

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THE RISE OF "MIND CURE"

Positive thinking is good for you. You can become healthy, wealthy, and influential by using the power of your mind to attract what you desire. These kooky but commonplace ideas stem from a nineteenth-century new religious movement known as "mind cure" or New Thought. Related to Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science, New Thought was once a popular religious movement with hundreds of thousands of followers, and has since migrated into secular contexts such as contemporary psychotherapy, corporate culture, and entertainment. New Thought also pervades nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century children's literature, including classics such as *The Secret Garden*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and *A Little Princess*. In this first book-length treatment of New Thought in Anglophone fiction, Anne Stiles explains how children's literature encouraged readers to accept New Thought ideas – especially psychological concepts such as the inner child – thereby ensuring the movement's survival into the present day.

ANNE STILES is Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of Medical Humanities at Saint Louis University. She is the author of *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2011) and the editor of *Neurology and Literature, 1866–1920* (2007). She also coedited two volumes in Elsevier's Progress in Brain Research series (2013). Her work has been supported by long-term grants from the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (2016–2017); the Huntington Library (2009–2010); and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2006–2007).

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
AND THE RISE OF "MIND
CURE"

*Positive Thinking and Pseudo-Science
at the Fin de Siècle*

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For Kevin and our flock

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Acknowledgments

The seeds of this project were planted years ago when I was an undergraduate at Harvard University. In spring and fall, I enjoyed lengthy rambles in Cambridge's Mount Auburn Cemetery, a popular destination for runners, bird-watchers, and history buffs alike. The cemetery contains many graves of famous people, including literary lights such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes Senior, and Julia Ward Howe. But one particularly beautiful memorial caught my attention. Next to Halcyon Lake, surrounded by luxuriant foliage, stands a fifteen-foot-tall circular colonnade in classical revival style, built of Vermont white granite and decorated with a wild rose motif.

This monument honors Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), who attracted countless followers in the nineteenth century with her belief that the body and all material things are illusions and that reality consists of mind and spirit. Ergo, pain, suffering, and death are false beliefs that can be healed through prayer and right thinking, methods that psychologist William James would later term “mind cure.” Eddy's monument reflects these principles: it was built without a roof so that nothing could stand between her and Heaven. The monument was also outfitted with a telephone so that Eddy might call her followers from the beyond if she chose and testify to her triumph over death (so far, she hasn't).

At the time, I had no idea who Eddy was or why someone would dedicate such a sublime structure to her. But I was to encounter Eddy and her ideas again when I returned to Harvard for a postdoctoral fellowship in 2006–2007, where I audited a class on mind–body medicine taught by historian of science Anne Harrington. One unit of the course covered mind cure and featured guest speakers who were members of Eddy's Mother Church in Boston. They described leaving their own and their children's injuries in God's hands and forgoing medical intervention, as Eddy's religion notoriously demands. One woman described how she refused to go to the emergency room after a car accident smashed her

windshield, leaving shards of glass embedded in her face. She described how prayer and faith alone had healed her, as her body gradually expelled each piece of glass. Another man described how he refused to take his child to the doctor after she broke her leg, even though Christian Science makes an exception to its medical prohibition for bone setting. I was unsure what to make of these stories or of people who were faithful to a seemingly dangerous creed. Revisiting the beautiful monument at Mount Auburn, I wondered why Eddy, a frail and eccentric human being, had seemed like a prophet to hundreds of thousands of people – someone for whom they willingly risked their lives and health time and again.

Some years later, as an assistant professor of English at Washington State University, I taught a class called “Victorians and the Occult” that covered literature inspired by new religious movements such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, Mormonism, and Christian Science. I taught Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) and L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) alongside Eddy’s religious tome, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures* (first edition 1875). Slowly, Chapters 3 and 4 of this book started taking shape in my mind. This was the official beginning of a journey that would eventually lead to the publication of this volume.

Children’s Literature and the Rise of “Mind Cure” was an engrossing project that allowed considerable “scope for the imagination,” to quote Montgomery’s heroine Anne Shirley. But its subject matter aroused uncomfortable feelings for some. I encountered opposition from people who thought that Christian Science and its more secular offshoot, New Thought, were not proper topics for “serious” literary criticism. Others did not appreciate learning that their favorite children’s books – works like *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess* (1905), or Montgomery’s *Anne* series – were inspired by Christian Science or its offshoots in any way, shape, or form. Still less could they tolerate the idea that Anglo-American novelist Henry James, consummate stylist and cosmopolite, would have engaged with Eddy or New Thought.

I am, therefore, doubly grateful to the funding agencies who generously supported this project in its early and middle stages. These included, interestingly enough, the Christian Science Church, which sponsored my research trip to the Mary Baker Eddy Library in August 2015. The superb librarians there directed me to their collection of Christian Science children’s fiction, a treasure trove of material that scholars have heretofore neglected. They also gave me access to Mary Baker Eddy’s correspondence and, most importantly, helped explain aspects of their beliefs and history

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that were difficult for me to understand as an outsider to their faith (as far as I could tell, all employees of the Mother Church, librarians included, are followers of the religion). When I gave a lecture about my research at the end of my visit, I met with a surprisingly warm reception from the Christian Scientists I addressed. They were forthcoming about books that inspired them as children (*The Secret Garden* was a universal favorite) and about the Church's official stance on imaginative literature, which Eddy discouraged followers from reading. Unlike other audiences I had encountered, the Christian Scientists could readily see aspects of Eddy's teachings in the mainstream children's books I discuss here, even if they disagreed with my categorization of their faith as a branch of New Thought.

I am also immensely grateful to the Institute for Research in the Humanities (IRH) at the University of Wisconsin, which awarded me a yearlong Robert M. Kingdon Fellowship in religious studies in 2016–2017. This fellowship provided me time and resources to write much of the manuscript, including a first draft of the introduction and the long chapter on Canadian author L. M. Montgomery, composed during a snowy Wisconsin winter. Special thanks go to Susan Stanford Friedman, then the Director of the IRH, for urging me to embrace what was controversial about my topic instead of shying away from it.

The most consistent support for my work, however, came from my employer, Saint Louis University, which generously funded visits to archives throughout the United States, including the New York Public Library, the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Harvard's Houghton Library, and the American Religions Collection at the University of California, Santa Barbara. My department chairs through the years – Sara van den Berg, Jonathan Sawday, and Toby Benis – provided unflagging support for this project, as have my other colleagues in the English Department. Special thanks to those who read early drafts of chapters and grant proposals, particularly Jonathan Sawday, Ellen Crowell, Phyllis Weliver, and Hal Bush, and to those who asked helpful questions at talks I gave about this material. Last but not least, I am grateful for the fall 2018 sabbatical that enabled me to complete a full-length draft of the manuscript.

The earliest versions of this material debuted at academic conferences including Visawus (the Victorian Interdisciplinary Studies Association of the Western United States), whose members heard drafts of each chapter over the past few years. Special thanks to Diana Maltz, Kristen Mahoney, Neil Hultgren, and Lindsay Wilhelm for their sustained interest in my

work and for asking questions that strengthened my research. Diana also read an early draft of my chapter on James and provided vital feedback. Kristine Swenson read a later draft of the James material and participated in my seminar, "Alternative Approaches to Health and Wellness," at the Midwest Victorian Studies Association Annual Conference in 2018. My sincere thanks to each of the seminar participants, whose brilliant papers enhanced my knowledge of New Thought and its cultural milieu. I am also grateful to the members of NAVSA, the North American Victorian Studies Association, who heard drafts of my chapters on Burnett, James, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for their suggestions and encouragement.

Some portions of this book previously appeared in print. A draft of Chapter 3, titled "Christian Science versus the Rest Cure in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*," appeared in a summer 2015 special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to literature and neuroscience. Many thanks to special issue editor Stephen Burn for soliciting this piece and to *Modern Fiction Studies* and Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to repurpose this material. A partial draft of Chapter 1, titled "New Thought and the Inner Child in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*," appeared in a December 2018 special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Literature* devoted to new religious movements. I coedited this special issue along with Charles LaPorte, Sebastian Lecourt, and Deanna Kreisel, each of whom provided valuable feedback on my essay. Many thanks to them and to journal editor Jonathan Grossman for their guidance, and to the University of California Press for allowing me to reuse this material.

The artwork that appears inside this volume is in the public domain, from Reginald Birch's illustrations of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in Chapter 1 to the photographs of Shirley Temple in the epilogue. But this is not true of the cover art, John Singer Sargent's oil painting "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose" (1885–1886). I am grateful to the Tate Britain for allowing me to use Singer Sargent's gorgeous artwork for this volume.

Individual debts I have incurred are too numerous to name, though I will try. First and foremost, thanks to the members of the Victorian Writing Accountability Group (VWAG) for holding me to my writing goals and providing much-needed encouragement along the way. Jill Galvan, Nora Gilbert, and Diana Bellonby: each of you has strengthened this book in countless ways. Nora deserves special thanks for suggesting Shirley Temple films as a fruitful topic for my epilogue, and for advice on Chapters 1 and 2. Another generous supporter was L. Ashley Squires, who shared parts of her excellent book *Healing the Nation: Literature, Progress,*

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and Christian Science (2017) with me before it was published and pointed me to important resources at the Mary Baker Eddy Library. My former graduate advisor, Joseph Bristow, continued to be a valuable ally and mentor during this second project. So did my former colleague Debbie J. Lee of Washington State University, who read early draft proposals of the manuscript. Finally, I am grateful to the many individuals at Cambridge University Press who shaped this book into its present form, including commissioning editor Bethany Thomas, editorial assistants Natasha Burdon and Rachel Blaifeder, series editors Kate Flint and Clare Pettitt, and the anonymous reviewers whose advice improved the book immeasurably.

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