

*Medicine and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, History, and Culture*, by Sandra Dinter and Sarah Schäfer-Althaus (eds.). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023. xv + 296pp. ISBN 9783031170195

Sandra Dinter and Sarah Schäfer-Althaus have compiled a well-researched and insightful collection of essays titled *Medicine and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, History, and Culture*. This volume consists of eleven chapters and an introduction, covering a wide range of topics by both established scholars and emerging experts in the field, including Pamela K. Gilbert, Sally Shuttleworth, and Monika Pietrzak-Franger. The editors convincingly demonstrate in their introduction that medicine and mobility were already interrelated in nineteenth-century literature and indicate that in most cases these relatively new research fields have been analysed separately. They argue that “new insights can be gained by analysing the cultural and literary histories of medicine and mobility as entangled processes whose discourses and practices constituted, influenced, and transformed each other” (2). The edited volume sheds light on the correlation between new transportation technologies and concerns regarding health during the nineteenth century.

The volume is divided into three sections. Section One, “Travel and Health”, features four essays that transition smoothly from one topic to the next and ease the reader into the interrelation of medicine and mobility. The articles draw not only from novels but also diary entries and address sea journeys, spas, the interrelation of disease and travel and idling. Sally Shuttleworth starts the section with an analysis of sea journeys for physical health. She examines voyages to Australia that were taken solely for health reasons. Using diary entries and ship-board newspapers, she demonstrates the advantages of sea air, but also the hardships and tragedies that occurred during these journeys. Pamela K. Gilbert’s excellent essay, which is often cited in this edited volume, highlights the interrelation of physical health and moral decay in spas and seaside towns. The advancement of technology during the Victorian period made it easier to travel to the seaside and enjoy the health benefits it offers. However, these towns also promised pleasures that were easily associated with danger. The seaside towns are very familiar to readers and scholars of nineteenth-century literature and Gilbert shows that warm water baths were “suspected of weakening the vital force, and perhaps moral fiber” (55) while cold water was “considered more manly and moral” (55) due to the permeability of the skin. Following this essay, Natasha Anderson delves into the connection between diseases and journeys in Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy. In her fascinating study, she shows how travel and sickness impact the families in both novels and how “ailments facilitate and prevent mobility” (76). Heidi Lucja Liedke closes the section with a study on “idling as a transgressive practice that subverts contemporary discourses surrounding (mental) health” (98). In Mary Shelley’s *Rambles in Germany and Italy*, idling is used as a mental rest, particularly to cope with grief. Similarly, in Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins’s *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, the characters realise that constant busyness can have negative effects on their health and embrace inactivity.

Part Two, “Pathologising Mobilities”, and its four interrelating essays, address respectively *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot, Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* and *Three Men on A Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome, dance as an art form, and migration of the Irish. In her work on *The Mill on the Floss*, Monika Class draws attention to the intriguing theme of posture. She delves into how gendered postures affect and influence the actions of the main characters. Class’s analysis is thought-provoking and insightful, as she explores the nuances of the characters’ movements throughout the novel. Ursula Kluwick follows with her essay

focusing on “the mobility of aquatic matter and disease aetiology” (146) in *The Woman in White* and *Three Men on a Boat*. Although these two novels may seem dissimilar, Kluwick effectively demonstrates that analysing them from this perspective can deepen our comprehension of them, and of how different bodies of water were conceived in the Victorian period. A different kind of movement is discussed in Stefanie John’s article. It focuses on dance in Decadent poetry and adds an interesting aspect to this edited volume. Dance was essential for fin-de-siècle culture and John’s readings of poems by Wilde, Symons and Field show that “the figurations of dance routines and aimless wandering [...] prolong and defer progress in both temporal and spatial terms” (183). Catherine Cox and Hilary Marland focus on Irish patients in Lancashire asylums in their article. “In Manchester, by 1871, the Irish made up under 10 per cent of the general population, while 25 per cent of the city’s Prestwich Asylum were Irish-born” (190). Drawing on asylum records and newspaper articles, they analyse the movements of the Irish and confront some of the contemporary stereotypes that the patients had to face.

The final section of this volume, which consists of three essays on “Mobilities and Medical Regimens”, provides another distinctive perspective as it focuses on different practices and products that were supposed to help Victorians minimise health risks associated with travelling. Ariane de Waal begins this section with an article that explores the impact of mobility on the skin and how people in the Victorian era interpreted physical closeness. “Travelling entails exposing the skin not only to rough winds or drastic temperature changes but also to the toxins or odours emanating from other—potentially unwashed, illness-infested, and infectious—bodies” (215). She emphasises how strict the routines for healthy skin were and discusses how some Victorians managed to defy these severe guidelines and restrictions on physical mobility. In her analysis, Monika Pietrzak-Franger draws attention to the significance of clothing for comfortable and healthy travel to tropical regions. However, she also highlights the negative consequences of the cotton industry, which required complex international networks and posed health hazards for textile workers. Despite providing warmth and comfort to travellers, the fabrics “in their microscopic variants, cocooned and suffocated the organs of textile workers” (248). The final article in the collection is a study by Markku Hokkanen on the relationship between mobility and health in the British African Empire. The article delves into colonial hygienic practices and their impact on mobility, highlighting both the advantages and disadvantages and showcasing the fact that the British always desired more comfort, which in turn called for an increase in African labour.

The editors have successfully accomplished their objective of initiating “a methodological and interdisciplinary intervention” (2) resulting in a sound and interdisciplinary methodology. The articles included in this edited volume cover a diverse range of topics and materials. Throughout the collection, all scholars effectively demonstrate that examining the connections between medicine and mobility can lead to new perspectives and enhance our understanding of the Victorian era.

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