preacher, instead of instilling moral values in their readers, sensation novelists tended to 'excuse criminality, or to render vice interesting',[13] as the author of an unsigned 1862 review in *St James's Magazine* complained. Sensation fiction not only attracted criticism from lay critics but also caused a significant outcry among members of the clergy and certain Christian denominations. For example, the *Record*, an Evangelical newspaper, complained that sensation fiction was 'one of the crying evils of the day'.[14]

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[12] Barbara Leckie, *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, the Newspaper, and the Law, 1857-1914* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 119.
[13] 'Philosophy of "Sensation"', *St James's Magazine*, 5 (October 1862), 340-6 (p. 343).
[14] Qtd. in Mark J. Knight, 'Rethinking Bibliolatry: Wilkie Collins, William Booth and the Culture of Evangelicalism', *Wilkie Collins Society Journal*, New Series, 3 (2000), 47-58 (p. 50).

In the nineteenth century, disease was not only associated with physical but also with moral harm. The spreading of venereal disease through prostitution had become a considerable problem in Victorian England, leading to the passing of the Contagious Diseases Act in 1864. This act made it possible for the police to detain prostitutes for compulsory health checks. Like prostitutes, books were considered to be agents of contagion and contamination, both in a moral and physical sense. As Gilbert has shown, books were believed to be capable of spreading disease, resulting in the disinfection of books during epidemics and the withdrawal from circulation of books loaned to reportedly diseased people (see p. 55). In the nineteenth-century imagination, the contagious potential of literature and prostitutes was strikingly similar, as 'both involve the invasion of the desiring subject by an apparently passive, but secretly aggressive and dangerous object' (p. 56). It was this dangerous potential of books that justified their subjection to close moral inspection by the reviewer, since '[t]he fear of the physical contamination of books by germs is an expression and crystallization on a physical level of anxiety related to a less specifically identifiable agency of moral contamination in the text' (p. 56).

The Sins of the Father: Hereditary Contagion and Religious Mania in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866)

As in the nineteenth-century sensation debate, sin and disease are curiously aligned in Wilkie Collins's 1866 novel *Armadale*, whose main conflict is rooted in the Bible verse 'The sins of the father shall be visited on the child'. In *Armadale*, the sequence of events that threatens to disrupt the lives of the two main protagonists, Allan Armadale and Ozias Midwinter (né Allan Armadale), is set in motion already well before the two of them are born, namely during the lifetime of their fathers, who vied for the affections of the same woman. The novel opens in the German spa town of Wildbad, where the mortally ill Allan Armadale writes a confessionary letter to his son, who bears the same name (to avoid confusion, hereafter called by his birth name, 'Wrentmore'). The letter, which is to be delivered to his son Allan Armadale (hereafter called Midwinter, an alias he assumed during adolescence) when he has come of age, tells of the father's debauched youth, which culminated in the murder of his cousin, who was also called Allan Armadale (hereafter 'Ingleby', the name assumed to trick Wrentmore), because he had alienated Ms Blanchard's affection from him and married her himself. Wrentmore believes that his son, Midwinter, will have to

pay for his sins, which is why he closes his letter with an explicit warning to his son to steer clear of Ingleby's offspring and all the other people who were involved in the plot, most notably Ms Blanchard's maid, because he is convinced that his son and the son of his adversary are bound to re-enact the actions of their fathers and will cause each other's downfall:

> I look into the Book which all Christendom venerates; and the Book tells me that the sin of the father shall be visited on the child. I look into the world; and I see the living witnesses round me to that terrible truth. I see the vices which have contaminated the father, descending, and contaminating the child; I see the shame which has disgraced the father's name, descending, and disgracing the child's. I look in on myself – and I see My Crime, ripening again for the future in the self-same circumstance which first sowed the seeds of it in the past; and descending, in inherited contamination of Evil, from me to my son.[15]

According to Wrentmore, sin is not something that is contained within the individual sinner but something that, like a disease, can be transmitted to other people. However, unlike an infectious disease, which can be communicated to everyone who comes into direct or indirect contact with it, sin rather seems to have the qualities of a hereditary disease, which is solely passed on from parent to child. As the above quotation indicates, the idea of the heritability of sin can be traced back to the Bible. More precisely, it is presented in a passage in the *Book of Exodus* in which God admonishes the Israelites not to worship idols after their flight from Egyptian slavery, threatening them to visit their transgression of this law on their descendants: 'Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me'.[16] Although other Bible passages indicate that '[t]he fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin' (Deut. 24.16) and that '[t]he son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son' (Ezek. 18.20), thereby suggesting that children cannot be punished for

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[15] Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*, ed. by John Sutherland (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 47. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[16] *The Bible*, Authorised King James Version with Apocrypha (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Exod. 20.5. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

their parents' sins, Wrentmore remains staunch in his belief that his sin will be passed on to this progeny to 'work its deadly mischief' (p. 47) with the second Armadale generation.

Years later, due to a series of accidents, Midwinter and Allan Armadale, Ingleby's son, cross paths and form a firm friendship, which becomes endangered when Midwinter receives his father's deathbed letter. After the receipt of his father's letter, Midwinter repeatedly tries to break off his friendship with Allan because, like his father, he is convinced that he will be the instrument of his best friend's destruction. Despite Midwinter's repeated attempts to escape the allegedly fatal sequence set in motion during their parents' lives, it seems that the two Allan Armadales of the second generation are bound to repeat their fathers' actions. At a first glance, the idea of the transmissibility of sin built up in *Armadale*'s first chapters is corroborated by a prophetic dream that gradually seems to come true as well as a number of startling coincidences, including the reappearance of Lydia Gwilt, Ms Blanchard's former maid, who, struck by the resemblance of the two friends' names, devises a plot to defraud Allan of his money by marrying Midwinter under his real name. Even though the novel eventually disproves the notion of the transmissibility of sin by inheritance, hereditary contagion plays an important part in the unfolding of events. Wrentmore's superstitious belief in cross-generational retribution, which borders on religious fanaticism, is passed down to his son through his confessionary letter, which serves as a metaphor for hereditary transmission. Although the novel only contains few direct references to mental illness, Midwinter's conviction of the heritability of sin undoubtedly has morbid characteristics, leading other characters to dub it a 'mad superstition' (p. 564).

This is in line with nineteenth-century medical discourse, which connected religious fanaticism and insanity in various ways. In the nineteenth century, it was a common belief that excessive religiosity could provoke insanity. For example, Philippe Pinel, a famous French psychiatrist whose works were also translated into English, listed religious fanaticism as one of the main exciting causes of mental illness.[17] Moreover, the diagnosis 'religious insanity', with its clinical manifestations 'religious mania' and 'religious melancholia', established a direct link between religion and mental disease. Alexander Morison and many other nineteenth-century alienists considered religious insanity to be a form of

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[17] Philippe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. by D. D. Davis (Sheffield: Cadell and Davies, 1806), p. 113. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

monomania.[18] According to Morison, religious insanity could take a variety of shapes, ranging from 'Theomania' to 'Demonomania' (see p. 115). One of the most common forms, however, was religious melancholia, which was usually accompanied by a sense of impending doom, with 'the patient conceiving that he is under the wrath of heaven and, that all hope of salvation is lost' (p. 115). James Cowles Prichard gave a similar definition of religious melancholia: 'Many religious persons, labouring under a predisposition to grief and despondency, have conceived the opinion that they are doomed to future perdition, their own cases forming particular exceptions to the otherwise merciful dispensations of Providence'.[19]

The case of Midwinter, who believes that he is 'doomed, beyond all human capacity of resistance, to bring misery and destruction blindfold' (p. 513) on his best friend and cannot be persuaded to believe that providence would intervene on his behalf, is strikingly similar to the cases described by Morison and Prichard. Right from the beginning, the novel establishes an indirect, yet firm, connection between Midwinter's superstitious belief in the transmissibility of sin and disease by linking the 'symptoms' of his religious fanaticism to the symptoms experienced by his father, who is suffering from syphilis, or 'general paralysis', as nineteenth-century medical practitioners usually termed it. It is interesting to note that general paralysis was frequently associated with mental illness in the nineteenth century. For instance, Prichard noted that general paralysis 'frequent[ly] occurre[d] in conjunction with mental derangement' (p. 99), which is why it 'must be looked upon as nearly related to that disease […]' (p. 100). By aligning Midwinter's passive submission to what he considers his fate with his father's affliction, the novel establishes a link between Midwinter's superstition and mental disease. Like his father, Midwinter appears to be paralysed by the oppressive sense of doom that haunts him. His paralytic condition is also noted by some of the other characters, who entreat him to 'free [himself] from the paralysing fatalism' (p. 512) that has taken hold of him.

Apart from Midwinter's almost paralytic resignation and passivity, his 'psychopathic obsession'[20] with inherited doom also elicits a number of other

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[18] Alexander Morison, *The Physiognomy of Mental Diseases* (London: Longman, 1838), p. 115. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[19] James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1835), p. 31. Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[20] Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins, Medicine and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 58.

symptoms of disease, like mood swings, loss of appetite, uncontrolled shaking, and even swooning. Jenny Bourne Taylor has noted that the descriptions of Midwinter's nervous condition resemble contemporary discourses of hysteria.[21] Also Lyn Pykett has pointed out that 'Midwinter's hypersensitivity, his susceptibility to non-rational modes of interpretation, and his emotional self-policing combine to place him in a role in the sensation narrative which is more usually occupied by a female character – the hysteric'[22]. In fact, his sensitivity is so pronounced that Dr Hawbury, one of the novel's rational authorities, at one point states, 'I wouldn't change nervous systems with that man, for the largest fortune that could be offered me' (p. 137).

According to Marc Milton Ducusin, 'Ozias's hysteria resembles the gender transgressions that Ellis and other English sexologists would later label as inverted'.[23] Indeed, the transgression of gender norms seems to be curiously aligned with a tendency towards mental illness in nineteenth-century medical and cultural discourses. Many heroines of sensation novels who are labelled 'mad' are apt to transgress established gender boundaries. This is hardly surprising given the fact that, as Elaine Showalter has pointed out, 'expressions of sexual desire, anger, and aggression were taken as morbid deviations from the normal female personality'[24] and therefore frequently deemed pathological. With this in mind, it may be argued that Midwinter's 'sensitive feminine organization' (p. 220), which represents a departure from Victorian ideals of masculinity, makes him particularly liable to mental diseases of a religious kind. In *Observations on the Religious Delusions of Insane Persons*, Nathaniel Bingham, a nineteenth-century physician, observed that religious insanity was frequently produced 'in persons of a delicate and very susceptible constitution'[25] when occupying themselves excessively with religious matters. Midwinter himself acknowledges the detrimental effects his superstitious belief in the transmission of his father's

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[21] See Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 165.
[22] Lyn Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel* (Horndon: Northcote House, 2011), p. 49.
[23] Marc Milton Ducusin, 'Male Hysteria, Sexual Inversion and the Sensational Hero in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*', in *Victorian Medicine and Popular Culture*, ed. by Louise Penner and Tabitha Sparks (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 95-107 (p. 100).
[24] Elaine Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Insanity', in *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen: The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*, ed. by Andrew Scull (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 313-36 (p. 322).
[25] Nathaniel Bingham, *Observations on the Religious Delusions of Insane Persons* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1841), p. 118.

sin has wrought on his mental condition: 'I am ill and unnerved; trifles startle me' (p. 264). Although he believes that his nervous suffering is the after-effect of an attack of brain fever he suffered earlier in the novel, it soon becomes obvious that his nervous symptoms are brought on by his pathological belief in cross-generational retribution.

The affinity between Midwinter's superstition and disease not only manifests itself in the range of physical and mental symptoms listed above but becomes apparent from its infectious nature. Like a contagious disease, Midwinter's superstition seems to have the property of spreading to other characters. While some of the novel's characters, like Allan or the Reverend Brock, seem to be immune to his fatalistic beliefs, Lydia Gwilt, despite being the novel's most sensible character, is compelled to admit that she has been infected with Midwinter's superstition: 'I believe I have caught the infection of Midwinter's superstition. I begin to think that events are forcing me nearer and nearer to some end which I don't see yet, but which I am firmly persuaded is now not far off' (p. 442). Although mental illness was not generally regarded as a contagious disease, religious insanity was commonly believed to be infectious in nature. Nineteenth-century medical practitioners frequently used terms like 'outbreaks', 'contagion' or 'epidemic'[26] when describing alleged cases of religious hysteria. As Robert E. Bartholomew and Julian D. O'Dea have pointed out, 'Collective reactions among revivalist movement members were typically viewed as contagious hysteria'.[27] For example, the author of an 1862 article entitled 'The State of Lunacy in Ireland' quoted a report stating that 'during the two months that *religious revivalism* was prevalent, a year or two ago, in the northern district of the island, more cases of insanity resulted therefrom than had taken place in the whole preceding year'.[28]

Nineteenth-century alienists believed that religious insanity was of 'a most obstinate character'.[29] According to Pinel, 'melancholia or mania, originating in religious enthusiasm, will not admit of a cure, so long as the original impressions are to be continued, or renewed by their appropriate causes' (p. 81). However, the

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[26] J. G. Havelock, 'An Epidemic of Religious Mania Originating from a Case of Spurious Pregnancy', *Transactions of the Edinburgh Obstetrical Society*, 19 (1894), 183-5 (p. 184).
[27] Robert E. Bartholomew and Julian D. O'Dea, 'Religious Devoutness Construed as Pathology: The Myth of "Religious Mania"', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 8.1 (1998), 1-16 (p. 4).
[28] 'The State of Lunacy in Ireland', *The Medical Critic and Psychological Journal*, 2 (January 1862), 102-13 (p. 110).
[29] Forbes Winslow, 'Religious Insanity Metaphysically Considered', *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 1 (1875), 67-79 (p. 70).

novel's conclusion suggests that religious insanity is curable given the right treatment. Midwinter's path towards mental recovery begins with the moral management of his friends, who encourage him to exercise self-control. As Rebecca Stern has pointed out, 'As a genre, the sensation novel both contributed to and reflected public discourse about moral treatment'.[30] While Stern does not elaborate on this claim, Bourne Taylor has addressed the relevance of moral management for the plot of *Armadale* in more detail. According to Bourne Taylor, it is Midwinter's continued self-analysis and attempts at self-control that promote his recovery: 'in attempting to control his associations Midwinter enacts the prescriptions set up by Abercrombie and Conolly in their outline of "the qualities and acquirements which constitute a well-regulated mind"' (p. 166).

Quite tellingly, Midwinter's recovery is completed at a mental asylum. To gain possession of Allan's inheritance, Lydia Gwilt, the novel's arch-villainess, lures the two Armadales into the sanatorium of her criminal associate Dr Downward, where an elaborate mechanism is supposed to flow a deadly, undetectable toxin into the room where Allan is staying for the night. However, Midwinter, sensing that something is not right, switches rooms with his best friend, thus saving his life. While some scholars have read Midwinter's selfless act as a way to atone for his father's sin, thus being able to put a stop to the fatalistic sequence set in motion by the murder of Allan's father, I agree with Peter Thoms, who has interpreted it as a means to recover from his religious delusions:

> By substituting himself for Allan Armadale in the sanatorium and thus saving him, Midwinter avoids the repetition of the past which his father's deathbed confession […] foresee[s]. His sacrificial substitution relates to the original criminal act of substitution (in which the attempt to usurp another's position leads to murder) as a form of rewriting or reinterpretation. Thus he halts the almost fatalistic sequence which has carried him along paralyzed by guilt. He repudiates the curse of the past and in his new independence reclaims a lost innocence.[31]

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[30] Rebecca Stern, '"Personation" and "Good Marking-Ink": Sanity, Performativity, and Biology in Victorian Sensation Fiction', *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 14 (2000), 35-62 (p. 43).

[31] Peter Thoms, *The Windings of the Labyrinth: Quest and Structure in the Major Novels of Wilkie Collins* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), pp. 114-5.

The realisation that he has turned out to be Allan's saviour rather than the tool of his destruction erases the last traces of the superstition he has contracted from his father and makes a happy ending possible. While *Armadale* provides an optimistic outlook by showing that the contagious effects of religious fanaticism can be overcome by the right treatment, Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* paints a grimmer picture of this subject, by detailing the potentially disastrous effects that religious enthusiasm can have on individual lives.

Carnal Sin, Religious Fervour and Fever Epidemics in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1867)

Like in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*, the concept of sin also features prominently in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well*. Being a representative of a sub-genre of sensation fiction that Andrew Maunder has dubbed 'erotic sensationalism', the book's sensationalism 'lies in thrilling emotion' rather than 'crime and detection'.[32] As Shirley Jones has noted, 'Adultery, or the possibility of it, is the most common "crime" featured in [Rhoda Broughton's] novels'.[33] However, although adultery is only contemplated and never actually committed, Rhoda Broughton's 'controversial representation of female desire'[34] was considered to be highly problematic by conservative reviewers, like Margaret Oliphant, who declared her writings to be downright 'sinful' (p. 267).

The first part of the novel is set in a Welsh seaside resort, where the book's heroine, Kate Chester, and her two siblings, Maggie and Blount, are staying with their aunt and uncle for the summer. During her stay, Kate falls passionately in love with the local squire's second son, Dare Stamer, a debauched womaniser. After a number of ardent encounters, Dare confesses that he is already married to another woman and tries to convince Kate to run away with him and become his mistress. Despite Kate's unconventionality, she is shocked by her lover's proposal and vehemently refuses his offer. Soon afterwards, she leaves for town together with her siblings, where they establish a household together. After an interval of a year and a half, Kate is still lovesick for Dare but is gradually

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[32] Helen Debenham, 'The Victorian Sensation Novel', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by William Baker and Kenneth Womack (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 209-21 (p. 214).

[33] Shirley Jones, '"Love": Rhoda Broughton, Writing and Re-Writing Romance', in *Popular Victorian Women Writers*, ed. by Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 208-36 (p. 212).

[34] Tamar Heller, 'Rhoda Broughton', in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 281-92 (p. 282).

becoming her old self again. She starts a harmless flirtation with her cousin George Chester and rather unwillingly does charity work under the supervision of her old friend, the curate of her parish, James Stanley. One day, however, she runs into Dare again, and he renews his indecent proposal. Although Kate has qualms at first, she eventually relents and promises to elope with him and become his mistress. However, on her way to meet him the day afterwards, she runs into her moral guardian, James Stanley, who guesses her purpose of running away with Dare. By means of a lengthy sermon, he eventually manages to convince Kate not to meet with Dare after all. Kate's decision to forsake her lover proves to be so stressful that she comes down with brain fever. After she has convalesced, Kate completely immerses herself in charity work and eventually decides to join an Anglican sisterhood, where she dies a few years later, after having gone through many hardships and privations.

Kate's love for Dare is represented as sinful and destructive. Right from the beginning of the novel, the narrator establishes a dichotomy within love, one high, ethereal and ennobling, the other low, earthly and degrading. According to the narrator, Kate's feelings for Dare belong to the second class:

> That muddy, polluted flood of earthly love […] had, with its bitter waters, swallowed up and choked the spring of higher, better love, which might have refreshed and watered her soul for the garden of God. O, idiot! – to make so losing a bargain with this dull, passing world.[35]

Throughout the novel, this contrast between love originating in the 'dull swampy flats' of Earth and 'that better, boundless love which is the essence of Deity' (p. 41) is framed as a vertical hierarchy, with God's 'higher, purer, more satisfying love' at the top and the 'wretched, wicked love, that is desolating [Kate's] life' (p. 299) at the very bottom. This dichotomy is embodied by two of the book's characters. While James Stanley, Kate's friend and moral guardian, is the representative of 'pure, deep, utterly unselfish love', Dare is a personification of the 'mad, wild-beast passion' (p. 296) that only breeds 'disgrace and shame and pollution' (p. 297).

The destructive nature of Kate's passion is highlighted by the book's use of the rhetoric of disease and contagion. Right at the beginning of the book, Kate muses that life would be much more peaceful 'without any of those dreadful hot

and cold fits that one is subject to in typhus fever and love' (p. 51). The analogy between love and fever is further developed through the attack of brain fever Kate suffers after she has forsaken her lover for the second time:

> People cannot indulge in such frantic emotions as I have tried weakly to portray in the last chapter without paying for them – paying a good price too. Nature will avenge herself on those who maltreat her so uncalculatingly. For the second time in her life, Kate was struck down by a violent brain-fever. Again for weeks and weeks she lay, hovering on the ill-defined borders of life and death, in a sort of debatable land that hardly belonged to either. Again, in delirious frenzies, she raved about her forever-lost Dare […].

According to the narrator, the brain fever is a reprisal for the intense emotions Kate gave way to on the day she intended to elope with Dare. Following a lengthy sermon by her moral guardian, James Stanley, in which he makes plain the sinful nature of her passion for Dare, Kate's attack of brain fevers seems to be the product of sin. Similar to Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*, sin appears to be closely aligned with disease. Moreover, just like in *Armadale*, the disease bred by sin does not remain contained within the individual sinner but spreads like a wildfire. As Gilbert has noted, Kate's fever of passion 'is […] transformed from an individual to a community concern, escaping its containment within the individual to prey on society at large' (p. 117). According to Gilbert, Kate becomes 'a vector for disease' (p. 114), 'spread[ing] contagion wherever she goes' (p. 116). Kate's apparent recovery and search for a cure from her diseased passion is set against the backdrop of a fever epidemic, which rages in the slums of the town where she lives. Although the outbreak of the disease in the slums predates her attack of brain fever, it is only after she has abandoned Dare that the fever begins to spread uncontrollably.

The infectious nature of Kate's sinful passion is well-grounded in nineteenth-century religious discourse. Indeed, the idea that sin was contagious and could be communicated to everyone who came into direct or indirect contact with it had gained some traction among authors of nineteenth-century religious text on both sides of the Atlantic, as this passage from the writings of Daniel Smith, an American Methodist, demonstrates:

> Sin is contagious. […] It is a spreading leprosy. Can we welcome it to our embrace, and yet hope to avoid the contagion? In vain does the blood dance joyously along in its appointed courses; in vain does the eye flash and the cheek bloom; in vain is the step elastic and the strength firm; the infection is inhaled by the breath, absorbed through the pores – soon is it coursing its way through every artery and vein, and corrupting the whole mass – the light fades from the eye, the limbs falter, 'the whole head becomes sick, and the whole heart faint!'[36]

Also James Spence, a Scottish clergyman, shared the opinion that sin was not self-contained but could infect and corrupt other people:

> We are all familiar with the sad fact that sin is infectious, that it possesses a power of self-propagation, of passing by contact from man to man, and from heart to heart. One soul that is tainted communicates the taint to another, and that one to a third, and thus the foul thing is transmitted and its existence perpetuated in the earth.[37]

According to Gilbert, Kate's sinful sexual passion for Dare 'is figured forth as disease' (p. 116). However, the fact that the outbreak of the fever epidemic in the city slums follows directly on a sermon delivered by Kate's friend James and coincides with Kate's new-found religious fervour makes another interpretation possible. In the book's second volume, before she decides to leave Dare for good, Kate becomes a district visitor, distributing evangelical tracts to the poor and the sick. Although she initially goes about her duties rather reluctantly, calling the tracts she is supposed to hand out '[l]ittle torments' (p. 168), she starts to embrace her district-visiting duties after her recovery from brain fever: 'Heart and soul, with all the energies of her body, and all the faculties of her mind, she went into that work, with which she had formerly trifled and played' (p. 304). In accordance with the saying 'The devil finds work for idle hands', she plunges herself into charity work to atone for her past sins.

As this instance of internal focalisation reveals, Kate's attempts to suppress her 'sinful' urges through self-sacrifice assume exaggerated proportions:

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[36] Daniel Smith, *Lectures to Young Men on Their Dangers, Safeguards, and Responsibilities* (New York, NY: Carlton and Philipps, 1853), p. 26.
[37] James Spence, 'The Greatest of These Is Love', *The Original Secession Magazine*, 17 (1886), 369-79 (pp. 377-8).

> No reins […] could be too strait and tight to curb and check so untamed a
> soul, no manacles too heavy and close to fetter it. […] She had done for
> ever with the flowers and jewels of life; the thorns must be her portion now,
> and she would wear them crownwise, round her brows, and not clamour or
> complain about the blood they drew. On her past harmless coquetries she
> looked back as on so many deadly sins […]. (p. 303)

Both the narrator and Kate's immediate family members agree that Kate's
religious fervour has taken on pathological features. According to the narrator,
Kate's 'exaggerated strictness' with herself is the result of a 'morbid remorse' (p.
303). This sentiment is echoed by Kate's sister, Maggie, who states, 'She is
morbid; it is unnatural to hear a young girl preach like that […]' (p. 331).
Moreover, Kate's fervent adoption of Methodism is connected with mental
illness. When Kate does not show any inclination of giving up her visiting of
districts where the fever is raging, Maggie declares her 'mad' (p. 308). The
association between Kate's religious enthusiasm and madness is reminiscent of
nineteenth-century medical discourse, which considered religious fervour,
especially in the context of religious revivalist movements, to be an important
cause of insanity.

By reading the rhetoric of disease and contagion in the context of religious
fervour rather than transgressive sexuality, the book's message appears in a
completely new light. While many scholars have highlighted the moralistic
overtones of the book's second half, which largely seem to erase the novel's
radical stance on female desire and sexuality of the book's first half, such a
reading allows an entirely different interpretation. Rather than condemning
passion as 'a contagion that invades the body and corrupts the mind' (Gilbert p.
117), the novel seems to foreground the oppressive nature of religion, which by
preaching continence prevents people from attaining happiness. This
interpretation is underscored by the fact that Kate's religious transformation is
not conducive to her happiness. Although the narrator appears to be awed by her
self-sacrificial devotion, Kate's final years with the Sisters of Mercy, which are
summarised in a few words, have no semblance of a happy ending: 'Early and
late she toiled, giving her days and her nights, her feeble strength, and all her
tender woman's heart, to the abating by but a few drops the great ocean of human
anguish; and, for meed of her labours, won much weariness of body, oftentimes
discouragement of soul, and small cold praise' (p. 375).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be said that the rhetoric of disease and contagion not only pervaded the mid-nineteenth-century sensation debate but also features prominently in the two representatives of the genre chosen for the subject of this article. Both Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* and Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* weave together discourses of disease and contagion with discourses of sin, thus replicating the rhetoric that was used by conservative reviewers to discredit the genre of sensation fiction and demonstrate its allegedly harmful properties.

However, as I have argued, instead of taking on a moralistic, preaching tone, their use of the rhetoric of disease and contagion in conjunction with the rhetoric of sin allowed the authors of the two works under consideration to challenge and negotiate notions of what constitutes sinful behaviour. By applying the rhetoric of disease and contagion to both sin and religious enthusiasm, the two novels put the two concepts on the same level, suggesting that excessive religious fervour can be as destructive as sin. This is exemplified by the stories of the two novels' main protagonists, Ozias Midwinter and Kate Chester. While Midwinter's religious mania threatens to drive a wedge between him and his best friend, thus almost making his worst fear come true, namely that he will bring about his best friend's destruction, Kate's adoption of Methodism, rather than bringing her happiness, condemns her to a life of toil and misery.

It may be argued that both novels display an anti-Evangelical strain, as they both demonstrate the dangerous potential of the Evangelical 'insistence on human depravity'[38] and belief in the doomed nature of humanity in their own way. By depicting both Midwinter's conviction that he is doomed to be the tool of his best friend's destruction and Kate's conviction that her depravity has put her outside the pale of God's mercy (see p. 293) and her subsequent religious fervour as pathological, the novels under consideration level thinly veiled criticism at two of the core teachings of Evangelicalism. Thus, in an ironic reversal of nineteenth-century moral criticism of sensation fiction, which declared sensation novels to be 'one of the crying evils of the day', Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* and Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely, but Too Well* can be said to expose moral self-

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[38] Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian England: From Dickens to Eliot* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 94.

righteousness and excessive religiosity, especially that of an Evangelical turn, as the real agents of contagion.

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'every door might be Death's Door':
Narrating Mortality in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853)

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Abstract

This essay examines the revealing intersection of death, architecture, and narration in Charles Dickens's novel Bleak House *and attempts to address the question of why a novel preoccupied with the human condition as mortal takes shape in architectural terms. To realise his realist exploration of human mortality, it is vital that Dickens employ a first-person narrator, a participant in this inevitability who must experience, process, and write about a life experience dominated by the knowledge of impending death. Consequently, Esther frequently narrates life and death in tandem via the material conduit of an architectural register of imagery. Yet Esther's particular way of seeing, understanding, and writing about architecture has largely gone unremarked. Like Persephone descending to the Underworld, Esther enters, observes, and re-emerges from various death houses to write about her experience with her death-inflected architect's eye. While the reading of Esther as gratingly cheerful, naïve, and uninteresting remains critically recurrent, this essay argues that Esther is in fact a dark figure, a harbinger of death who takes it upon herself to remind her readers incessantly of their own inescapable mortality.*

Introduction

Three years before the publication of his novel *Bleak House* (1853), Charles Dickens was given a *Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture* by his brother-in-law, Henry Austin. On receipt, he wrote to Austin in a letter dated 27 February 1850: 'Many thanks for the Report, which is extraordinarily interesting. I began to read it last night in bed – and dreamed of putrefaction generally'.[1] Three months later, Dickens wrote again to Austin, excusing himself from direct involvement with the burial reform cause: 'If I get fierce and antagonistic about burials, I can't go back to Copperfield for hours and hours. This is really the sort of condition on which I hold my inventive powers; and I

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[1] K.J. Fielding and A.W. Brice, '*Bleak House* and the Graveyard', in *Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation*, ed. by Robert B. Partlow, Jr. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), pp. 115-139 (p. 124). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

can't get rid of it' (p. 124).[2] In addition to the *Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture*, the catalogue of Dickens's Gadshill library lists J.D. Parry's 1847 pamphlet, *Urban Burial: the London Churchyards, with Suggestions for joint Parochial Cemeteries in Town and Country* and G.A. Walker's *Lectures on the Condition of Metropolitan Grave Yards, four series*.[3] Dickens, while well-read on the topic of burial reform, found the subject distinctly disruptive to his writing.

A key figure in the debate concerning London's urgent need for burial reform was the sanitary reformer G.A. Walker. In his 1839 report, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, Walker surveys numerous churchyards and burying grounds and provides a scathing report on their condition. Walker calls for the 'ENTIRE REMOVAL OF THE DEAD FROM THE IMMEDIATE PROXIMITY OF THE LIVING'.[4] Walker's primary concerns are the desecration of interred bodies and the spread of diseases emanating from the burial ground:

> Our best affections are involved, and call upon us to secure, by every contrivance, the peaceful repose of the departed; and, at the same time, to remove as far as possible from the living, THE PESTIFEROUS EXHALATIONS OF THE DEAD. (p. vii)[5]

This is a disturbing visual, suggesting the dead as active agents with the power to negatively impact the living. Walker proceeds to document, in horrific detail, the disastrous condition of London's overflowing burying grounds and churchyards. Frequently, the living and the dead quite literally cohabitate, as illustrated by Walker's description of the burying ground in Portugal Street:

> The effluvia from this ground, at certain periods, are so offensive, that persons living in the back of Clement's Lane are compelled to keep their windows closed; the walls even of the ground which adjoins the yards of those houses, are frequently seen reeking with fluid, which diffuses a most offensive smell. Who can wonder, then, that fever is here so prevalent and so triumphant? (p. 152)

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[2] 12 May 1850.

[3] J.H. Stonehouse, ed. *Catalogue of the Library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill* (London: Piccadilly Fountain Press, 1935), p. 89.

[4] G.A. Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards* (London: Messrs. Longman and Company, 1839), p. 11. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[5] Dickens later uses the word 'pestiferous' in *Bleak House* when describing the 'hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene' (p. 165).

In this passage and numerous others, Walker emphasises the vulnerability and permeability of the adjacent domestic residences. He includes first-hand accounts of sweating walls, atrocious smells, and spoiled food – the consequences of living near an active and poorly maintained burying ground. Walker also catalogues gruesome desecrations, including corpses being robbed of jewellery, the use of coffins as firewood, the selling of second hand 'coffin furniture' such as coffin nails (p. 199), and the gravedigger's 'management' practices, which include breaking down coffins and removing partially decomposed bodies to make room for new internments (p. 198).[6] Thus, when Walker queries, 'Whence this rude invasion of the tomb?' (p. 189), he is concerned not only with the dead bodies saturating the ground and pressing in on domestic residences, but also the intentional unearthing of, and interference with, the dead by the living.

Walker depicts an untenable situation, a dual encroachment resulting from an unnatural proximity. He describes the ground beneath London as potent with activity, 'overcharged with death' (p. 148) and 'literally overcharged with death' (p. 170). The ground of Ewer St. Chapel is 'literally surcharged with dead' (p. 178), and nearby Deadman's Place is 'equally surcharged with dead' (p. 178). Walker's anxiety is palpable as he describes the ground level rising higher and higher around domestic habitations, at times even obscuring the view from kitchen windows. Many churchyards were filled to capacity and 'The raising of the ground above its natural level often meant that accommodation for the living was separated from masses of decomposing corpses by damp and crumbling walls'.[7] Haewon Hwang suggests that in the nineteenth century, 'the image of the underground as a resting place for the dead, separate from the living world above, was supplanted by a more porous image of pestilence and pollution'.[8] As we have seen from Walker, the 'underground' was too charged with activity to be considered a viable 'resting place'. Instead, underground space was routinely unearthed and intruded upon. The tension between the living and the dead has also been noted by Samantha Matthews, who writes of the years following Walker's report, 'London's population explosion necessarily extended to the

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[6] See also G. A. Walker's follow-up work, *Burial-Ground Incendiarism* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846), pp. 21-22 for an extended description of the chaotic burial ground 'management' practices as described by a working gravedigger.

[7] James Stevens Curl, *A Celebration of Death: An introduction to some of the buildings, monuments, and settings of funerary architecture in the Western European tradition* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1993), p. 286.

[8] Haewon Hwang, *London's Underground Spaces: Representing the Victorian City, 1840-1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 121.

dead as well as the living, so that the two communities must hereafter compete for space, literally and psychically'.[9] The living now vied with the dead for real estate, and this was a struggle with an accompanying psychological impact, as the living were forced to confront the uncomfortable idea of being edged out by the dead.

Significantly, in formulating his argument against intramural burial, Walker relies on the language of habitation to delineate the realms of both the living and the dead. He writes of his regret that, in England, 'the putrefaction process emanating from those who have gone to their last homes is allowed to accumulate in the very midst of the habitations of the living' (p. 90). Walker is deeply disturbed that 'in a moral and Christian country, the abode of the dead is openly violated – its deposits are sacrilegiously disturbed, and ejected' (p. 188-9). For Walker, the dead remain residents of sorts, although he is clearly anxious to have them well-housed apart from the living. Despite being written a decade earlier, it is this aspect of Walker's report, the idea of death as a state of habitation and one that is vulnerable to intrusion, that resonates with Dickens's *Bleak House.* Dickens infuses *Bleak House* with both material and metaphorical architectural structures in tandem with materially dead bodies and imagery of metaphorical decay. He writes into being a London where death is always present, always pressing in on the characters and their built environment.[10] While the houses adjacent to cemeteries or burying grounds are permeated by the effluvia of death in a manner that mirrors the concerns vocalised by contemporary burial reformers, the language of death, decay, and organic disintegration also appears in Dickens's representation of domestic habitations removed from the cemetery. While Walker represents a dual domestic invasion – the living violating the dead and the dead violating the living – Dickens merges the states into one, through his metaphorical representation of tomb-like habitations for the living. Through the built-environment-as-tomb emphasis, Dickens takes the overflow and permeability danger illustrated by Walker to its metaphoric limit. Dickens blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead and, in doing so, emphasises the unavoidable reality of human mortality and the inevitability of enclosure within

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[9] Samantha Matthews, 'The London Necropolis: Suburban Cemeteries and the Necropolitan Imaginary' in *A Mighty Mass of Brick and Smoke: Victorian and Edwardian Representations of London*, ed. by Lawrence Philips (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 257-281 (p. 270).
[10] Scholars have thoroughly addressed the various manifestations of death and decay in both Dickens's overall cannon and, most frequently, *Bleak House*. See Robert Alter, Haewon Hwang, Andrew Sanders, and Garrett Stewart.

some form of burial architecture. Architecture and the idea of habitation, then, are a key component of Dickens's realist representation of human mortality.

To fully realise his realist exploration of human mortality, it is vital that Dickens employ a first-person narrator, a mortal participant in this inevitability who must experience, process, and write about a life experience dominated by the knowledge of impending death. As an intimate participant in the life to death trajectory, Esther frequently narrates life and death in tandem via the material conduit of an architectural register of imagery. In doing so, Dickens reveals how significant architecture is to the human experience – an experience coloured by our mortal condition that takes shape in the novel through architecture and its association with the tomb. A focused reading of Esther's treatment of architecture reveals Dickens' intent in utilising a first-person narrator who is also the dexterous author of her own account: Esther has both an awareness of her own mortality and a sophisticated understanding of architecture as a powerful narrative vehicle for expressing her own subjectivity and psychological profile. Yet Esther's particular way of seeing, understanding, and writing about architecture has largely gone unremarked. Consequently, this essay focuses on the half of the novel narrated by Esther, arguing that Dickens deploys a heroine with a death-inflected architect's eye. While the historical context of the condition of London's burying grounds has certainly informed this essay, I will look particularly at Esther's role in representing this death-saturated built environment landscape and the extent to which Esther colours her life experience surrounded by architecture with imagery of death.

Esther has intimate knowledge of the ease in which our living architectural enclosures could become our dying ones. As she well knows, contagion is a powerful and relentless force, capable of permeating the homes of rich and poor alike. After hearing that the poor streetsweeper Jo has fallen ill, Esther and Charley bring him from the brickmaker's cottage back to Bleak House and attempt to nurse him back to health. Eventually, Jo absconds, and Charley falls ill. Esther indicates that once Charley is out of danger, 'I began to think the contagion of her illness was upon me'.[11] While Dickens does not name the disease Esther battles, the implication is that it is smallpox. Esther survives her brush with death, yet emerges from her illness with the marks of her ordeal visible on her face: she lives, but is forever outwardly changed. Her experience with contagious

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[11] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 463. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

disease marks both her appearance and her outlook as a narrator. Esther has looked into the abyss and seen the ultimate conclusion of every human life and, while she herself survives in this instance, she is fully cognisant of the fact that death cannot be outrun. As Jo says "'They dies everywhere. . . They dies more than they lives, according to what *I* see'" (p. 453).

Through Esther's portion of the novel, Dickens explores the author's role in experiencing loss and writing about death. Esther gives shape to her dark outlook through her accounts of contact with the built environment world of *Bleak House*, providing solidity to her representation of subjectivity. While scholars have increasingly discussed Dickens in terms of psychological realism (see Stolte, Pratt-Smith), Esther's psychologically-revealing preoccupation with death, her defining characteristic, has yet to be fully explored. In this essay I argue for a reassessment of Esther and her role as narrator and first-time author based largely on the psychological profile Esther self-constructs in her description of the houses she encounters and her use of revealing architectural metaphors. Her death-inflected vision becomes an overriding feature of her character and, consequently, this essay provides new insight into Esther: while the understanding of Esther as gratingly cheerful, naïve, and uninteresting remains critically recurrent, I will offer a reading of Esther's dark outlook and drive to document architectural structures as enclosures for the dead that stems from her knowledge of traumatic events to come. Far from vacuous and trite, Esther is a dark figure, a harbinger of death who takes it upon herself to remind her readers of their own inescapable mortality at every turn.

Esther's Authorship and Narration

Readers of *Bleak House* cannot fail to note the dizzying number of architectural interiors Dickens represents in his novel. The novel is architecturally profuse, and the built environment landscape is a mass of houses, businesses, doors to enter, and characters to encounter and leave behind. We follow Esther and the third-person narrator in and out of domestic residences and businesses, up grand staircases, and down into subterranean dwellings. Dickens constructs fifty-eight unique architectural interiors in *Bleak House*. Some of these structures are described by both Esther and the third-person narrator, but there are also views presented by one narrator alone. On my count, the third-person narrator describes seventeen interiors unseen by Esther, while Esther describes twenty-seven interiors unremarked by the third-person narrator. The reader is entirely

dependent on Esther's vision for an understanding of these twenty-seven architectural interiors, structures that include, significantly, both Bleak House and the new Bleak House introduced at the novel's close. These numbers indicate that Esther is responsible for describing roughly half of the novel's built environment. Despite this fact, even recent criticism continues to perpetuate the distinction between the two narrators in terms of expansive openness and domestic enclosure. Caroline Levine writes that '*Bleak House* is unusual in switching back and forth between an impersonal, detached, ironic, mobile, and knowledgeable narrator who speaks in the perpetual present tense and Esther Summerson's situated, immersed, naïve, past-tense account'.[12] In actuality, Dickens gives his readers an unusually mobile heroine with an eye for detail and an interest in writing architecture. Esther's architect's eye is a significant and overlooked aspect of her character: she meticulously describes the architectural structures she encounters, and her architectural reporting enhances the novel's realism as she foregrounds her direct experience of the novel's built environment.

Over the years, scholars have discussed the dual narration of *Bleak House*, expressing various views on Esther's role as partial narrator of the novel from frustration with her obfuscations to a more recent acknowledgement of Esther's significance and narrative contribution.[13] Yet focusing exclusively on the fact that the novel has two narrators can distract from the specific work that Esther accomplishes as a narrator and the unexpected literary skill that Dickens intentionally affords a self-avowed first-time author. I sympathise with Joseph Sawicki who expresses frustration that 'When Esther exhibits some narrative sophistication, critics have almost universally viewed it as a slip on Dickens's part'.[14] As a result of this dismissive treatment, Esther's writing has not always been taken seriously. For example, despite his generally positive reading of Esther's abilities as a narrator, Alex Zwerdling nevertheless suggests, 'We are asked to look very much *at* Esther rather than *through* her, to observe her actions, her fantasies, even her verbal mannerisms with great attention'.[15] But we should

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[12] Caroline Levine, 'Victorian Realism', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 84-106 (p. 100).

[13] Most recently, Tyson Stolte examines Esther's first-person narration in his 2022 book *Dickens and Victorian Psychology: Introspection, First-Person Narration, and the Mind*. See also Leonard W. Deen, Doris Stringham Delespinasse, John P. Frazee, M.E. Grenander, and Ellen Serlen.

[14] Joseph Sawicki, '"The Mere Truth Won't Do": Esther as Narrator in *Bleak House*', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 17 (1987), 209-224 (p. 211).

[15] Alex Zwerdling, 'Esther Summerson Rehabilitated', *PMLA*, 88 (1973), 429-439 (p. 429).

not discount the idea of looking through Esther, particularly in terms of her detailed architectural reporting. This narrative feature substantially contributes to the realism of the novel's built environment. Esther details the architecture she encounters with both confidence and precision while also employing architectural metaphors to narrate her past: Esther leads her reader through the tangible architecture of the novel while also utilising architecture to its fullest metaphoric potential. She conceptualises her subjectivity in architectural terms and generates psychological realism through the act of writing. Thus, Esther reveals herself to the reader through the act of writing and, in particular, writing about architecture. At the same time, she accomplishes notable artistic work in her half of the novel, namely, employing architecture as a way to guide her reader through the novel's built environment as well as through the story she narrates, to convey character, introduce foreshadowing, describe intimate moments from her past, and illustrate her commitment to writing the human experience as a parade of enclosures tending to the grave.

Esther prioritises architectural realism in her narrative. Not only does she describe the rooms of Bleak House, she attempts to replicate their architectural layout, asking her readers to walk with her through this house precisely as she remembers it. To do so, she writes with confidence and architectural precision, meticulously documenting the number of steps up and down between rooms: 'Out of this room you went down two steps [...] Out of this you went up three steps' (p. 78). By providing such details as the exact number of stairs to go up and down to enter each room, Esther reveals her desire to convey Bleak House's three-dimensionality, making that structure navigable and knowable to her readers. Esther's authorial dedication to architectural realism is complicated by her additional goal of expressing her subjective experience within that architectural space. For example, when Esther describes Bleak House she walks her reader through the architectural blueprint of the house while simultaneously striving to recreate the initial feeling of disorientation she experienced upon her arrival: 'It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are' (p. 78).[16] Additionally, Esther often reaches for architecture when detailing the pivotal moments of her life. When contagion infiltrates Bleak House and she falls gravely ill, Esther recalls that in her delirium:

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[16] Dickens uses the phrase 'pleasantly irregular' to describe Gad's Hill Place (Douglas-Fairhurst note 7).

'I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned, as I have seen a worm in a garden path, by some obstruction, and labouring again' (p. 513). Esther describes her illness through the image of an insurmountable staircase as she architecturalises the otherwise hard-to-pin-down experience of being delirious.

Throughout the novel, architecture and narration are intimately bound. In his article 'The Urban Gothic of *Bleak House*', Allan Prichard indicates that Dickens's preoccupation with houses and architecture infiltrates even minute passing descriptions: 'None of his other novels is so filled with images and symbols of houses as this one: in Bleak House a character cannot even gesture or a child play a game without some reference to houses'.[17] Here, Prichard refers to a moment when Esther recalls unsuccessfully searching for Peepy Jellyby: 'The oyster shells he had been building a house with, were still in the passage, but he was nowhere discoverable'.[18] This scene represents architectural manipulation on a minute level, highlighting the human compulsion to design and construct architectural structures over which they have control. It is useful here to recall Peter Brooks and his idea of likening the efforts of Victorian realist authors to the delight in architectural play with scale models. Dickens compounds this idea by not only creating the architecturally realistic built environment world of *Bleak House* but also allowing his heroine to participate in this 'form of play' through her materially and metaphorically rich accounts of architecture in her written account. [19]

For Esther, this 'form of play' involves using architecture as a vehicle for representing an author's subjectivity as well as a narrator's darker preoccupations with death and loss. Writing years after the events she describes, and with full knowledge of events to come, including discovering her mother's dead body, Esther purposefully infuses her architectural descriptions with imagery of death.[20] Esther's death-inflected vision is an overriding feature of her character but one that has gone largely unremarked. Death surrounds Esther in a material sense with the overflowing cemeteries and the dead bodies she herself encounters, but it is also how Esther sees and navigates the world: Esther predominantly views houses as containers for the dead. *Bleak House* is certainty, as Tyson Stolte states, 'a

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[17] Allan Pritchard, 'The Urban Gothic of *Bleak House*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 45 (1991), 432-452 (p. 434).
[18] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 199.
[19] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p 3.
[20] For more on Esther's use of foreshadowing see John O. Jordan and Doris Stringham Delespinasse.

novel relentlessly peering into the grave', and a great deal of that peering is accomplished by Esther. [21] While scholarship tends to consider Esther a positive figure, 'a paragon of all the virtues'[22] and a 'specific locus'[23] for good in contrast to the third-person narrator, Esther has a darker side and carries death with her. Most notably, in the midst of writing about her life, Esther cannot ignore the fact that death hangs over each character, as well as herself. Consequently, death infiltrates her representation of almost every single architectural structure in her narrative.

Narrating Mortality

From the very beginning of her narrative, Esther reveals her belief that architecture is intimately linked to the task of writing. Her architect's eye assesses the material architecture of her built environment and understands how to digest and then refigure that architecture as a compelling literary device to tell her story. Esther also uses architecture as an emotional vehicle, writing her anxiety, grief, and frustration into the structures she narrates. By doing so, she reveals precisely how architecture lends itself to a form of psychological realist writing: Esther projects her knowledge of the events to come onto the architectural spaces she details for the reader. In this section I will explore Esther's encounter with the pauper burying ground, as well as her Persephone-like role in entering, exiting, and narrating metaphoric house-tombs. I argue that Esther is at the centre of the psychological realist form depicted through architecture. She is a narrative force and a self-generating psychological portrait. Her psychology is death-inflected and her representation of the world around her is accordingly affected by her internal preoccupation with death and mortality. As a result, her psychological fixation with death is writ large on the built environment world of the novel she documents: her death vision unites with architecture and results in house-tombs. Writing architecture in this way is not just a reflection of death in the material world but about *how* Esther sees and *what* that particular way of seeing tells us about how she processes the events of her past.

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[21] Tyson Stolte, '"Putrefaction Generally": "Bleak House", Victorian Psychology, and the Question of Bodily Matter', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 44.3 (2011), 402-423 (p. 402).

[22] M.E. Grenander, 'The Mystery and the Moral: Point of View in Dickens's *Bleak House*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 10.4 (1956), 301-305 (p. 305).

[23] Leonard W. Deen, 'Style and Unity in *Bleak House*', *Criticism*, 3.3 (1961), 206-218 (p. 214).

Raised by her godmother (her aunt), Esther grows up assuming culpability for her mother's death: '"What did I do to her? How did I lose her?"' (p. 26). With no information to go on, Esther sounds the depths of her memory for recollections of funerary customs: 'I had never worn a black frock . . . I had never been shown my mama's grave' (p. 25). After being told by her aunt that she should never have been born (p. 26), Esther articulates her sense of her problematic existence through architecture: '[I] felt so sensible of filling a place in her house which ought to have been empty' (p. 27). When her aunt dies, Esther (then fourteen) finally has a tangible death to locate within time and space. Shortly after her aunt's funeral, Esther buries her doll (p. 31), an act that could be read as symbolising the end of her youth and the beginning of adulthood but should also be regarded for what it is in fact – a death that she herself hastens and burial that she can control. Thus, Esther the author hints at her darker preoccupations from the very start of her account, knowing that she has many burial and death scenes to write before the close of her narrative.

Esther forcefully introduces the idea of the intimate relationship between person, architecture, and death when recalling a conversation between herself and her guardian, John Jarndyce. This conversation takes place early in the novel, in the fifth chapter narrated by Esther. During this conversation, Jarndyce describes certain houses caught up in the Chancery suit, saying,

> It is a street of perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out; without a pane of glass, without so much as a window-frame, with the bare blank shutters tumbling from their hinges and falling asunder; the iron rails peeling away in flakes of rust; the chimneys sinking in; the stone steps to every door (and every door might be Death's Door) turning stagnant green; the very crutches on which the ruins are propped, decaying. (pp. 109-110)[24]

By first describing these houses in terms of what they are missing, Jarndyce presents a stark portrait of houses divorced from all standard architectural features. In addition to their missing pieces, the houses appear to be dying, disintegrating, and returning to the earth. Simultaneously, the people associated with these properties waste away as they await the results of the seemingly endless lawsuit. The languishing houses powerfully convey misery and despair

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[24] Dickens later returns to the phrase 'Death's Door' in his essay 'Night Walks' published in *Uncommercial Traveller* (1869) when describing Newgate and 'that wicked little Debtor's Door – shutting tighter than any other door one ever saw – which has been Death's Door to so many' (p. 186).

while anticipating the unavoidable breakdown of the human bodies they enclose: the organic and the built are decaying hand in hand. As Robert Douglas-Fairhurst writes, 'For Dickens, home is not only a physical shelter but an extension of the self, like an additional skin or an exoskeleton'. At the same time, 'The biblical sense of "home" as a grave like the "long home" that Ecclesiastes tells us we are travelling towards, is one that often haunts Dickens's fiction'.[25] So, in Douglas-Fairhurst's understanding, domestic homes in Dickens's novels are both 'an extension of the self' and a 'grave'. Dickens capitalises on this association of bodies with houses and houses with tombs in *Bleak House*, never allowing his reader to forget about our impending death and the inevitability of removal from one 'home' to another. Jarndyce's comment that 'every door might be Death's Door' is multifaceted and provides an original way of thinking about our architectural surroundings. By representing the concept of death architecturally, Dickens encourages his readers to think about the experience of death as walking through a door from the realm of the living to the dead and entering a new phase of habitation. Esther finds this image so compelling that it recurs throughout her narrative as she repeatedly represents the houses she encounters over the course of the novel as metaphoric tombs. Merging the organic with the built, architecture and inhabitant, this is an early instance in the novel of Dickens's (and Esther's) incessant linking of architecture and death.

Dickens experiments with narrating life and death simultaneously by deploying a heroine who recounts entering and exiting death-laden architectural spaces. In fact, Esther moves seamlessly between the two realms, repeatedly walking her reader through Death's Doors and returning to write about her experience. Her narrative choices indicate that she considers herself to be a Persephone-like-figure, inhabiting and moving through the worlds of both the living and the dead. She delves into the realm of the dead by entering numerous architectural enclosures containing the deceased or the dying (her aunt, the brickmaker's baby, Jo, Richard) and returns unscathed to document what she has seen. Scholars have certainly noted Esther's last name, Summerson, in the context of her bright and cheerful nature. For example, Lynn Cain writes in *Dickens, Family, Authorship: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Kinship and Creativity* (2008) that Esther's 'surname phonetically represents her as a maternal Persephone who will bring back summer and sunshine to the bleak, wintry

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landscape of Victorian England'.[26] But Esther as a Persephone figure with sustained contact with the realm of the dead has gone unremarked.[27] Throughout her narrative, Esther presents creative variations of the idea that 'every door could be Death's Door', repeatedly architecturalising her representation of death and consequently employing architecture as a key component of enhancing Dickens's realist representation of human mortality.

For Esther, the domestic architecture she encounters represents anticipating tombs and unavoidable enclosures for the dead and she expresses this fact directly in her narrative. Early in the novel, Esther accompanies Mrs Pardiggle on an uncomfortable visit to the brickmaker's cottage. The angry brickmaker shouts at the obnoxious do-gooder Mrs Pardiggle, saying of his cottage 'Yes, it is dirty – its nat'rally dirty, and its nat'rally unwholesome; and we've had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides' (p. 121). Chris Brooks writes of the spread of disease at this time, 'In the single rooms occupied by working-class families, the dead were literally, not metaphorically, domesticated, and continuity between the living and dead was forged not by affection but infection'.[28] Esther understands that contagion has permeated this home where the living and dead now cohabitate.[29]

Esther skilfully utilises architecture as a vehicle for foreshadowing, including two death-tinged descriptions of the architectural enclosures inhabited by her parents prior to their death and imprinting her grief onto these structures. Esther briefly glances into the room that belonged, unbeknownst to her, to her father. Looking in, she recalls, 'A sad and desolate place it was; a gloomy, sorrowful place, that gave me a strange sensation of mournfulness and even dread' (p. 214). Without giving away the mystery surrounding her parentage, Esther expresses the sorrow of never knowing her father. Similarly, Esther infuses her lengthy description of Chesney Wold's exterior with images of tranquil peace

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[26] Lynn Cain, *Dickens, Family, Authorship: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Kinship and Creativity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), p. 145.

[27] For a look at later literary heroines with connections to Persephone, see Margot K. Louis, *Persephone Rises, 1860-1927: Mythography, Gender, and the Creation of a New Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[28] Chris Brooks, *Mortal Remains: The History and Present State of the Victorian and Edwardian Cemetery* (Exeter: Wheaton Publishers Ltd., 1989), p. 35.

[29] For a full account of death and burial customs through the centuries, see Thomas W. Laqueur's book, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*, particularly the section 'Putting the Dead in their Place: Pauper Funerals, Burials, and Reburials' in Chapter 5.

and 'undisturbed repose' (p. 265), words with intrinsic death associations. Esther cannot divorce her knowledge of her mother's premature death, and the trauma of discovering her lifeless and exposed body, from her description of her mother's home.

Esther's use of architecture as a vehicle for foreshadowing is perhaps the most insistent when she indicates that her friend Richard's fatal association with his lawyer has infiltrated his lodgings. When Esther and Ada visit Richard, 'we came to Richard's name in great white letters on a hearse-like panel' (p. 724). Esther notes the 'musty rotting silence of the house' (p. 730) and recalls, 'I put my lips to the hearse-like panel of the door' (p. 730). Esther's narrative method ensures that readers cannot fail to note that Esther's foreknowledge of events colours her vision of the architecture surrounding Richard. Here, at the end of the novel, Esther deploys these death metaphors with creative confidence, utilising architecture to its fullest metaphoric potential and revealing to the reader that her portion of the narrative is intimate and psychologically revealing. Esther's death-inflected vision, where the architecture of the past becomes mutable, highlights Dickens's aim of psychological realism for his novel.

At the climax of the novel, Esther learns that her mother has been alive all these years but, after a wild night of frantic searching, ultimately discovers Lady Dedlock's dead body. Esther's experience of locating her mother's body at the pauper burying ground results in the death-infused representation of architecture throughout her narrative. The memory of discovering Lady Dedlock's corpse is foundational across her written account, as Esther anticipates the psychological impact of writing this moment. After tracking Lady Dedlock through the city, Esther and Inspector Bucket eventually come to the burying ground where Captain Hawdon was previously interred.[30] It is here that Esther discovers her mother's dead body and she recalls, 'She lay there, a distressed, unsheltered, senseless creature' (p. 847). The surrounding houses inadequately shelter her mother's body which, unburied, mocks the typical practice of shallow burying ground internments. Esther indicates that an unburied body jars with human feeling and activates the desire to enclose and protect.

Esther's account of this moment of discovery is deeply personal, yet her description of the burying ground also encapsulates many of G.A. Walker's key

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[30] In a 4 April 1868 letter to Miss Palfrey, Dickens indicates that the burying ground he wrote of in *Bleak House* had its origin in St. Martins-in-the-Fields: 'I do not remember that the graveyard is accessible from the street now, but when I was a boy it was to be got at by a low covered passage under a house, and was guarded by a rusty iron gate. In that churchyard I long afterwards buried the "Nemo" of Bleak House' (Dexter 624).

concerns. Like Walker, Esther draws attention to the unhealthy proximity of the living to the decomposing dead, writing,

> The gate was closed. Beyond it, was a burial-ground – a dreadful spot in which the night was very slowly stirring; but where I could dimly see heaps of dishonored graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses, with a few dull lights in their windows, and on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease. (p. 844)[31]

For those living around the burying ground, the gate cannot block out the encroaching bodies or the constant, tangible reminder of human mortality as bodies permeate the domestic homes and the organic and the built decompose in tandem. In fact, there is a distinct futility to the gate, as it cannot protect the dead from desecration or the living from the spread of disease. Deborah Lutz discusses the movement of cemeteries into towns in *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2015), writing that 'Gradually corpses came to inhabit areas adjacent to living spaces, as if dying might mean simply slipping into the next room'.[32] Thus, Dickens frames his portrait of the burying ground in *Bleak House* in corporeal rather than spiritual terms: bodies are removed from the house to the cemetery yet return to permeate the surrounding residences. Louise Henson suggests that Dickens and his *Household Words* contributors

> utilized popular folk beliefs about the return of the dead and produced a new kind of ghost story in which death led to a sinister resurrection. Rising from their graves in the form of harmful miasma, the dead pollute the air, permeate the wells, and bring disease and death to the living.[33]

Citing a study about London residents' exposure to poisonous gas as a result of overcrowded burial areas, Henson writes that ultimately, 'The miasma hypothesis suggested that the physical traces of the dead were in the very air, and literally present in the buildings they were supposed to haunt' (p. 13). Dickens embraces this disturbing concept of the dead permeating architecture. It provides a compelling way to think about human mortality as the dead 'live on' within

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[31] The third person narrator has previously referred to the cemetery as 'hemmed-in' (p. 165).

[32] Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 104.

[33] Louise Henson, '"Phantoms Arising from the Scenes of Our Too-Long Neglect": Charles Dickens, Victorian Chemistry, and the Folklore of the Ghost', *Victorian Review*, 26.1 (2000), 6-23 (pp. 11-12). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

architecture and assume a second residence in the architecture surrounding their burial place. Dickens illustrates the potential dangers of comingling the living with the dead and Andrew Sanders puts Dickens's novel on par with Edwin Chadwick's *Sanitary Report* (1842) for its impact on sanitary reform. Sanders writes, 'By association at least, the dark church-yard where Captain Hawdon is buried is assumed to be a breeder to the disease which Tom propagates. It serves Dickens as an equally forceful reminder of the intimate relationship between the living and the dead'.[34] The burying ground is surrounded with houses, 'filthy' from their unavoidable contact with the dead. Consequently, the living and the dead meet in the 'intimate' space of domestic interiors permeated by the effluvia of bodily decomposition. Dickens certainly represents the living and the dead as connected through the spread of contagion but also suggests a fluid relationship where the living and the dead connect via architecture.[35]

Architecture, death, subjectivity, and narration intersect as Esther describes the houses encircling the burying ground containing the interred body of her father and the exposed body of her mother. Years later, writing this scene with her confident architect's eye, Esther must think about where her parents currently reside. Are they nestled safely in the ground, or have they permeated the surrounding buildings? Will they stay where they are placed or be removed by an unknown hand? Are they in the air and inhalable? Esther exhibits the psychological impact accompanying this understanding of the dead exerting their agency as migratory figures infiltrating the air or potentially cohabitating with the living in material architecture. This is an uncomfortable reality and Esther clearly does not enjoy writing this part of her history, twice repeating the phrase 'I proceed to other passages in my narrative' (p. 847). Esther drags her mind forward, away from these upsetting memories by the act of writing. This is the psychological impact of narrating a parent's death that is only possible with a first-person narrator, as Dickens suggests that a writer makes themselves known even through their concealments and instinctive attempts to avoid pain. Esther's authorial process involves projecting and foreshadowing loss via architecture and then moving on quickly after recounting the actual death scene.

Throughout Esther's narrative, Dickens reminds the reader repeatedly of the author's prerogative to include or excise. Just as Esther uses accelerated

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[34] Andrew Sanders, *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), p. 148.

[35] Architects and landscape designers also expressed interest in mediating this intersection of the organic and the built, the body and the monument. See J.A. Picton, 'On Cemeteries' *Architectural Magazine* (September 1837).

pacing to describe the death of her mother, she slows down and is self-reflective on happier occasions. For example, 'Reluctantly' describing praise from her friends, Esther states, 'I must write it, even if I rub it out again, because it gives me so much pleasure' (p. 448). In this passage Dickens alludes to the drafting process and the fact that an author might write countless pages that never reach the reader's eyes. He highlights Esther's narrative authority by making the reader wonder what else she might have 'rubbed out'. Esther clearly takes pleasure in holding back relevant information, yet later admits her omissions, a technique that draws attention to her narrative authority while also bringing her emotional preoccupations into stark relief.

Esther describes the burying ground as a space defying barriers or boundaries, a chaotic, surging mass of disease and decay, yet the contrasting form of internment, burial in a mausoleum, also makes a prominent appearance in the novel. In fact, death and architecture meet perfectly in the built structure of the mausoleum.[36] It is a structure that mimics aspects of traditional domestic architecture with its doors, windows, and steps, familiar features that suggest an attempt to assert order over chaos, to provide texture and tangibility to an unknowable experience.[37] Dickens unites these two burial option extremes by having Lady Dedlock, in effect, experience both. In *Bleak House*, Lady Dedlock's body is removed from the burying ground and deposited in the Dedlock family mausoleum. While she had attempted to escape entirely from the architecture of Chesney Wold and join Captain Hawdon in the wild open chaos of the pauper burying ground, she is returned to her expected place. Her body will not be allowed to decompose in the soil and will instead remain a tangible object, architecturally enclosed. In his article, 'Dickens and the Burial of the Dead' (2005) Alan Shelston writes of the contrast between Captain Hawdon's unmarked grave and Lady Dedlock's mausoleum: 'Two of the three final illustrations of *Bleak House* are of these locations: they remind us, finally and emphatically, that in their deaths the Victorians were very much divided'.[38] Dickens, though, has

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[36] In his book, *Architecture and the After-Life* (1991), Howard Colvin describes the transition of prehistoric tombs from subterranean mounds to mausoleums.

[37] James Stevens Curl discusses the architectural history of mausolea and their increasing popularity in the nineteenth century in *A Celebration of Death* (1993). See also Curl's book, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (1972) for a detailed look at Victorian funeral customs and Patricia Jalland's book, *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996), for all aspects of dying in the Victorian family.

[38] Alan Shelston, 'Dickens and the Burial of the Dead', *Babylon or New Jerusalem? Perceptions of the City in Literature*, ed. by Valeria Tinkler-Villani (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 77-92 (p. 78).

been at pains to represent the impossibility of total division, especially in terms of the spread of disease. While I certainly agree with Shelston that the architecture of internment varied greatly according to wealth and social status, I think that it is significant that Lady Dedlock attempts to bridge the divide and cross over, seeking the death and, by extension, the burial of her own choosing: Lady Dedlock had previously taken a guided tour of the burying ground, led by the street sweeper Jo, and was fully cognisant of the horrors occurring there (p. 240). While she is overruled in death and ultimately carted back to the mausoleum, she dies on her own terms while simultaneously making a remarkable and defiant statement about the choices she has made in her life.[39]

Esther's portrayal of her life experience is intrinsically coloured by death expectations. She cannot write about her life without the shadow of death creeping in, even when describing her own avowed happiness with her husband and two daughters. Esther recalls her first vision of the New Bleak House, writing that it was 'a cottage, quite a rustic cottage of doll's rooms' (p. 888). At this moment the novel comes full circle around dolls as we recall Esther's confession that she buried her own doll before departing her aunt's house (p. 31). What then does this dollhouse image say about how Esther thinks about her own ending? I find that by describing the New Bleak House in these terms, Esther is writing her own death scene. She dies for the reader before her actual death, and we follow her into the New Bleak House but no further. Esther writes herself into this final space and then concludes her narrative on a tangent, abruptly severing her connection with the reader. The last words of the novel read as last words in the most definitive sense: 'they can very well do without much beauty in me – even supposing – ' (p. 914).

The final words of the novel also represent the death of Esther's vocation. She has answered the call to write, even though from early in the novel Esther reveals that she is unsure of her intended readership. This is an unusual position for any author and one she reiterates at the conclusion of the novel:

> The few words that I have to add to what I have written, are soon penned; then I, and the unknown friend to whom I write, will part forever. Not without much dear remembrance on my side. Not without some, I hope, on his or hers. (p. 910)

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[39] See Fred Kaplan for a discussion of how Dickens's own burial wishes were ignored.

By mentioning the unknown gender of her reader, Esther is specific about the mystery of her imagined readership. Is this 'unknown friend' intended to indicate the organiser of the project or to denote any reader who later encounters her writing? Despite not knowing her readers, Esther says that she will maintain 'much dear remembrance on my side', a comment that by extension seems to apply more to the act of writing and the work in which she has been engaged. Esther has certainly enjoyed her task, but that task is now complete, and Esther gives no indication that writing will be a part of her life in the future. This one-time opportunity raises the stakes for Esther: she must writer herself into the fabric of this narrative now or never, and this knowledge results in a distillation of her subjectivity.

Esther organises her narrative as a tour through various Death's Doors and consequently reveals her dark vision of the architecture she encounters. From the unique structure of Bleak House to the grandeur of Chesney Wold, Nemo's abandoned room to Vohles's office, everything appears funereal to Esther. By building up these death-inflected architectural enclosures for her reader, Esther simultaneously expresses qualities of her own mental interior and psychological health. Dickens actively turns to architecture as a psychological intermediary and allows his heroine to construct her own psychological profile through her representation of architecture in her narrative.

Conclusion

In his exploration of the psychological impact of mortality on authorship, Dickens deploys a narrator with an interest in penetrating the house of the dead: Esther enters, encounters, observes, and re-emerges from various death houses to write about her experiences. For Esther, there is something enlivening about these brushes with death, and they have a distinct creative impact on the novel. After discovering her mother's body surrounded by houses but nevertheless exposed, Esther turns to write a narrative saturated with architectural detail. The texture and tangibility of architecture provides her with the material vehicle to describe character, represent psychological health, foreshadow, and assert narrative authority. Ultimately, though, what underlies the majority of these architectural descriptions is the sense that Esther strives to represent the inevitability of death and burial and the accompanying psychological impact of this knowledge. It is essential to Dickens's realist portrayal of human mortality that he employs a narrator who, as a self-aware participant in this trajectory, endeavours to write

about this fact even as she represents architectural structures temporarily animated by their inhabitant. Esther links the domestic home with the tomb, the tomb with the home, and relentlessly reminds her reader that 'every door might be Death's Door'.

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Pre-Raphaelite Art and the Influence of Opium on Ways of Seeing

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Abstract

The article explores how increased use of opium to combat epidemics and disease affected Pre-Raphaelite painters and their audiences from the 1850s to 1880s. It argues that opium altered artists' perceptions of the world and played an important role both in the development of Pre-Raphaelite composition and in forming the ideas of the Aesthetic Movement. The author also proposes that opium directly affected the highly detailed visions of artist, which has been primarily attributed to the advent of photography. Key artists discussed are Henry Wallis, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal, and James McNeill Whistler. Images of sleep and death form a particular focus of the study and the author uses both contemporary literature and newspaper reviews to reassess important paintings, including The Death of Chatterton *(1856),* Ophelia *(1852),* Beata Beatrix *(1870), and* The Little White Girl *(1865).*

In 1848, just six years after the First Opium War (1839-42) and following several devastating cholera waves across Britain, the Pre-Raphaelite art movement emerged. Their close-up perspectives, controversial subject matter, and hyper-realist style caused a sensation among the British art establishment, and the paintings they exhibited became the subjects of blockbuster exhibitions. This essay will examine how the medicinal use of opium to combat disease, and its widespread use among the population, dramatically altered the visions of Pre-Raphaelite artists and their audiences.

Opium Consumption in Victorian Britain

From 1831 to 1859 domestic consumption of opium in Britain rose at an average rate of 2.4 per cent per annum. Imports, primarily from Turkey (where opium with the highest morphine content was grown), climbed from 41,300 kilos in 1830 to a staggering 280,000 kilos in 1860. Furthermore, the reduction and abolition of tax on the drug meant that, by the 1850s, opium had become significantly cheaper, with the wholesale price at 30 shillings per pound plus tax in 1818, down to 21 shillings per pound plus tax in 1851. Opium was imported to

the docks of Bristol, Liverpool, and Dover. 90% of the opium trade was conducted in London, where the Pre-Raphaelite artists were based.[1]

For Victorians living in rapidly industrialising cities which were experiencing epidemic waves of diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, and typhoid, opium became the essential and most affordable drug in the doctor's medicine bag.[2] It was used to treat severe pain, coughs, stomach complaints, and female medical conditions, as well as anxiety, insomnia, and depression. It could be bought freely in pubs and bakers' shops, at any dose without prescription. In 1848, the President of the Pharmaceutical Society commented with concern:

> At present as the law stands, any man, however ignorant – an individual unable even to sign his own name – half of whose shop is stored with butter, bacon, cheese or tape, shall from the other half, have the power of dispensing, to any person applying, preparations of mercury, arsenic, opium etc. etc.[3]

Medicine bottles were often reused, measurements were unreliable, and poison labels were not required by law until 1868.

Opium was drunk, frequently as laudanum, a drink spiced with alcohol and herbs, eaten, or smoked.[4] Popularly described as *Manus dei* (Hand of God) or *Donum dei* (Gift of God) for its pain-relieving properties, users experienced a sense of deep, euphoric wellbeing. Side effects included a reduction of pupil size and sensitivity to light and colour – recalling the high focus, *depth of field* effect found in photography.[5] Such effects are described by Charlotte Bronte (1816-55) in the drugged experience of Lucy Snowe in *Villette* (1853):

> In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest

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[1] Martin Booth, *Opium: A History* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 50-53.
[2] See doctor's medical kit. From website: *Science Museum Group* <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co197663/unopened-packet-of-diarrhoea-draughts-controlled-drug-packet> [accessed 3 August 2020].
[3] Peter Bartip, '"A Penurth of Arsenic for Rat Poison": The Arsenic Act of 1851 and the Prevention of Secret Poisoning', *Medical History*, 36 (1992), 53-69 (p. 60).
[4] Harold Kalant, 'Opium Revisited: A Brief Review of its Nature, Composition, Non-medical Use and Relative Risks', *Addiction*, (1997), 267-277 (p. 275).
[5] Elizabeth Grey, 'Understanding Depth of Field: A Beginners Guide', *Photography Life,* (2021) <https://photographylife.com/what-is-depth-of-field> [accessed 17 April 2023].

architectural wealth – of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and
sphinx: incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed
throughout the park of Villette.[6]

The dream imagery related by Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859) in *Confessions
of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) offers another striking example. As opium
affects the parts of the brain that controls breathing, it also engendered a sense of
time slowed down or stopped.

By 1860, a third of fatal poisonings, including suicide, were linked to
opium.[7] Accidental overdoses caused shallow breathing, whereby the brain could
eventually be starved of oxygen. [8] As opium was three to four times more
addictive than alcohol, regular users often found that they needed larger repeat
doses to prevent withdrawal symptoms.[9] Opium was not a social drug taken in
pubs and was usually consumed privately at home. The harsh symptoms of
withdrawal – anxiety, tearfulness, inability to sleep, abdominal cramping, nausea,
pain, and trembling – made addiction a solitary and extremely distressing
condition.[10] Such symptoms of addiction are described by the Pre-Raphaelite
poets Elizabeth Siddal and Christina Rossetti in their love poetry. Artists could
reference opium experiences to a knowing and perceptive audience.

The Death of Chatterton: The Transcendent Powers of Opium

The extent to which this widespread opium use altered Victorian perceptions can
be seen in Henry Wallis' iconic painting *The Death of Chatterton* (1856),
depicting the suicide of the 18th century poet and forger Thomas Chatterton
(1752-70), the 'marvellous boy' lauded by Romantic poet William Wordsworth

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[6] Charlotte Bronte, *Villette*, (1853) in *Bibliotheca Virtual Universal*
<https://biblioteca.org.ar/libros/167127.pdf> [accessed 17 April 2023] (p. 451).
[7] Martin Booth, *Opium: A History* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 1998), p. 64.
[8] Opium was and remains a highly dangerous drug, as witnessed by the more recent opiate
scandal in America, where 1.7 million people were addicted to prescription opioids in 2017
and nearly 400,000 people are estimated to have died between 1999 and 2017. See 'In
numbers: The Sackler Family, Purdue Pharma and the US Opioid Crisis', *BBC News*,
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49718388> [accessed 10 April 2023].
[9] Harold Kalant, 'Opium Revisited: A Brief Review of its Nature, Composition, Non-medical
Use and Relative Risks', *Addiction*, (1997), 267-277 (p. 275).
[10] Harry Hubble Kane, *Drugs that Enslave* (Philadelphia, PA: Presley Blakiston, 1881), p. 20.

(1770-1850).[11] When it was first displayed in 1856 at the Royal Academy, London, it was praised by the art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) as:

> faultless and wonderful: a most noble example of the great school. Examine it well inch by inch: it is one of the pictures which intend, and accomplish, the entire placing before your eyes of an actual fact – and that a solemn one. Give it much time.[12]

The subject had long been known in popular culture, but Wallis' painting marks a significant departure from 18th century depictions' focus on the hopelessness and squalor of the poet's death. John Flaxman's *Chatterton receiving a Bowl of Poison from Despair* (c.1775-80) illustrated the horror of the final suicidal act; while Edward Orme´s engraving *Death of Chatterton* (1794) showed the miserable poverty of the room and the poet's suffering.[13] Wallis builds on the *Chatterton* myth, but the composition and mood of the painting is entirely different. Instead, he beatifies the poet and presents the audience with the sublime moment of his release through opium.

It may have been while studying in Paris in 1851 that Wallis was inspired by the novel *Stello* (1832) and play *Chatterton* (1835), both by the Romantic writer Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863). De Vigny attacked the harsh economics of capitalism and its impact on impoverished artists. In the preface to the play, he states:

> The cause is the perpetual martyrdom and the perpetual immolation of the Poet. – The cause is the right he should have to live. – The cause is the bread no one gives him. – The cause is the suicide he is forced to commit.[14]

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[11] Donald S. Taylor argued in 1952 that Chatterton may not have committed suicide. Traces of opium have been found on the poet's pocket book and it is thought that he may have died of accidental poisoning. The myth, however, has proved enduring. See Thomas Chatterton Society, 'How and Why did Chatterton Die? Accident or Suicide?' *The Thomas Chatterton Manuscript Project* <https://www.thomaschatterton.com/death-chatterton-c9> [accessed 10 April 2023].

[12] John Ruskin, *Notes on some of the Principle Pictures Exhibited in the Rooms of the Royal Academy,* Vol. 2 (London: Smith and Elder & Co., 1856), (p. 60).

[13] John Flaxman, *Chatterton receiving a bowl of Poison from Despair*, (1775-80), British Museum; and Edward Orme, after Henry Singleton, *Death of Chatterton*, (1794), Library of Congress.

[14] Alfred de Vigny, *Chatterton*, (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1908), p. 2. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

In the play's dramatic final scene, Chatterton tears up his poetry and takes the fatal dose of opium, claiming that with it he can buy back his soul and welcome an eternal dawn (p. 68). The scene in Wallis' painting echoes this moment. In using the young writer George Meredith as a model, Wallis added a further aspect of authenticity to his painting, encouraging his audience to directly reflect on the nature of artists and their value to society. Both for de Vigny and for Wallis suicide is not a criminal act, although it was still illegal in Britain; rather, it is the response of the artistic individual to an over-commercialised society. Opium, rather than arsenic, offers a fitting release for such a nature.

The painting was displayed in an arched frame with Christopher Marlowe's quotation from *Dr Faustus* (c. 1592): 'Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight. And burned is Apollo's laurel bough' – underlining both the genius and the martyrdom of the artist. As in the religious painting *Pietà*, Chatterton's body arcs elegantly across the bed. The poet lies in his white open shirt, while his blue breeches and red coat add bright colour to dark shadowed corners of the room. The petal-like remains of his poems scattered around the casket by his head trace a parallel line with his arm to the laudanum bottle on the floor, linking opium both to his poetic creativity and death. The empty bottle's distinctively slim shape would have been instantly recognisable to a contemporary audience. Wallis' commissioned woodcut in the *National Magazine* (1856) and the 1860 print by Thomas Oldham Barlow placed the laudanum bottle even more prominently into view.[15]

A close friend of the Pre-Raphaelites, Wallis used a combination of their new painting techniques to replicate the mind-expanding effects of the drug on the poet. Luminous Pre-Raphaelite colours light up his pale face and halo of red hair, while the detail of the frozen smoke of the snuffed-out candle engenders a feeling of stasis at the moment of death. The unsettling, close-up perspective, noted by previous critics of the Pre-Raphaelites, directly impacts the emotions of the viewers. When compared to a painting by *The Clique* painter, Augustus Egg (1816-63), *The Death of Buckingham* (1855), which was exhibited at the Royal Academy a year earlier, the differences in the two approaches are stark. Egg uses very similar compositional detail, but his traditional perspectives ensure that the viewer can only intellectually observe the horror of Buckingham´s wasted life.

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[15] Engraving of Chatterton after Henry Wallis, *National Magazine*, 11 (1856), p. 33. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1875-0710-3739> [accessed 14 April 2023]; and engraving by Thomas Oldham Barlow, *The Death of Chatterton*, (1860). British Museum. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1889-0409-357> [accessed 14 April 2023].

Wallis encourages his audience to truly feel the sublime emotion of an artist through the painting.

Here, Wallis may have been influenced by *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) by Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859). Two new editions of the book were published in 1853, as well as his collected works. A resurgence of interest in the writer was the result.[16] De Quincey argued that only a superior English mind could benefit from the effects of opium. He described how it spurred him on towards greater creativity and more profound appreciation of art. De Quincey had also claimed that the opium eater 'feels that the diviner part of his nature is paramount' (p. 47). In *Confessions*, De Quincy recalled his own semi conscious state under the influence of the drug and writes:

> And at that time, I often fell into these reveries upon taking opium; and more than once it has happened to me, on a summer-night, when I have been at an open window [...] and could command a view of the great town of L---, […] that I have sate, from sun-set to sun-rise, motionless, and without wishing to move'. (p. 54)

Wallis' view through Chatterton's garret window, as the sun rises over St Pauls and the City of London, echoes such a moment. For De Quincy, Wallis, and Chatterton, opium, the *Donum Dei* (Gift of God), becomes the agent that allows the individual to experience a 'Godlike' state of being.

Wallis shows that transcendence can be achieved via the sublime experience of opium. Despite its controversial subject matter – or perhaps because of it – *The Death of Chatterton* became a huge success at the Manchester *Art Treasures Exhibition* in 1857, which attracted over 1.3 million visitors. It was subsequently restaged in 1859 by James Robinson as a tinted 3D stereoscopic photograph. Viewers were thrilled at the immediacy of the image.[17] Carole Jacobi notes, 'The light and colour appear crude in comparison with the painting but the stereoscope records "every stick, straw, scratch" in a manner that the painting cannot'. Photography, unlike painting, could not be selective about the detail it showed, and Jacobi adds that 'the haphazard creases of the bed sheet are more

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[16] Barry Milligan, 'Introduction' to Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. xi. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[17] Marcus Bunyon, ''painting with light: art and photography from the pre-raphaelites to the modern age' at Tate Britain, London', *Art Blart* (2016) <https://artblart.com/tag/henry-wallis-chatterton/> [accessed 15 August 2020] (para. 14 of 37).

suggestive of restless movement, now stilled, than Wallis's elegant drapery'.[18] This distinction between art and photography is important. It shows that the influence of photography on the Pre-Raphaelites cannot be fully relied upon as an explanation for the subtle, harmonious effects of their art.

Ophelia: Sexuality, Fairies and the Social Order

Millais' *Ophelia* (1852) also tackles suicide and escape from societal restraints, this time through a literary female figure.[19] The model for the painting was the non-conforming Pre-Raphaelite artist and opium addict Elizabeth Siddal.[20] She posed lying in a bath; and it is not implausible that she took opium to numb the cold and discomfort of modelling during the long hours lying still in water. Siddal's father sued the artist for his daughter's ill health following an incident when the bath heating lights went out.[21] In contrast to Wallis' treatment of Chatterton, Millais' more distanced, class-based response towards socially unfettered women like Siddal creates a highly complex image well worth examining.

For Victorians, Ophelia represented a vulnerable, young person 'too good, too fair, to be cast among the briers of this working-day world' but her sexuality also served as a popular warning to young girls to beware of passion.[22] However, Millais defies conventional Victorian presentations of her seated on a branch as portrayed in fellow Pre-Raphaelite artist Arthur Hughes' *Ophelia* (1852).[23] When both paintings were exhibited at the Royal Academy, *The Times* critic noted this departure and commented: 'There must be something strangely perverse in an imagination which souses Ophelia in a weedy ditch, and robs the drowning struggle of the lovelorn maiden of all pathos and beauty, while it studies every

[18] Carole Jacobi, 'Tate Painting and the Art of Stereographic Photography', *Tate Gallery* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/photography/essay> [accessed 14 March 2022] (para. 21 of 22).
[19] John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, (1852). Tate Britain.
[20] Siddal suffered illness throughout her adult life and opium is likely to have been prescribed for her symptoms. Her death in 1862 was from an overdose of laudanum and was suspected as suicide from grief for her stillborn child in May 1861. The coroner's inquest on 13 February 1862 pronounced her death as accidental. See Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters*, (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2022), p. 33.
[21] Anon, 'Look Closer. The Story of Ophelia', Tate Gallery <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506/story-ophelia> [accessed 14 March 2022] (para. 6 of 9).
[22] Simonetta Falchi, 'Re-mediating Ophelia with Pre-Raphaelite Eyes', *Interlitteraria*, 20.2 (2015), 171-183 (p. 176). Further references are given after quotations in the text.
[23] Arthur Hughes, *Ophelia*, (1852), Manchester City Art Gallery.

petal of the darnel and anemone floating on the eddy' (p. 177). For its audience, Millais' *Ophelia* presented uncomfortable associations with the murky river Thames and the 'fallen' women who drowned themselves in it.

Millais' reasons for challenging the usual iconography of *Ophelia* are complex. In his departure from convention, it is likely that he took inspiration from close readings of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* text, but also of the French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863). Delacroix's dramatic lithograph of *Act IV Scene vii. The Death of Ophelia* (1843) was part of a Shakespeare lithograph series owned by Rossetti's tutor and Millais' friend Ford Maddox Brown (1821-93) and used to inspire his *King Lear* (1848-49) pen and ink studies.[24, 25] There are strong compositional similarities in the two Ophelia images. Both show a chiaroscuro landscape, an overhanging willow branch, and Ophelia lying prone in the water. However, the mood of the two images is very different. Unlike Delacroix, Millais sublimates the sexual tensions inherent in the original story.[26] While Delacroix shows Ophelia as a wild Romantic soul, bare-breasted and clinging desperately to the branch, Millais renders Ophelia semi-conscious, drifting, and indifferent to her fate in a lush, green English landscape.

Peter Brix Søndergaard notes that 'the bourgeois response to the threat of sexuality was often asceticism'.[27] He argues that Millais sought to come to terms with these inner psychological conflicts by transforming Ophelia into the *femme fragile* (p. 119), but Simonetta Falchi also notes that Millais' sexualised iconography – portraying a young girl with open outstretched arms and 'mermaid-like spreading of her robes' – would have been disturbing to Victorian eyes (p. 177). Yet *Ophelia* also contains religious symbolism. Her body is posed like a mediaeval saint, surrounded by wildflowers. Pansies, signifying love in vain, or thought; poppies, sleep and death; violets, death in youth; and daisies,

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[24] Laura MaCulloch, 'Ford Maddox Brown: Works on Paper and Archive Material at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery', Doctoral Thesis submitted to Birmingham University <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/611/1/MacCulloch10PhD1.pdf> [accessed 20 March 2022] p. 27-8.

[25] Eugène Delacroix, *Act IV Scene vii. The Death of Ophelia*, (1843). From website <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eug%C3%A8ne_Delacroix_-_The_Death_of_Ophelia_-_WGA06259.jpg> [accessed 20 April 2021].

[26] In William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Queen Gertrude makes references to the bawdy flower Long Purples and Ophelia's 'mermaid-like' figure in the water. Mermaids were considered sexual creatures and were used as a euphemism for prostitutes in Shakespeare's London.

[27] Peter Brix Søndergaard, '"Something strangely perverse": Nature and Gender in J.E. Millais's Ophelia', *Journal for the Study of Romanticism*, 7 (2018), 115-125, (p. 118). Further references are given after quotations in the text.

innocence. For Millais, *Ophelia* seems to embody both the saint and sinner as she drifts towards her death.

In an attempt to contain this instability, Millais places her in a womb-like bower, surrounded by wild nature, painted with hallucinatory clarity. This Ruskinian depiction of abundant plant life increases the viewer's awareness of nature, but it also blurs the corporeality of Ophelia/Siddal's trance-like figure. Noting this confusing inversion, Tom Taylor, critic for *Punch* magazine, commented wryly:

> Talk as you like, M'Gilp, eminent painter, to your friend Mr. Squench, eminent critic, about the needless elaboration of those water mosses, and the over making-out of the rose leaves, and the abominable finish of those river-side weeds matted with gossamer, which the field botanist may identify leaf by leaf. I tell you, I am aware of none of these. I see only that face of poor drowning Ophelia. My eye goes to that, and rests on that, and sees nothing else, till – buffoon as I am, mocker, joker, scurrile-knave, street jester by trade and nature – the tears blind me, and I am fain to turn from the face of the mad girl to the natural loveliness that makes her dying beautiful.[28]

For Taylor, Millais' inspired composition dissolved the boundaries between the minutely observed natural world and the mystic 'other world' of death and eternity. Ophelia's face carries the opiate ecstasy of release and has the power to reduce the critic to tears.

Here the 'lesser' genre of fairy painting with its magical and vividly sexualised dream imagery (often inspired by opium) becomes a useful point of exploration. Millais had painted his only contribution to the fairy genre (also from Shakespeare) *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1850) just two years earlier.[29] It is likely that he was influenced by his close friend Joseph Noel Paton (1821-1901), whose painting *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* (1849) was widely celebrated at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1851.[30] Plants and the natural world are painted with

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[28] Tom Taylor, *Punch Magazine,* May (1852), pp. 216-17 in <https://kimberlyevemusings.blogspot.com/2011/09/review-of-desperate-romantics-private.html> [accessed 20 March 2020] (para. 4 of 9).
[29] John Everett Millais, *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel*, (1850). Private Collection.
[30] Joseph Noel Paton, *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania*, (1849). Scottish National Gallery.

hyper-realist detail.[31] *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* shows each leaf, flower, and fairy clearly delineated. Noting the same technique used in *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel,* Allen Staley comments: 'This microscopic natural detail appears at the expense of space, atmosphere, or any feeling of light or shade' and 'The hyper-real clarity of delineation does not contradict but enhances the sense of fantasy'.[32] Millais' *Ophelia* replicates this hyper-real style – timeless and devoid of shadow – enabling the viewers to re-experience the natural world through 'otherworldly' eyes.

The same obsessive intensity of detail can be observed in *The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke* (1855-64) by Richard Dadd, founder of the rival artistic group *The Clique* and well-documented opium user.[33] The painting took Dadd four years to complete and was created in Broadmoor Hospital, Berkshire, where he underwent treatment after a violent psychotic episode during which he killed his father. Dadd had first shown signs of mental illness (including hallucinations) in 1842, while on an expedition in Egypt.[34] What is often described as a mental illness may have been the result of increased access to medical opium while abroad for the treatment of dysentery. The subsequent withdrawal symptoms may have contributed to his 'madness' back in England. Medical reports after his trial confirm that once his dose was stabilised, he became a model patient who continued to work on his art while in hospital.[35]

It has already been noted that opium reduces the pupil size of the eye and affects how the brain perceives light and depth, producing a high overall focus known in photography as *depth of field*. It is not implausible that Dadd and other artists including Millais were reproducing this physiological effect to create the unsettling, colourful, and surreal spaces of their paintings. In both the Victorian fairy painting genre and, more obliquely, in *Ophelia*, opium loosens the boundaries between nature and self, as well as the conscious and unconscious mind.

Millais' attitude towards female sexuality, however, remains ambivalent and reflects very real contemporary societal concerns regarding the effects of high

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[31] Such was the fascination that the writer Lewis Carroll (1832-1898) delightedly noted that he had counted precisely 165 individual fairies in the painting. See Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (Phaidon Press: London 1999), p. 205.

[32] Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 27.

[33] Richard Dadd, *The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke*, (1855-64). Tate Britain.

[34] Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1999), p. 202

[35] Louise Lippincott, 'Murder and the Fine Arts; or, a Reassessment of Richard Dadd', *The John Paul Getty Museum Journal*, 16 (1988), 75-94, (pp. 78-82).

opium addiction in young women. It loosened them from domestic duties, responsibilities, and ultimately from their reproductive role. In many later Millais works, sexuality and death remain closely linked to images of languid, sleeping women. *Apple Blossoms* (1859) shows girls – descendants of Eve – involved in the domestic activities of an orchard picnic, while one wantonly meets the viewer's gaze, a scythe representing death by her side.[36] *The Wise Virgins* (1864) derives from the parable of 'The Ten Virgins', five of whom missed meeting their heavenly bridegroom because they fell asleep (Matthew 25:1-13).[37] Following the conservative Victorian view of morally 'lost' women, Millais' *Ophelia* may ultimately warn, like George Frederick Watts' *Found Drowned* (1850), that unbounded freedom in females threatens both the male social order and even the future propagation of the species.[38]

Eyes Wide Shut: Elizabeth Siddal, Art, and Addiction

A fascinating counterpoint to this view can be seen in the art and poetry of Elizabeth Siddal (1829-62). Siddal's opium addiction and early death from a laudanum overdose have often overshadowed her artistic contribution to the Pre-Raphaelites, yet she participated in the earliest stages of the movement's development, modelling as Viola in Walter Deverell's *Twelfth Night, Act 2, Scene IV* (1850) as well as for Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti.[39] Siddal and Rossetti later married, and they collaborated closely during their relationship. Her style was greatly admired by Ruskin, who purchased her body of work for an annual stipend of 150 pounds. She was the only woman to exhibit with the Pre-Raphaelites in 1857 in Fitzroy Square, London.

In assessing Siddal as an artist, it is crucial to move beyond depictions of her as a tragic muse or iconic sleeping beauty. Detailed scholarship by Jane Marsh, and Constance Hassett's excellent assessment of her poetry, has made a strong case for her talent both as a painter and poet.[40] Stefania Arcara also argues powerfully that Rossetti's numerous drawings of her posed as sleeping or resting in their home have more to do with Rossetti's Victorian attitudes towards

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[36] John Everett Millais, *Apple Blossoms*, (1859). Lady Lever Art Gallery.
[37] John Everett Millais, *The Wise Virgins*, (1864). Tate Britain.
[38] George Frederick Watts, *Found Drowned*, (1850). Watts Gallery.
[39] Walter Deverell, *Twelfth Night, Act 2, Scene IV*, (1850). Private Collection.
[40] See Constance W. Hassett, 'Elizabeth Siddal's Poetry: A Problem and Some Suggestions', *Victorian Poetry*, 35.4 (1997), pp. 443-70.

femininity and illness than Siddal herself.[41] Siddal's actions contradict this image of the passive, suffering invalid. She studied with Rossetti and later at the Sheffield School of Art in 1857.[42] Her break with Rossetti from 1856 to 1860 further demonstrates her independent mind. A year after Rossetti and Siddal married, the 1861 census still lists her at their home in London as 'Artist and Painter', underlining her dedication to her profession.[43]

It therefore becomes far more interesting to ask the question: 'How might Siddal have proactively used opium to facilitate her art?'; Caroline Perez notes that the experience of mental and physical pain in females has long been misunderstood by the medical profession.[44] The opiate crisis in North America has also shown that females are more likely to be prescribed opiate pain killers than males. Female addicts are also more likely to suffer from depression and psychiatric problems linked to their drug taking.[45] Siddal may have used opium to relieve mental or physical pain, as well as to enhance her productivity as an artist. Certainly, as a working-class woman who passionately aspired to be an artist, the psychological stresses of going against societal norms were considerable.

It is possible to argue that, for a time, opium increased and supported Siddal's creativity. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61) provides a contemporary example of a woman artist who valued opium as a stimulus for her work; she was a functioning addict for many years. Holman Hunt's daughter Violet, in her biography of Siddal, comments on Siddal's relationship with Rossetti, writing that 'she taught him to drug'.[46] Although evidently a book of purple prose, it is interesting that she gives Siddal agency. Scientific studies have

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[41] See Stefania Arcara, 'Sleep and Liberation: The Opiate World of Elizabeth Siddal', in *Sleeping Beauties in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Laurent (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 95-121.

[42] Jane Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2019), p. 29.

[43] Anna McNay, 'Beyond Ophelia: A Celebration of Lizzie Siddal Artist and Poet', *Studio International* (2018) <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/beyond-ophelia-celebration-of-lizzie-siddal-artist-poet-wightwick-manor-wolverhampton-national-trust> [accessed 15 August 2021] (para. 11 of 11).

[44] Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World designed for Men* (London: Vintage, 2019), p. 226.

[45] Kathleen T. Brady, Sudie E. Back, and Shelly F. Greenfield eds., *Women and Addiction: A Comprehensive Handbook* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2009), p. 341.

[46] Violet Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti, Her Life and Death* (London: Dutton and Co., 1936), p. 22.

noted the mutually supportive relationship between addicted couples.[47] Cunha and Marsh also note that Siddal's more mystical embrace of medievalism in her art may have influenced the style of Rossetti's work in the early years of their relationship, rather than the other way around.[48] Drugging may have enhanced the sensitive and powerfully original talent in Siddal that Rossetti so valued.

Siddal's *Lovers Listening to Music* (1854) forms a fascinating example of the couple's shared experience of ecstasy and art.[49] The description 'the two Egyptian girls playing to lovers' written onto the drawing by Rossetti strongly associates the work with Orientalism and the exotic, as well as possibly drug-inspired experiences (Egypt was a known producer of opium). This unusual cultural allusion could have been linked to their close friend Holman Hunt, who set out for Egypt and the Holy Land in 1854. We also know from Rossetti's letter to his mother that Siddal sketched two 'gypsy' girls while in Hastings.[50] It is interesting to speculate that Siddal may have used their dark appearance and 'otherness' ('gypsy' being a shortening of 'Egyptian') as a gateway into her opiate world.

In the drawing, the couple sits enraptured, the man singing and the woman listening to the music played by two women kneeling, while playing a stringed instrument on the ground. Siddal captures a mood of pure experience. The drawing was one of the first of Siddal's to be praised by Ruskin, when it was included in a batch presented to him. Rossetti wrote to his friend William Allingham (1824-89) in March 1854 that 'he bought on the spot every scrap of designs hitherto produced by Miss Siddal. He declared they were far better than mine' and that Ruskin paid Siddal 30 pounds, a considerable sum at the time.[51]

The simplicity of line and the clarity of the image produce a sense of intense rapture, which resonates with experiences of music recalled by De

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[47] Janie Simmons and Merrill Singer, 'I love you... and heroin: Care and Collusion among Drug-using Couples', *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 1.7 (2006). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1524734/> [accessed 18 March 2021].

[48] Mariana Cunha, ''Behind those Screens' – Bringing Women Forth: Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal', *Anglo Saxonica*, 17.1 (2020) <https://www.revista-anglo-saxonica.org/articles/10.5334/as.15/> [accessed: 15 August 2020] (para.13 of 34).

[49] Elizabeth Siddal, *Lovers Listening to Music*, (1854). Wightwick Manor, National Trust Collection. <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/1287930> [accessed: 13 August 2019].

[50] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Letter to his mother, 1.7.1855 in M.W. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His Family-Letters with a Memoir (Volume One)* (London: AMS Press, 1970), p.140.

[51] Derrick Leon, *Ruskin: The Great Victorian*, (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 216.

Quincey. Drawing a clear link between opium and the enjoyment of music, he states:

> Now opium, by greatly increasing the activity of the mind generally, increases, of necessity, that particular mode of its activity by which we are able to construct out of raw material of organic sound an elaborate intellectual pleasure.

He further explains that in order to heighten this experience he would visit the opera and:

> a chorus, &c, of elaborate harmony, displayed before me, as in a piece of arras work, the whole of my past life – not, as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in music: no longer painful to dwell upon: but the detail of its incidents removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction; and its passions exalted, spiritualized, and sublimed. (p. 51)

For De Quincey art, opium, and otherworldly pleasures are tightly bound together.

Siddal's two lovers also access this higher level of experience. Behind them is the tangled, Dantean wood; before them the clear, open countryside. It is this release, where the 'opium eater is too happy to observe the motion of time', that Siddal strives to reproduce (p. 53). She places a child in the picture, hinting at the innocence of childhood and the tantalising Blakean hope of recapturing that innocence. By blending the setting of the English countryside with the Egyptian musicians, Siddal creates a reimagined and enhanced scene. Just as in Rossetti's later work *The Blue Closet* (1857), narrative is dissolved and time and place cannot be fathomed, as music breaks the boundaries between earthly and heavenly experience.

While much of Siddal's work is drawn from similar 'ancient' and medieval subjects, it would be wrong to view it as pure escapism. Siddal illustrated several ballads from Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), and closer examination of the ballads themselves uncovers some disturbing and uncomfortable narratives. Chris Baldick, writing on the uses of medieval themes in Gothic literature, notes that 'prominent among its special features is a preoccupation with inherited powers and the corruptions of feudal aristocracy' and 'the memory of an age-old regime of oppression and persecution which

threatens still to fix its dead hand upon us'.[52] Siddal may have used the stories contained in the ballads as a critical protest against the restrictive class-based society she inhabited. The haunting singing voices of the ballads function as a mechanism to unlock the 'trauma' hidden in her images.

In Siddal's paintings and poetry, acute mental and physical pain caused by an authoritative patriarchal order feature frequently. In the sketch for *The Gay Goshawk* (1854) the heroine's parents, who are opposed to her marriage choice, test to see if she is dead by pouring molten lead on her; *Sister Helen* (1860) tells of a girl killing her unfaithful rich lover through spells; and *Clerk Saunders* (1857) shows a lover return to the woman as a ghost, after her brothers have murdered him in her bed.[53] Reflecting on society more broadly and very possibly with the Crimean War (1853-6) at the forefront of her mind, the richly luminous watercolour *Sir Patrick Spens* (1856) shows women left widowed on the cliff tops after their husbands are sent to sea by a despotic ruler. Viewed in this way, opium may have provided the means for Siddal to detach from the mental pain of living in a social system that constrained women's sexuality and controlled their agency.

I would further argue that the numerous images by Rossetti depicting Siddal with her eyes shut signify more than the drowsy sleep of the laudanum-addicted model and may also be viewed as a knowingly posed act of resistance and self-realisation. Strong taboos existed against middle-class women smoking and drinking alcohol in public, but opium could be consumed without censure in private. As Kristina Aikens observes, female drug-taking in Victorian literature can be considered as liberating: 'The threat of the opiate comes not from without, but from within; the threat here is not the loss of the self, but rather the discovery of a self that could destroy, or at least disrupt, a patriarchal society that wants to keep women in a fixed location and role'.[54] In both known photographs of her, we see that Siddal controls her image and appears with her eyes closed.[55] She poses in such a way as to indicate a remoteness from the domestic world – sitting

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[52] Chris Baldick ed., *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. XX-XXII.

[53] Elizabeth Siddal, *The Gay Goshawk*, (1854). Ashmolean Museum. *Sister Helen*, (1860). Wightwick Manor, National Trust Collection. *Clerk Saunders*, (1857). Fitzwilliam Museum. *Sir Patrick Spens*, (1856). Tate Britain.

[54] Kristina Aikens, 'A Pharmacy of Her Own: Victorian Women and the Figure of the Opiate' submitted PhD Thesis, Tufts University (2008), p. 4.

[55] Photograph of Elizabeth Siddal from biography of Violet Hunt, *The Wife of Rossetti*, published 1936. <http://www.lizziesiddal.com/html/photograph_of_elizabeth_siddal.html> [accessed 16 May 2021]; and Photograph of Mrs Rossetti (1860). The Walters Art Museum. <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/19820/mrs-rossetti/> [accessed 16 May 2021].

in the first with eyes shut leaning her head on her hand; and in the second with clasped hands, almost as if in religious ecstasy. Her shut eyes emphasise her special status as an artist, rather than as a posed wife.

In her poem *The Lust of the Eyes*, Siddal may be imagining the thoughts of the male artist viewing his Pre-Raphaelite 'stunner' model.[56] Quoting *Revelations* (1 John 2:16), which refers to the sins of earthly desire, she warns of the danger to the individual's soul/self when she is not truly seen and is objectified. There is an almost vampiric cruelty in the relationship between the passive beloved-woman/muse and active lover/artist. She writes:

> I care not for my Lady's soul
> Though I worship before her smile;
> I care not where be my Lady's goal
> When her beauty shall lose its wile.
> Low sit I down at my Lady's feet
> Gazing through her wild eyes
> Smiling to think how my love will fleet
> When their starlike beauty dies.[57]

By shutting her own 'wild' eyes to the world, Siddal contradicted conventional stereotypes of female passivity and actively protected her own notion of 'self'.

Beata Beatrix: Opium, Rossetti and 'The Fleshly School of Poetry'

Beata Beatrix (1870) is Rossetti's response to Siddal's early death from a laudanum overdose in 1863.[58] He shows her as the eternally youthful Beatrice of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, as she sits in simple, green robes, her face and hair illuminated by the setting sun. A red bird (reminiscent of the red/brown cinnamon spice found in laudanum at the time) drops a poppy into her open hands. However, for Rossetti no art work or life could stand only for itself, and, as Elizabeth Prettejohn notes, subtle Baudelairian 'correspondences' appear constantly in

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[56] Mariana Cunha "Behind those Screens' – Bringing Women Forth: Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal', *Anglo Saxonica*, 17 (2020), pp. 1-12, (p. 9)
[57] Elizabeth Siddal, 'The Lust of the Eyes' in *Poems and Drawing of Elizabeth Siddal* (Wolfville: Wombat Press, 1978), p. 14.
[58] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix,* (1870). Tate Britain.

Rossetti's poetry and art.[59] Rossetti was exploring more than his personal tragedy and loss. He returned to a favourite obsession, the death of the poet Dante's beloved Beatrice, that had occupied him before he ever met Siddal, and which he had explored in the poem *The Blessed Damozel* (1850). In 1875, he recreated this encounter yet again in his sumptuous painting of the same name. This time his new model, Alexa Wilding, leans down from Heaven while he, her lover Dante/Rossetti, lies prostrate below.[60]

This restless losing and replicating of identity and self, often observed in addictive relationships, is most clearly seen in Rossetti's *How They Met Themselves* (1860-4), painted just before their marriage.[61] Rossetti called it his 'bogie' picture, as two lovers fatefully meet their *Doppelgänger* in a forest. Such an encounter in fairy stories foreshadowed death, and the image recalls Siddal's own watercolour *The Haunted Wood* (1856), in which a woman meets a ghostlike male figure among the trees.[62] Magic and enchantment form an important theme for Rossetti and Siddal and 'drugging' through opium seems to have enhanced their experience of the supernatural. The lethally dangerous combined effects of opium and chloral addiction also gave Rossetti waking visions and voices after Siddal's death, increasingly blurring the boundaries between the imagined and the real.[63]

Rossetti's obsessions are further channelled through the eroticism of his work. Siddal is the chaste *Beata Beatrix* but also *Regina Cordium* (1860), the erotic and nakedly sensual 'Queen of Hearts', who inspired poems such as *Nuptial Sleep*.[64] The theme mirrors problems with addiction in China, where Lovell notes Chinese imperial concerns about opium and the corruption of respectable people 'in the gratification of impure and sensual desires, whereby their respective duties and obligations are neglected'.[65] Rossetti too explores similar liberating drug-inspired sexual experiences. In *Bocca Baciata* (1859), a portrait of the model Fanny Cornforth, as the much-kissed woman of Bocaccio's *Decameron*, Rossetti directly challenges Victorian society's condemnation of female promiscuity and anxiety about sexually transmitted disease. He brings the

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[59] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 202-205.

[60] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*, (1875-78). Lady Lever Art Gallery.

[61] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *How they met Themselves*, (1860-64). Fitzwilliam Museum.

[62] Elizabeth Siddal, *The Haunted Wood*, (1856). Wightwick Manor: National Trust Collection.

[63] Dinah Roe, *The Rossettis in Wonderland* (London: Haus Publishing, 2011), pp. 242-45.

[64] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Regina Cordium*, (1860). Johannesburg Art Gallery.

[65] Julia Lovell, *The Opium War* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 36.

image so close to his viewer that they must experience her beauty intimately.[66] Knowingly controversial yet fearing public censure, Rossetti rarely exhibited at the Royal Academy and mostly sold his paintings directly to private buyers.

More darkly, Rossetti's world of confined and sensual women was one that many Victorian men could recognise. In China, opium was used to keep concubines compliant, and in Europe chloral later became a drug of choice for many prostitutes.[67] Rossetti's 1860s images often show women in liminal states, waiting and resting in opulent surroundings, reflecting the contemporary situation of women kept by rich men in apartments across Britain's cities. *Lady Lilith* (1866-73) painted by Rossetti and bought by Lord Frederick R. Leyland (1831-92), the wealthy Liverpool shipping owner, puts the viewer into just such a primary, instinctive world.[68] Prettejohn comments: 'It is as if the picture contents were turned inside out, projecting into our spaces rather than receding into illusionist depths […] we cannot preserve a safe moral distance' (p. 213). She continues, 'Rossetti is obliterating the I- thou relationship that had characterised western painting since the Renaissance' (p. 214). The social messages found in earlier Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) become lost among the sensual pleasures of the non-narrative, 'art for art's sake' aesthetic. Rossetti's serial 'stunners' override all morality and intellect.

Ultimately, this lack of restraint and breakdown of social order in the Aesthetic Movement was not lost on the British art and literary establishment. Robert Buchanan's 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' (1871) marks the backlash against Rossetti and his followers. Buchanan is particularly disturbed by the passion Rossetti's women display in his poems, claiming he had never met such 'females who bite, scratch, scream, bubble, munch, sweat, writhe, twist, wriggle, foam'.[69] These descriptions of female sexual arousal also reflect states of severe illness and drug withdrawal. While the link between drugs, sickness, and intense sensuality had already been described obliquely in *Goblin Market* (1862) by Rossetti's sister, Christina Rossetti, Rossetti's un-coded, ardent kisses in *Nuptial Sleep,* and his judgement-free contemplation of the intoxicated prostitute *Jenny*,

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[66] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Bocca Baciata*, (1859). Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

[67] Martin Booth, *Opium: A History* (Kindle Edition: St Martin's Griffin, 2013), p. 104.

[68] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Lady Lilith*, (1866-73). Delaware Art Museum.

[69] Robert Buchanan, 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr D.G. Rossetti', *The Contemporary Review*, 18 (1871) in *The Victorian Web* <https://victorianweb.org/authors/buchanan/fleshy.html> [accessed 12 March 2019] (para 12 of 15).

proved unacceptable. Buchanan condemned Rossetti's 'morbid deviation from the healthy forms of life' and his 'unwholesome' poems. Rossetti's reaction was strong and troubled, culminating in a suicide attempt, increased drug taking and a sustained withdrawal from society.

The Little White Girl: Oriental Dreams and Escape from Reality

While opium enabled Pre-Raphaelite artists to explore new psychological freedoms in their art, as the century progressed, accumulated societal censure led many to move towards the ever more veiled and obscure images of the Aesthetic Movement. In relation to this transition, it is useful to examine the art of James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) and his painting *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (1865).[70] Whistler was not a Pre-Raphaelite but he and Rossetti became close friends after Rossetti moved to Chelsea in 1862, following Siddal's death. Like Rossetti, Whistler had experienced extreme critical hostility when *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1861-2), a portrait of his companion and model Jo Hiffernan, was rejected by both the Royal Academy and the Paris *Salon* for offending public decency.[71] Contemporary reviewers were mystified by the girl's expressionless face and the painting's lack of moral narrative. Pre-Raphaelite artist and critic Frederic George Stephens speculated in the *Athenaeum* that the model might allude to a character in Wilkie Collins' drug-fuelled bestseller *The Woman in White* (1859-61), while a French critic wrote of 'her great eyes swimming in ecstasy'.[72] Whistler's later painting *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (1865) contrasts with the realism of the previous work through carefully coded, obscure imagery; it explores how the artist might escape to a world where 'truth and beauty' could be accessed freely, without the sting of public criticism.[73]

    In the Little White Girl, Hiffernan stands by the mantlepiece looking towards a vase of the blue and white Nanking porcelain, part of the ceramic collection which marked Whistler's fascination with the Far East. Elizabeth Hope Chang has written on Britain's complex cultural engagement with China. She

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[70] James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, (1862). Tate Britain.

[71] James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, (1862). Washington D.C. National Gallery of Art.

[72] Richard Dorment and Margaret F. Macdonald, *Whistler* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994) pp.76-77.

[73] James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl*, (1865). Tate Britain.

notes that, while some contemporary writers thought the Chinese perceived the world differently because of their almond shape eyes, William Rossetti's review of Whistler's *Lange Leizen of the Six Marks* (1864) suggested that a 'sensitive gaze' towards these Chinese artefacts could in turn access Chinese sensibilities.[74] The French artist Henri Fantin Latour commented on Whistler's studio in 1864, writing to his mother 'Here, I am nearly in Paradise. We're fashioning an impossible life, all three of us in Whistler's studio. You would believe you were at Nagasaki or in the Summer Palace, China, Japan, it is splendid'.[75] Ironically, by 1860, the magnificent Summer Palace near Beijing had already been destroyed and looted by British and French troops at the end of the second Opium War (1856-60). The 'Orient' existed chiefly in the artists' imagination.

In *The Little White Girl,* Hiffernan's gaze into the scene painted on the vase may be interpreted as Whistler's own intense yearning for a China of his imagination. However, Aileen Tsui comments that the model's *Doppelgänger* – her darker reflection – suggests 'an underlying emotional complexity' beneath the painting's surface (para. 8). The double portrait marks Hiffernan's uncertain social position in Whistler's home, as she was also his mistress. It shows her wearing a wedding ring but Whistler never married her. Her reflection looks towards a red cinnabar/opium lacquer, covered pot. Once again Chinese objects become a means of accessing Chinese 'experience' within the context of London. Whistler may be suggesting to the more 'knowing' viewer that the red container holds opium and a means of accessing 'Eastern' eroticism. Chang has written how the opium den represented a dangerous and 'corrupting' space in British imagination (p. 111). Similar shaped containers can be seen on the trays of opium smokers shown in the *Illustrated London News*.[76] The opium dens smokers occupied could be found in the Limehouse docks of east London and were later described by Dickens in the novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). They were places where identities were blurred and lost.

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[74] Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 98. Further references are given in quotations after the text.

[75] Aileen Tsui, 'Whistler's La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine: Painting Re-oriented', *Nineteenth Century Art World Wide,* 9.2 (2010) < http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn10/whistlers-la-princesse-du-pays-de-la-porcelaine> [accessed 12 March 2022] (para 6 of 35). Further references are given as notes in the text.

[76] Opium Smokers in the East End of London (1874), *Illustrated London News*, 8 (1874) in *Wikimedia Commons* <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Opium_smoking_1874.jpg> [accessed 12 March 2022].

In his *10 O'clock Lecture* of 1885, Whistler makes the link explicit between opium, China, and artistic sanctuary, telling his audience at the Prince's Hall, Piccadilly:

> Art, the cruel jade cares not – and hardens her heart, and hies her off to the East – to find, among the opium eaters of Nankin, a favourite with whom she lingers fondly – caressing his blue porcelain, and painting his coy maidens – and marking his plates with her six marks of choice – indifferent, in her companionship with him, to all save the virtue of his refinement![77]

Whistler thus uses the narrative of Empire to create a fantasy in which Chinese artists are 'opium eaters' living in primitive innocence with their 'coy maidens'. He aligns himself with them against the consumerism of Victorian London. However, in 'othering' the Orient, Whistler also reveals the ambivalent relationship between imperial expansion and the London art market. Asian porcelain and the resulting Chinamania became accessible to Rossetti, Whistler, and others because of the turmoil in China after the Opium Wars. Sir Frederick Leyland, an important patron for both Whistler and Rossetti, became rich through the China shipping trade. He used his new wealth to purchase and display his lavish collection of Chinese porcelain in the Peacock Room alongside Pre-Raphaelite paintings in his London home. Art consumers such as Leyland embraced Whistler and the Aesthetic Movement's philosophy of 'art for art's sake' partly because it allowed them to escape from the uncomfortable realities of Empire and plunder.

Thus, Algernon Swinburne's philosophy, that art should 'cut itself off from all non-artistic concerns to concentrate solely on its own craft', helped establish a sense of amnesia among late Victorian artists and their industrial clients, removing from them a need for a social conscience.[78] Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98) evocatively referred to his later paintings as:

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[77] James McNeill Whistler, '10 O'clock Lecture' (1885) in *The Correspondance of James McNeill Whistert University of Glasgow* <https://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/miscellany/tenoclock/> [accessed 14 August 2020].

[78] Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 217.

> a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be – in a better light than any light that ever shone – in a land that no one can define or remember, only desire – and the forms divinely beautiful.[79]

For Pre-Raphaelite artists transitioning into Aestheticism, 'seeing' now relied on opiate visions of the mind, while industrialisation, disease, and social inequality receded into the mists.

Conclusion

Opium enabled Wallis, Millais, Siddal, and Rossetti to present their audiences with themes of sleep, suicide, and death that related closely to the population's familiarity with the effects of the drug. By referencing opium, the Pre-Raphaelites and Whistler broke down social constructs around morality and the 'ego' and evoked deep spiritual experiences. These often ran counter to Establishment values but also revealed ambiguity around women's emancipation and non-Western cultures. Literature and art were often closely linked and provided, especially for Siddal and Rossetti, a 'double work of art' that the literate audience could use to further decode artists' messages. For Siddal, ancient ballads provided a way to unlock 'trauma' in her paintings and a means of catharsis from the daily stresses experienced as a female artist.

Opium and its effect on artists' vision is also likely to have contributed to the distinctive Pre-Raphaelite style, as high *depth of field* detail was used by Wallis, Millais, Siddal, and Rossetti. Close-up perspectives in the works ensured that the audience were fully immersed and could participate emotionally with the artist in shared and intensely memorable encounters. While similar to the stereograph, the influence of opium on shaping composition should not be underestimated, as it allowed the artist to see and present detail selectively and for maximum effect. Opium also gave access to imaginary worlds and the colourful visions of fairy paintings, which were likely inspired by opium induced dreams. Whistler further embraced opium as a means of escape, linking opium to the 'art for art's sake' philosophy of the Aesthetic Movement. By examining the influence of opium on Pre-Raphaelite artists, a complex psychological portrait of British society under the influence of a powerful drug is revealed. Medicating against contagion with opium unleashed desires that challenged orthodoxy and

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[79] Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisters*, (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2019) p. 10.

hinted at personal fulfilment beyond societal needs. In their concerns about social order and convention, the British and Chinese authorities had more in common than they would have at first believed.

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BOOK REVIEW

Convalescence in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Afterlife of Victorian Illness by Hosanna Krienke (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021) 227 pp., hardback, $85.55

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When people fall ill in the twenty-first century, many are driven by the notion that they must recover as quickly as possible so they can get back to their normal life, namely work. Things were different in the nineteenth century, however, as Hosanna Krienke demonstrates in *Convalescence in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Afterlife of Victorian Illness,* a recent instalment in the Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture series. In it she explores the relationship between nineteenth-century conversations about convalescence, the uncertain, extended period of rest and recuperation following illness or medical treatment, and its representation within five Victorian novels: *Bleak House*, *Ruth*, *The Moonstone*, *Erewhon*, and *The Secret Garden*. Krienke argues that these works demonstrate what she terms 'convalescent time' (p.1) as part of a process of training readers in a process of reading that emphasises the 'slowly emerging and contingent meanings of the unfolding plot' (p.1) above the novels' often tidy conclusions. Fictional depictions of convalescence therefore serve as a means through which readers become more comfortable with prolonged uncertainty necessitated by the process of novel-reading itself.

Krienke's work builds from foundational studies of illness in the nineteenth century, yet her approach differs from the majority of scholarship on Victorian illness in that she considers convalescence from a temporal perspective, as a shared experience among and across communities, instead of tracing specific pathologies or diagnoses and their impacts on individual characters. This focus on the uncertainty of illness, convalescence, and recovery draws from disability studies methodology, which Krienke then combines with cultural studies approaches; each of the five chapters couples literary analysis with extensive background and analysis of a specific aspect of convalescence discourse within Victorian culture to illuminate the complex connections between literature and culture.

In the first chapter, 'Convalescence and the Working Class: Convalescent Homes, Illness Outcomes, and Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*', Krienke presents her strongest analysis in contextualising the rise of the convalescent home for working-class and poor patients in the earlier parts of the nineteenth century. Rather than focusing primarily on the sometimes-narrator Esther Summerson, as a number of other studies of this novel have done, the chapter instead closely examines the role of George's shooting range as a makeshift convalescent home for the ill and infirm, including characters Phil Squod, the dying Jo, and Mr. Gridley. Krienke argues that *Bleak House* offers an optimistic roadmap for ways in which lower-class convalescents might be able to access and benefit from the care that their middle- and upper-class convalescent counterparts already enjoyed.

Chapter 2 discusses Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* alongside the genre of religious tracts aimed at convalescents; these 'devotionals' (p.19) discuss the religious benefits that illness may bring to suffering patients and caution them against getting carried away in their desire for reform only to ultimately fall away from their religious resolutions as their health recovers. Krineke traces Gaskell's engagement with these religious discourses within *Ruth* and claims that, despite the novel's seemingly condemnatory ending, in which 'fallen woman' Ruth's early misbehaviour leads to her final illness and eventual death, it is the novel's middle that offers numerous episodes of various characters' efforts toward moral reform that contradict or at least complicate punitive readings of Ruth's ending.

In the third chapter, Krienke departs from representations of overt depictions of illness in an examination of Wilkie Collins's sensation novel *The Moonstone*, where she grounds her discussion in magazine articles and autobiographical accounts wherein male writers present novel-reading as a form of convalescence aimed at counteracting overwork and what we might today term burnout. Here she argues that *The Moonstone* presents novel-reading as a means through which readers might step outside of social expectations determined by gender and class and thereby 'aims to foster cross-class sympathy' (p.20).

Chapter 4 represents a shift from what Krienke identifies as the more optimistic period of nineteenth-century discourses surrounding convalescence in the first three chapters; here she examines Samuel Butler's dystopian satire *Erewhon*, a novel depicting a society where illness is punished as a crime and criminal behaviour is treated with compassion and understanding, in relation to the After-Care Association, a charitable organisation promoting extended convalescent care to patients released from insane asylums. Krienke reads the

novel as commentary on the treatment of these individuals, seeing it as a harbinger of the decline of British societal appreciation for the open-ended, uncertain nature of convalescence in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a decline coincident with the rise of eugenics discourses.

The final chapter discusses the fascinating system of imperial convalescent depots in India, outposts where British soldiers were sent to recuperate from illness and injury throughout the long nineteenth century, in connection with Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. Through examination of documents and records pertaining to treatment plans and early medical studies on British soldiers in India, Krienke argues that these recuperation centres ran counter to general philosophies about convalescence and convalescent time and instead augmented their policies and treatment plans as a means of improving efficiency and reducing cost, which she sees as a foundation for post-WWI methods of recuperative care. *The Secret Garden*, then, serves as an effort to 'reclaim the moral awakenings of convalescence to forge a vision of an ethical, yet militaristic imperialism', (p.21) despite the underlying irony that military values and methods were a significant cause of the decline in convalescent care in Great Britain.

Each chapter offers a thorough grounding in both summarising the featured novel and in the historical context of its accompanying historical genre, making it useful for a range of audiences, both more experienced scholars of nineteenth-century literature and those who are new to the field such as undergraduate students. Krienke's research into and engagement with primary sources reveals the depth of this study, but this attention to historicisation does not come at the expense of literary analysis, as her close reading of the five texts is detailed and nuanced. If there is any weakness to the study, it may be in her selection of text for sensation fiction, *The Moonstone*. Collins's novel differs considerably from the other four in the study in that it does not feature convalescence of illness, and, indeed, the only male characters who appear to suffer from the overwork that the accompanying genre depicts have limited or no role in narrating the text. Sensation fiction is a genre simply brimming with ill and convalescing characters, particularly female characters, and one might wonder whether one of those texts might better represent the rich genre within this study or be discussed in addition to Collins's novel.

In her conclusion to this work, Krienke traces the decline of convalescent care and looks forward to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has once again challenged society's notions regarding convalescence, particularly as we

are seeing lingering effects from even mild infections. Her study comes at an opportune time, as it invites us to reexamine notions of illness and recuperation in a world where many people live through serious illness but face ongoing and uncertain levels of recovery. *Convalescence in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Afterlife of Victorian Illness* suggests that, despite modern medical advances, we denizens of the twenty-first century might learn something about recovery from the Victorians after all.

BOOK REVIEW

Kept from All Contagion: Germ Theory, Disease, and the Dilemma of Human Contact in Late Nineteenth-Century Literature, by Kari Nixon (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2020), 274 pp. Hardback, $95.

Reviewed by Jo Waugh
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Priscilla Wald's observation that 'Disease emergence dramatizes the dilemma that inspires the most basic of human narratives: the necessity and danger of human contact' is one of the most useful and concise summaries of what is at stake in epidemic, endemic, or pandemic outbreaks.[1] Disease emergence invites us to consider, often urgently, what we value and also what we fear in contact with others. It is perhaps not surprising that scholars of literature and disease are often drawn to this particular quotation, which is cited early in Kari Nixon's study. Arguably the complexities and risks of human contact are the inspiration not just for 'human narratives' but also for *literary* narratives: one way to explain the plots of most novels would be by recounting the human encounters they describe, and the dangers, benefits, and outcomes of those encounters. For Nixon, the 'unique conceptual space' (p.5) the Victorians inhabited in the wake of germ theory was a distinct moment in which that necessity and danger were navigated, interrogated, and often subverted.

Nixon reads germ theory's cultural valence in the nineteenth century in a number of specific ways. It represented an 'invisible battle' (p.2), the conceptual framework for which had precedents in other scientific advances such as, specifically, Darwin's theory of evolution, which offered a model for understanding the world as a stage on which forces which could not be seen were still at play, and in which competition and struggle determined outcomes. Germ theory was at once a staggering change in conceptualising the world, and also an opportunity for optimism, since it offered a scientific and verifiable way to account for disease and its transmission. Importantly, Nixon does not overstate the extent to which germ theory displaced miasma theory, or was even, in its basic assumptions about disease, radically different from the earlier model; both

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[1] Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p.2.

suggest that there are invisible causes of infection which must be managed, often through hygiene and sanitation. She does, however, argue that the difference between the two was that germ theory seemed to the Victorians like 'their deliverance from a world void of certainty' (p.24). Coupled with this hope for a more scientific future and a more reliable understanding of disease, however, came anxieties about subjectivity and bodily boundaries which have been theorised by Laura Otis and others, including Nixon herself, and resultant impulses toward isolation, and antiseptic procedure.[2] In a genre of novel she terms 'Biopolitical Resistance Literature' (p.5), Nixon argues that writers who either anticipated germ theory (including Daniel Defoe, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë) or who wrote later, in the time of its ascendancy (Henry James, Henrik Ibsen, Thomas Hardy and others), challenged some of its ideological implications by insisting on the value and indeed the necessity of connectivity over quarantinism, and interdependence over isolationism.

The book contains six chapters, each of which deals with representations of a different disease: plague, streptococcus, tuberculosis, syphilis, and typhoid fever. In each chapter, Nixon offers a detailed historical account of the disease in question and shows how at least two and sometimes four or five novels represent it in ways which articulate this 'biopolitical resistance'. Though the book's title anticipates its eventual focus on the late nineteenth century, Nixon arrives there via the eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth. In a move which she acknowledges is 'paradoxical, perhaps' (p.36), her first chapter discusses Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1772) and Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826). Defoe is here shown to mount a critique of isolationism both in health policy and more broadly in relation to trade and industry through *Plague Year*'s persistent cynicism toward, and often direct objections to, the quarantinist practices of locking the healthy up with the sick, inhibiting travel and business, and preventing travel. This argument is significantly advanced through a detailed analysis of Defoe's description of calciferous buboes versus leaky sores: Nixon argues that his emphasis on the need to burst the crusted buboes and enforce the free flow of whatever lay beneath indicates his broader response to 'risk encounters' and sense that a mediated flow is best in all circumstances, whether that flow is of trade, people, or pus. Despite the seemingly paradoxical focus of

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[2] See in particular Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker, *Contagion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), Laura Otis, *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), and Nixon's own edited collection with Lorenzo Sertvitje. *Endemic: Essays in Contagion Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

the chapter, in fact Nixon does important work here in terms of establishing the conceptual framework of the rest of the book. The chapter sets out in particularly clear terms the ways in which Defoe and Shelley's depictions of even obviously contagious and deadly diseases can be understood to endorse a model of exposure, movement, and mindful connectivity, and to dramatise the potentially deadly effects of isolation. The rest of the chapters are well-placed to expand on the more subtle forms of resistance taken in relation to less apocalyptic diseases.

Katherine Byrne has noted that, in the nineteenth century, 'consumption is really like two illnesses': an infection 'spread amidst the squalid and overcrowded dwellings of the poor' and a 'more unexplainable, random condition' when it appeared in the houses of the wealthy.[3] Nixon acknowledges the class dynamics of the disease, and in addition reflects on the significance of its tendency to afflict those who were already 'severely immunocompromised' (p.99), the fact that a sufferer could remain consumptive for so long that tuberculosis often appeared more as a condition to live with than a diagnosis to die from, and its awkward space between germ-theory and miasmatic accounts. What Nixon terms the disease's 'ductility' (p.104) made it a particularly useful trope for writers to explore and critique female friendships, she argues. Nixon carefully sets out tuberculosis's implacably mysterious nature, before historicising the concept of female friendships in the period and its literature and offering an especially persuasive reading of *Jane Eyre*, which sees Brontë consciously drawing on, rather than as is often assumed, naturally allying herself to, the tropes of Romantic consumption.

Elsewhere, Nixon draws Thomas Hardy and Henrik Ibsen together so deftly and persuasively that it becomes surprising to realise this pair have rarely been discussed alongside one another. Both, Nixon argues, engage with 'dismal and dingy realities' (p.134), but also share many of the same thematic concerns in *The Woodlanders* (1887) and *Ghosts* (1881): specifically, contagious sexual contact, which they represent in order to make the case for managed risk encounters and connectivity. The chapter concludes with a reading of *Jude the Obscure* (1896) in which Nixon makes a powerful case for Little Father Time as, thematically and possibly literally, a child who contracted syphilis *in utero*. *Kept from All Contagion's* fifth chapter focuses on typhoid fever in Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895), Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882) and Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* (1892, rewritten in 1897). The argument that typhoid's

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[3] Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.29.

reputation as a disease which crossed class boundaries (and, famously, killed Prince Albert) drew the Victorians' attention to the need for a shared response and, more prosaically, a shared approach to sewage, is well made with reference to each text, but Nixon's reading of Ibsen's Dr Stockmann is especially worth commending. Stockmann, who discovers typhoid bacteria in the water of a town's baths, calls for their closure and is condemned by the town rather than thanked: he has traditionally been read as 'the sole bastion of morality in a sea of depravity' (p. 188) but Nixon reads him rather as a misguided demagogue and even a fascist, who exemplifies the worst excesses of the quarantinist impulses inspired by germ theory, and thus sees the play as an argument for, rather than against, 'biopolitical resistance'.

In her conclusion, Nixon moves forward to a much more recent outbreak – cases of Ebola in Dallas, Texas in 2014. Her analysis of this outbreak and its management powerfully attests to the ongoing relevance of the dynamics described throughout the book: echoes of Victorian-style decontamination procedures, the postcolonial legacies in the language that was used about the disease and its sufferers, the ways that Ebola seemed to destabilise 'hard-worn existential stability' and present a new iteration of the Kristevan abject (p.213). Nixon has written elsewhere that Western cultures are 'strikingly not post-contagion', which is to say that that despite a sense of being somehow beyond or immune to the kinds of contagion of old, or 'elsewhere', such cultures retain their fears of contagion which breaches the boundaries of self, nation, or both.[4] Her conclusion here makes this case in persuasive detail. As a result, it confirms the ongoing significance and contribution of her study of Victorian responses by drawing attention to our own tendency to fall back into earlier ways of conceptualising disease. The conclusion also leaves the reader speculating on how we might proffer our own forms of 'biopolitical resistance' to such narratives: although the book was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic, it lands with particular urgency in its wake.[5] The innovative and original readings of the novels and plays, however, are a significant contribution to the growing field of work on Victorian literature and contagion in their own right.

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[4] Nixon and Sertvitje, p.4.

[5] Nixon is also the author of *Quarantine Life from Cholera to COVID-19: What Pandemics Teach us About Parenting, Work, Life, and Communities from the 1700s to Today* (New York, NY: Tiller Press, 2021).

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BOOK REVIEW

Medicine Is War: The Martial Metaphor in Victorian Literature and Culture
by Lorenzo Servitje (New York, SUNY Press, 2021) 352 pp., paperback,
$36.95

Reviewed by Katherine Voyles
(*Independent Scholar*)

'We all of us, grave or light, get entangled in metaphor and act fatally on the strength of it.' Lorenzo Servitje quotes George Eliot's well-known line from *Middlemarch* in *Medicine is War*, his book about how a metaphor about fatality itself became fatal. I begin with Servitje's invocation of Eliot not because it's where he begins—he begins with Mary Shelley—but to signal from my own beginning that *Medicine is War* is a deeply literary book. It's about novels, it's about metaphor, and it's about the power of literature to shape attitudes, orientations, and ways of understanding the world. How the military and medicine are interlaced, the language used to braid them together, and how those stories move through time (both in narrative and across the long span of the nineteenth century) are all concerns of *Medicine is War*.

The martial metaphor is the heart of the book. The militarisation of medicine is at the heart of the metaphor. How wars fought far from England's shores affected views of individual hygiene and public health in England itself and the fallout from those views takes many forms in Servitje's nuanced telling. In tracing this metaphor, he reveals how the relationships between bullets and bacteria, ammunition and immunisation, and national security and sanitation are wound and unwound, made and remade from Romantic through Modern literature. Servitje insists that, 'The martial metaphor is not natural; it emerged from a set of historical relations between actors, ideologies, and cultural productions' (p.2). This reality may not be self-evident today.

Imaginative literature, according to Servitje, has the ability to naturalise the metaphor, but he's also alive to moments when the metaphor is openly and explicitly deployed for critical ends. Because he takes this complicated view of his subject, Servitje treats the job of the literary critic as a process of denaturalising or defamiliarising. Many treatments of literature today offer new forms of reading, new ways of reading, and new definitions of form—it's exciting to practice literature, to engage in reading, to make literature matter when how to

do so is so open. Servitje doesn't explicitly take up these issues, but there is something quite convincing about how he takes literature seriously without feeling the need to be paranoid or reparative, critical or loving, in his handling of fiction. Examining how the metaphor became naturalised and what happened after it did is the long arc of Servitje's compelling book.

Medicine is War unfolds over five main chapters, with chapters one and two making Part 1 of the book, and the final three composing Part 2. Each chapter centers on a novel or novelist: *The Last Man*, Charles Kingsley, *Dracula*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and *Heart of Darkness*. He uses this organisation to make a few interrelated interpretative moves: he shows the origins and evolution of the martial metaphor across the century, he insists on the centrality of fiction to its beginnings, and it allows him to spend time with some of the signature political and military conflicts, from the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War, the Boer War, to the Scramble for Africa.

The entwined relationship between the military and medicine takes a number of different forms in Servitje's hands. Individual hygiene, public health, the politics of sanitation, biopolitics, liberalism, gender dynamics, imperialism, and Britishness are some of the crucial topics around which Servitje orients. These broad concerns take historically specific form. Servitje explains the book's organisation, 'The first part pertains to authors responding to miasma and contagion theory in the face of the first three cholera epidemics. The authors in part 2 respond to bacteriology, parasitology, immunity, and eugenics' (p.20). His compelling reading of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* illustrates how that novel exposes the martial metaphor as a metaphor even as it shows how it became naturalised, with the effect that medicine became militarised by and through and for nationalistic ends. In the chapter on Charles Kingsley Servitje dramatises how the third cholera epidemic, new developments in the sanitation movement, and the Crimean War work together to make Britain into a medical society, and that this turn is made possible by the martial metaphor's link to the military. *Dracula*, for Servitje, 'helped fashion a modern medical future by mediating a militant past' (p.110). Detection and immunity are the poles around which the chapter on Conan Doyle turns, these poles are anchored by Servitje's rehearsal of developments in bacteriology and toxicology. The final chapter, on *Heart of Darkness*, deals with what he calls '*coloniopathy*,' that is the illness of the native Congolese in Conrad's fiction, is an index of both the ravages of Colonialism and of its necessity (p.194). 'Collateral Damage' is his Afterword; it brings the fallout of the martial metaphor up to today by writing of antibiotic resistant bacteria and

the so-called War on Cancer to illuminate the long tail of the martial metaphor, and how liberal, nationalist approaches to medicine continue today.

Servitje, however, isn't merely interested in the formation and continuation of the metaphor, he's committed to excavating the political, social, and cultural forces that enable as they played out in developments in medicine and in warfare. The dynamics, however, run the other direction, too. He's equally committed to excavating how the martial metaphor enables political, social, and cultural forces as they played out in developments in medicine and in warfare. The metaphor itself works to obscure these relations, but Servitje deftly demonstrates how imaginative literature itself both assumes the metaphor, and critically reveals the assumptions imbricated in it.

His 'Addendum' brings his book into the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our moment vivifies the fatal stakes of conceptions of and responses to medicine and public health structured by the martial metaphor. The individualism and nationalism at the metaphor's heart fatally limit our collective responses by curtailing our horizons of possibilities precisely because they are simply assumed. Noting partisan political fractures in response to the pandemic is one thing, but understanding that beneath those ruptures is the martial metaphor reveals that even those cortisol-spiking differences are less pitched than they might originally appear because they are both entangled in metaphor and act fatally on the strength of it.

BOOK REVIEW

Children's Literature and the Rise of 'Mind Cure': Positive Thinking and Pseudo-Science at the Fin de Siècle by Anne Stiles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). 249 pp., hardback $99.99

Reviewed by Adam Epp
(*University of Saskatchewan*)

The 'Mind Cure', the main subject of Anne Stiles's *Children's Literature and the Rise of 'Mind Cure'*, is part of a spiritual movement called New Thought. New Thought practitioners reject scientific medicine and believe our thoughts directly affect our well-being, such that thinking positively can cure any disease and thinking negatively can lead to sickness and financial failure. Due to the inadequate care they received from physicians, nineteenth-century women experiencing depression and other mental illnesses were especially drawn to New Thought, as its emphasis on positive thinking was a welcome alternative to treatments such as Silas Weir Mitchell's rest cure. New Thought grew alongside Christian Science, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in the nineteenth century, and the two movements share similar beliefs regarding health and God. For over a hundred years, both New Thought and Christian Science have been criticised for their ineffectiveness against physical injuries and diseases. Some of the movements' members have died from ailments modern medicine could cure, although the 'Mind Cure' can work against some psychosomatic illnesses, albeit for the same reason that placebos can cure conditions.

Stiles, in *Children's Literature and the Rise of 'Mind Cure'*, advances scholarship on the 'once popular' but now neglected genre 'known as the New Thought novel' (p. 3). Stiles builds her research on Beryl Satter's studies on New Thought in *Each Mind a Kingdom* (p. 4) and the literary critics L. Ashley Squires and Jerry Griswold, among others. Since literary criticism, in general, has neglected New Thought's presence in literature, Stiles corrects this oversight through her examination of New Thought influences in the works of Frances Hodgson Burnett, Henry James, L.M. Montgomery, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Stiles's analysis emphasises 'earlier, woman-centered varieties of New Thought that privileged health and spirituality over material gain' to create a book that 'stands at the crossroad of children literature's studies and medical humanities, fields that seldom intersect' (p. 6). *Children's Literature and the Rise*

of 'Mind Cure' juxtaposes these fields' perspectives to demonstrate 'how children serve as multivalent metaphors in adult-centered discourses about health and desire' (p. 6). Stiles provides well-researched and fascinating analyses of beloved late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century texts, and though the book is of limited relevance to Victorian studies, it encourages future research on New Thought literature.

Chapter 1 begins by looking at the inner child in Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and 'Sara Crewe', the short story that the author later expanded into *A Little Princess*. In Stiles's study, the inner child refers to a 'person's original or true self' (p. 24), and she gives a 'detailed genealogy of the inner child' (p. 25), showing how Christian Science and New Thought borrowed from the Victorian cult of the child to attract female practitioners. Stiles presents convincing evidence that Burnett was familiar with and agreed with certain New Thought ideas relating to children. In Burnett's literature, Cedric Errol, later the titular Lord Fauntleroy, and Sara Crewe are each Romanticised children who heal the adults around them, and Stiles argues effectively that Sara, in particular, uses 'creative visualization' (p. 46) to imagine what she desires and receive it.

In Chapter 2, Stiles turns her attention to Henry James's seemingly friendly relationship with Burnett and his critical views of New Thought. Throughout his career, James wrote literature to correct the flaws he perceived in women's writings, and Stiles makes an excellent case that James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* is a realist critique of New Thought and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Stiles characterises Miles and Flora, James's child protagonists, as 'fun-house-mirror distortions of Burnett's innocent hero' (p. 56). Stiles convincingly argues the childcare approach of *The Turn of the Screw*'s governess is heavily reminiscent of New Thought's hands-off parenting style. Stiles's analysis of *The Turn of the Screw* is especially strong since it creates a clear interpretation of the notoriously ambiguous novella from a new angle.

Chapter 3 returns to Burnett and considers her novels *The Dawn of a To-morrow* and *The Secret Garden*. Stiles argues that the latter is influenced by James's *The Turn of the Screw*, itself a critique of Burnett's earlier work. Stiles details how Burnett, as she aged, became increasingly predisposed to New Thought philosophy and how *The Secret Garden* criticises mainstream medicine and the rest cure. In *The Secret Garden*, characters find no success with the rest cure, Stiles argues, and instead they achieve miraculous and 'effective spiritual cures for their ills' (p. 97) through New Thought ideas and help others in turn. Stiles's interpretation of *The Secret Garden* is persuasive, as she explains how

Colin, one of the novel's characters, is given the rest cure to no avail, only to regain the use of his legs by believing in himself and acting like a regular boy.

Chapter 4 traces the spread of New Thought to Canada, and Stiles explains how Montgomery, a woman married to a Presbyterian minister, encountered New Thought ideas and found the power of positive thinking helpful in curing her insomnia. Stiles examines Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables novels and *The Blue Castle* from a New Thought angle, although this approach is less effective when applied to Montgomery's literature. For example, Stiles argues that Anne Shirley's treatment of a baby is a criticism of modern medicine, since Anne rescues the baby before a doctor arrives, yet Anne uses medicine to treat the baby, not the power of imagination favoured by New Thought and Christian Science. Anne has an overactive imagination, as a New Thought heroine should, but her thinking does not miraculously cure illness. Stiles recognises this issue: 'despite its New Thought-inspired plot elements, *Anne of Green Gables* is not a typical New Thought novel' (p. 141). Stiles's analysis of *The Blue Castle* focuses on Montgomery's dissatisfaction with modern medicine, which she argues effectively, although the connection to New Thought is again a little tenuous.

Similarly, in Chapter 5, the connection between Gilman's *Herland* trilogy to New Thought is not as persuasive as in Stiles's first three chapters. Stiles admits that Gilman is an unusual subject to study as a New Thought author: 'These New Thought borrowings are surprising given that Gilman was outspokenly critical of organized religions, including (but certainly not limited to) Christian Science' (p. 159). Nonetheless, Stiles provides a solid background for Gilman's beliefs that coincide with New Thought principles, including how Gilman struggled as a parent and would have found New Thought views on parenthood appealing. Gilman's *Herland* trilogy, a series of utopian science fiction, depicts the power of imagination. Members of the all-female society in *Herland* are capable of willing themselves into pregnancy, so the application of New Thought to these works is valid, even if Gilman's version of a New Thought utopia includes 'elements that feel foreign or even repugnant to us, such as her insistence on chastity, eugenic fitness, and Anglo-Saxon female superiority' (p. 186).

Due to its subject matter, *Children's Literature and the Rise of 'Mind Cure'* is not entirely applicable to Victorian studies. Although they began in the nineteenth century, the New Thought and Christian Science movements originated primarily in the United States. Two of Stiles's subjects, Burnett and James, are Anglo-Americans who lived in England during the Victorian era,

while Montgomery and Gilman are Canadian and American, respectively, and most of the literature Stiles analyses was written after the Victorian era. The book is tangentially relevant, since Stiles identifies Victorian influences on the New Thought concept of the inner child, which drew from Lewis Carroll's Alice and Charles Dickens's Little Nell (p. 102). Stiles proposes further inquiry into James's familiarity with contemporary religious thought (p. 82), and promising new research can be directed towards identifying further connections between Victorian beliefs and New Thought.

Stiles's book should not be dismissed due to the minimal connections to the Victorian era. While I do not always find the New Thought interpretations of Montgomery and Gilman's literature convincing, Stiles's *Children's Literature and the Rise of 'Mind Cure'* is a valuable and provocative study. Her research on New Thought's history and each individual author's connection to the belief system is thorough and always relevant to the respective chapter's literary analysis. One area that I would have liked to see Stiles further explore is people's reluctance to 'acknowledge the heterodox religious content of the New Thought novels' (p. 200), especially in beloved children's literature such as *The Secret Garden* and *Anne of Green Gables*; Stiles focuses on demonstrating the New Thought elements in these novels, rather than considering people's reactions to these elements. In her defence, this demonstration is necessary, due to the general lack of awareness of the 'Mind Cure' in literary studies. Since I occasionally questioned her choice of New Thought literature, I add that Stiles could have focused this book on fewer authors or chosen more relevant New Thought literary texts. Stiles singles out Eleanor H. Porter's 1913 novel *Pollyanna* as 'unjustly neglected' (p. 23) in her study, and that text could have been considered in place of either Montgomery or Gilman's works. Regardless, the authors and texts that Stiles analyses cover a wide range of New Thought ideas, from the miraculous healing in Burnett's work to Gilman's struggles as a mother, and Stiles achieves a comprehensive view of New Thought literature. She succeeds in her efforts 'to evoke the richness and variety of New Thought novels as well as their coherence around woman and child-centered themes' (p. 23).