

Introduction

In Frances Hodgson Burnett's beloved children's classic *The Secret Garden* (1911), the climax of the story has little to do with the titular garden or the ostensible protagonist, Mary Lennox, a sickly orphan who travels from her native India to her uncle's Yorkshire estate. Instead, the novel concludes with a dramatic faith healing. Mary's invalid cousin, Colin Craven, learns that he is not a hunchback, will not die young, and that contrary to his own and his doctor's belief, he *can* "run and walk like any other boy" (142). Colin's cure is accomplished not by mainstream medicine, but by a simple change of attitude, as the narrator explains: "He had made himself believe that he was going to get well, which was really more than half the battle" (143). As a symbol of his dramatic transformation, Colin, who once believed he had a life-threatening allergy to roses, plants his very own "rose in a pot" (134).

Burnett's novel raises some puzzling questions. Why do Mary and the garden itself, who dominate the first two thirds of the book, recede from view in the novel's dramatic conclusion? How could a once bedridden boy, whom experts believed to be dying, suddenly recover health and mobility merely by believing he is well? And why is the "rose in a pot" a triumphant expression of his recovery? These and many other aspects of the novel can be explained by Burnett's interest in Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science, a faith-healing movement founded in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1879 that discouraged followers from relying on medical doctors and promoted healing through prayer and right thinking. Burnett, who was born in Manchester, England, but moved to America in her teens, underwent Christian Science treatments for her depression and insomnia while staying in Boston and Lynn during the early 1880s (Griswold 237). She also read Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (first edition 1875), which followers refer to as the "textbook" of their faith. While Burnett never formally converted to the religion, she maintained a lifelong interest in Christian Science and admiration for its strong female founder, whose favorite flower was the rose.¹

Children's Literature and the Rise of "Mind Cure" examines *The Secret Garden* alongside other British and North American novels that engage with Eddy's Christian Science and a related movement known as New Thought, which touted positive thinking, meditation, and prayer as a means to health and prosperity. New Thought or "mind cure," as it is sometimes called, consists in the belief that thoughts have the power to change the world. Dwelling on positive thoughts or uplifting words can supposedly bring about desired changes in one's life, while negative thinking allegedly causes sickness, poverty, and other catastrophic outcomes. According to this belief system, people can influence one another via mental telepathy, and by sending positive or negative vibrations (vibes) into the universe. These ideas were developed in mid-nineteenth-century New England by mesmerist Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802–1866) and his students, Warren Felt Evans, Julius and Annetta Dresser, and Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Dressers, Evans, and Eddy – followed by *their* students, such as Emma Curtis Hopkins, Ralph Waldo Trine, and Henry Wood – attracted hundreds of thousands of followers with the promise that they, too, could change their lives through positive thinking. These leaders brought together strands of liberal Christianity, Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Transcendentalism to create an eclectic faith with broad appeal. By 1906, for instance, Christian Science alone boasted 86,000 followers, 72.4 percent of whom were female, while the broader New Thought movement reached larger and more diverse audiences (Satter 5; Albanese 299).² Historians suggest that New Thought flourished around 1900 because it harnessed the placebo effect to assuage ailments that nineteenth-century medicine could not treat (Harrington 65). Women were disproportionately attracted to the movement due to their dissatisfaction with mainstream medicine and their relative economic powerlessness. New Thought gave such women the illusion of control over their problems and allowed them to wield a variety of soft power within and outside of the domestic sphere.³

New Thought's broad appeal explains the movement's influence on classic children's books of the era, many of which were among the top bestsellers of their day (Griswold vii). These books have, in turn, spawned theatrical and film adaptations that have taken on lives of their own.⁴ Take for instance, Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) and *A Little Princess* (1905); Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903); L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and its many sequels; Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* (1913); and Arnold Munk's *The Little Engine That*

Could (1930). These works remain well known and influential today, though few recognize the faith-based messages they contain. If one expands this list to include books written *about* children but not for them, one might include Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), which mocks New Thought in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), whose all-female utopia revolves around maternity, child-rearing, and avoidance of "horrible ideas" (*Herland* 240).⁵

Most of the books listed above are survivals of a once popular genre known as the New Thought novel, whose heyday (from approximately 1880–1930) coincides with the most rapid growth of this emergent movement.⁶ While some books in this vein were didactic, using "Christian Science," "New Thought," or related terms to describe the religious beliefs and practices they depict, by far the most successful and enduring have been those whose religious content is implicit rather than explicit.⁷ By espousing tenets of this faith within an apparently secular tale, novelists could reach a wider swath of readers, including those belonging to other religious sects (some of whom may have disapproved of New Thought in its more obvious forms). Such readers might later embrace New Thought principles or practices while still considering themselves devout Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, or secular humanists.

Children's Literature and the Rise of "Mind Cure" argues that these New Thought children's books, read by generations of young and impressionable readers, have conditioned English-speakers worldwide to accept New Thought concepts in purportedly secular areas of life, especially psychology, self-help, and alternative medicine. Historians have ably described how New Thought permeates these realms as well as corporate culture, twelve-step groups, fitness fads, prosperity gospel, and entertainment.⁸ Most visibly, television personalities like Oprah Winfrey and her protégée, Divine Science pastor and Yoruba priestess Iyanla Vanzant, bring New Thought into countless homes every day via their programming. For instance, Oprah's Book Club promoted Australian television producer Rhonda Byrne's self-help tome *The Secret* (2006), which sold over twenty-eight million copies by recycling New Thought platitudes for a new generation.⁹ Meanwhile, an offshoot of New Thought called prosperity gospel – whose followers believe God wants them to be rich – flourishes thanks to televangelists such as Creflo Dollar, T.D. Jakes, and Joel Osteen, whose ministry reaches a monthly audience of twenty million and brings in ninety million dollars a year (Dias). According to a 2006 article in *Time Magazine*, nearly one in five American Christians supports the prosperity movement (Van Biema and

Chu 2). Followers of prosperity gospel are believed to be partly responsible for the election in 2016 of United States President Donald Trump, who is a disciple of mid-twentieth-century positive thinking guru Norman Vincent Peale and a friend of Osteen (Dias).

Even medical doctors have jumped on the New Thought bandwagon, despite the historical rift between medical practitioners and Christian Scientists. Physician authors like Andrew Weil, Deepak Chopra, and Bernie Siegel have endorsed New Thought practices such as positive thinking, daily affirmations, and creative visualization. Some of these doctors – such as Siegel in his book *Love, Medicine, and Miracles* (1986) – court controversy by suggesting that such methods can cure cancer and heart disease. Siegel, for instance, avers that “happy people generally don’t get sick” and encourages cancer patients to “picture . . . your white blood cells eliminating the disease” (76, 114). Using creative visualization techniques such as these, patients allegedly shrank the size of tumors and metastases and even completely recovered in some cases. Despite their modern medical terminology, stories of miraculous cures told by Siegel and his ilk recall Colin Craven’s faith healing in *The Secret Garden*.

Despite being widely influential in so many areas of modern life, New Thought is poorly understood and seldom studied outside of university theology and history departments. In these academic contexts, however, it has received substantial attention. Early histories of New Thought, such as Charles Braden’s *Spirits in Rebellion: the Rise and Development of New Thought* (1963), Donald Meyer’s *The Positive Thinkers* (1965), and Gail Thain Parker’s *Mind Cure in New England* (1973), emphasize twentieth-century New Thought writing about wealth and success. By contrast, Beryl Satter’s *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875–1920* (1999) traces nineteenth-century New Thought that privileged women’s health and spirituality over material concerns. Since then, Catherine Albanese’s *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (2007) situates New Thought within a range of new religious movements and occult trends, while Anne Harrington views New Thought in medical context in *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (2007). Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America* (2009) outlines the perils of New Thought when taken to extremes. Finally, Kate Bowler’s *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (2013) describes how early twentieth-century New Thought, Pentecostalism, and muscular Christianity combined to form modern prosperity gospel.

Research on Christian Science also falls under the broad umbrella of New Thought scholarship. Like me, most historians view Eddy's faith as an iconoclastic yet highly visible branch of the New Thought movement, though Christian Scientists themselves would deny this affiliation. Among the more even-handed histories of the faith is Steven Gottschalk's *Rolling Away the Stone: Mary Baker Eddy's Challenge to Materialism* (2006), the first book-length treatment of Eddy's life and work to make use of the Mary Baker Eddy Library Collection in Boston. Equally fair-minded and comprehensive is Gillian Gill's biography, *Mary Baker Eddy* (1999). Rennie Schoepflin's *Christian Science on Trial: Religious Healing in America* (2002) examines Eddy's beliefs through the lens of controversial legal cases wherein parents or Christian Science practitioners are accused of manslaughter or child neglect. Perhaps the most critical history of the faith is Caroline Fraser's *God's Perfect Child: Living and Dying in the Christian Science Church* (1999), which resembles muckraking journalism about Eddy written by Georgine Milmine, Mark Twain, and others in the first decade of the twentieth century. As a former Christian Scientist who left the fold, Fraser infuses her history with a degree of autobiography, aligning her book with memoirs by ex-Christian Scientists such as Lucia Greenhouse's *fathermothergod: My Journey Out of Christian Science* (2011) and Barbara Wilson's *Blue Windows: A Christian Science Childhood* (1998).

While historians gesture toward New Thought fiction, this topic is tangential rather than central to their arguments. Literary critics, meanwhile, have unjustly neglected New Thought, while writing voluminously on contemporaneous new religious movements such as Mormonism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁰ Related trends such as mesmerism and psychical research have also received considerable attention.¹¹

Only recently have a few literary scholars begun to explore interactions between New Thought and American fiction. Key interventions include L. Ashley Squires's *Healing the Nation: Literature, Progress, and Christian Science* (2017), which traces the influence of Eddy's faith on Theodore Dreiser, Twain, and Burnett. Chapter six of Trysh Travis's *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* (2009) examines New Thought in Oprah's Book Club; while chapter five of Claudia Stokes's *The Altar at Home: Sentimental Literature and Nineteenth-Century American Religion* (2014) discusses Eddy's own poetry and short fiction. Finally, chapter eleven of

Jerry Griswold's *Audacious Kids: The Classic American Children's Story* (1992) examines Christian Science overtones of Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

Children's Literature and the Rise of "Mind Cure" extends Satter's conversation about New Thought in middle-class domestic settings and builds on Squires's and Griswold's work on Burnett and Christian Science. Like these authors, I emphasize earlier, woman-centered varieties of New Thought that privileged health and spirituality over material gain. I also follow Harrington's lead in exploring connections between New Thought, popular psychology, and alternative healing. The resulting book stands at the crossroads of children's literature studies and medical humanities, fields that seldom intersect.¹² This juxtaposition of perspectives enables us to see how children serve as multivalent metaphors in adult-centered discourses about health and desire. For instance, Colin Craven's miraculous recovery in *The Secret Garden* might signal the triumph of mind over matter, the victory of positive thinking over male hysteria, or even the wish-fulfillment fantasy of Burnett's deceased son, Lionel, coming back to life.¹³

As this example suggests, New Thought literature circa 1900 was as symbolically rich as it was abundant. For every blockbuster like *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, there were a dozen more ephemeral literary productions in a similar vein, many of which now languish in archives. Some of these works were written by New Thought leaders with literary aspirations, such as Alice Bunker Stockham and Lida Hood Talbot's *Koradine Letters* (1893) and Helen Van Anderson's *The Story of Teddy* (1893), both aimed at youth audiences. These texts supplemented the many didactic New Thought novels written for and about adult women, as described in chapter four of Satter's *Each Mind a Kingdom*.

There is also a fascinating and understudied collection of early twentieth century Christian Science children's fiction housed at the Mary Baker Library in Boston. Some of these works sold well in their day, such as Clara Louise Burnham's *The Right Princess* (1902) and *Jewel* (1903) and Lilian Bell's *Carolina Lee* (1906).¹⁴ A few remain popular among Christian Scientists, including *Jewel* and Katherine M. Yates's *On the Way There* (1904), a charming moral allegory reminiscent of *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Though never officially endorsed by Eddy or her Committee on Publication, such children's fictions occasionally received favorable notices in Church publications like the *Christian Science Sentinel* ("Slight Inventions"). There was even a short-lived magazine, *The Children's Star* (1907–1912), devoted to Christian Science poetry, games, artwork, and fiction for juvenile audiences, including short stories by Burnham and

Yates. While such little-known works are not the primary focus of this book, this larger corpus of forgotten New Thought fiction demonstrates the surprising range and cultural influence of this genre around the turn of the twentieth century.

With this historical background in mind, *Children's Literature and the Rise of "Mind Cure"* aims to restore the New Thought context of novels like *Anne of Green Gables*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden*, which most readers now view as secular, vaguely spiritual, or Protestant in nature.¹⁵ And understandably so: because New Thought lives on in so many mainstream, secular contexts, it can be difficult to recognize *as religion* when glimpsed in fictional narratives. The next section of this introduction provides a brief overview of the faith movement, its history, and its literary manifestations in order to recapture the cultural milieu in which these novels were written. This information will also help explain how and why New Thought and New Thought fiction infiltrated twentieth-first-century popular culture, psychology, and self-help literature.

New Thought: An Overview

At its core, New Thought is a form of magical thinking, which is “the belief, specially characteristic of early childhood and of many mental illnesses, that thoughts, wishes, or special but causally irrelevant actions can cause or influence external events” (OED). One need not look far to find examples of such behavior. A young child, for instance, might imagine that because he has covered his eyes, you can’t see him, or that he might slip down the bathtub drain like a bubble or a sliver of soap. A sufferer from obsessive-compulsive disorder might avoid sidewalks out of a fear that stepping on cracks will break her mother’s back. Such people grant thoughts and seemingly unimportant actions an agency they might not logically seem to possess. But magical thinking is not confined to children and the mentally ill, nor to an allegedly more primitive or gullible historical past.¹⁶ Healthy adults continue to engage in this type of thinking in the context of certain religious practices, superstitious behaviors, and altered mental states.

New Thought is a specific, optimistic type of magical thinking that pervades North American culture and has made inroads worldwide.¹⁷ In the words of Byrne’s *The Secret*, “your thoughts become things” that “attract . . . like thoughts to you.” Therefore, “If you want to change anything in your life,” you must simply “[change] your thoughts” (25). Byrne here articulates so-called law of attraction, the New Thought idea

that positive thinking brings positive results. This philosophy suggests that you have only to visualize a desired outcome to achieve it: “Ask, believe, and receive,” as proponents are wont to say, or “Name it and claim it” (Ehrenreich 60). Millions of individuals have applied these practices in their own lives, hoping to attain improved health, financial prosperity, better relationships, or to meet specific goals such as weight loss. When they succeed, these New Thought enthusiasts chalk up their success to their mental efforts; when they fail, they often blame themselves for insufficiently sincere positive thinking. By such means, New Thought retains its hold on individuals who could seek more practical solutions to their problems (such as going to a doctor, joining a dating website, going on a diet, etc.). The seductive aspects of this philosophy include its hopeful affect, relative ease of application, and elevation of individuals to Godlike status through their alleged power to transform their surroundings.

While this type of positive thinking is ubiquitous in certain areas of modern life, most people do not realize that it has a name and a history dating back to nineteenth-century New England, nor that it began as a religious movement. New Thought also has ties to mesmerism, a pseudoscientific practice that began in Paris in 1778 and took root in America in 1836 following Caribbean slaveholder Charles Poyen’s successful US lecture tour (Ogden 25, 29).¹⁸ Early mesmerists claimed to produce miraculous cures by manipulating a magnetic fluid inside patients. By passing their hands repeatedly over the patient or touching them with metal rods, mesmerists produced trembling and convulsions that “disrupted . . . unhealthy flows of animal magnetism,” with allegedly therapeutic effects (Harrington 44).

Eddy’s mentor and personal healer, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, practiced a modified version of mesmerism that inspired the first New Thought leaders. Instead of manipulating magnetic fluids through the laying on of hands, Quimby created a mesmeric-style clairvoyant rapport with patients in order to alter their beliefs. Specifically, he attempted to cure patients’ false belief in sickness: “Illness, he said, was caused by people’s false beliefs, their failure to recognize that the body was a reflection of the mind and that the mind was whole and perfect . . . change the mind, correct the beliefs, and the body healed of its own accord” (113).

Eddy channeled elements of Quimby’s philosophy when she argued that the body does not exist except in the mind and that all is Spirit, not Matter; sickness is thus an expression of a false belief that Matter is real.¹⁹ Some, like Julius Dresser, claimed that Eddy plagiarized Quimby’s views in her magnum opus, *Science and Health*, an accusation that would haunt Eddy

and her church for decades (Gill 138–146). But by aligning *Science and Health* with the Bible, Eddy took Quimby's principles in a more Christological direction than his other devotees, such as the Dressers or Warren Felt Evans, fellow patients who became New Thought pioneers in their own right (Squires, *Healing the Nation* 66). Meanwhile, Eddy attempted to distance Christian Science from its mesmeric roots by denouncing the practices of her rivals (especially competing New Thought sects) as “malicious animal magnetism,” contrasting their heterodox methods with her own Bible-based practices. Unlike Eddy, other New Thought leaders had “no codified religious doctrine”; instead, they liberally mixed heterodox religious traditions like Spiritualism, Theosophy, and elements of Buddhism and Vedanta with their own distinctive philosophies (66).

From these eclectic roots in mid-nineteenth-century pseudoscience and heterodox faith practices, New Thought would grow into a ubiquitous part of American life. Various official branches of New Thought survive today, the best known being Christian Science with tens of thousands of members worldwide – down from a peak of 269,000 in 1936 (Squires, *Healing the Nation* 3; Satter 5).²⁰ In addition to being more Bible-based than other branches of New Thought, Christian Science is more hierarchical and restrictive. Unlike members of other New Thought sects, Christian Scientists notoriously eschew mainstream medicine in favor of treatment by prayer. Although Eddy's Mother Church ostensibly leaves medical decisions up to the individual, Christian Science branch churches can strip members of leadership positions for undergoing surgery, taking painkillers, and so forth (Fraser 131). The gradual decline of this religion – suggested by dwindling subscriptions to church periodicals and the closing of branch churches – may have something to do with the increasing efficacy of mainstream medical care over the last century and a half (Fraser 399–400). Christian Science also faces competition from alternative health practices currently in vogue, including imports from the East. As of 2015, according to Steve Silberman, “Americans now consult their homeopaths, naturopaths, herbalists, acupuncturists, chiropractors, and Reiki workers more often than they see their primary care physicians” (70). This fact suggests that widespread distrust of mainstream medicine persists well into the twenty-first century. But skeptics are no longer flocking to Christian Science for answers.

Other prominent New Thought ministries active today include Divine Science Federation International, Religious Science, and Unity Church based in Kansas City, whose periodical *Daily Word* (1924–present) had

1.2 million subscribers as of 2002 (Albanese 434). Because these branches of New Thought tend to be more flexible in their application – with some, like Unity Church, calling themselves movements as opposed to religious sects – they may stand a better chance of long-term survival than Christian Science (430). New Thought also thrives outside of the United States, as suggested by the success of Tokyo-based New Thought organization Seicho-No-Ie, founded in 1930, which had 1.5 million members worldwide in 2014 (“Summary of Seicho-No-Ie”). Since the mid-twentieth century, Seicho-No-Ie (loosely translated as “House of Growth”) has been the largest organized New Thought sect in the world, with substantial followings in Japan, Brazil, the United States, and elsewhere (Braden 499). Although Seicho-No-Ie differs from other New Thought groups by incorporating aspects of traditional Japanese Buddhism, its teachings otherwise resemble those of Religious Science and Unity Church in the United States (496).

For members of these sects, New Thought consists of a set of beliefs and practices as well as a distinct religious outlook in which God is love, good is universal, and spirit (mind) triumphs over matter (one’s body and surroundings).²¹ According to this view, sickness, death, and other evils are illusions generated by our flawed understanding of a perfect universe. These illusions can be corrected through continual prayer and right thinking. New Thought thus fostered “healthy-minded attitudes” and feelings of “courage, hope, and trust,” as Harvard psychologist William James wrote in his influential book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902 [91]). New Thought’s rosy perspective appealed to downcast Americans in the wake of their country’s devastating Civil War, especially to those afflicted by that quintessential disease of modern life, neurasthenia or “Americanitis,” as James called it (Beck). Symptoms of this condition, whose emergence coincided with the rise of New Thought, included depression, anxiety, headaches, insomnia, indigestion, and a host of other stress-related ailments. Physicians such as Silas Weir Mitchell and George Miller Beard attributed such symptoms to the increasing speed and complexity of urban life in Gilded-Age America.²²

While New Thought’s hopeful tone comforted nervous Americans, the religious movement also provided them with welcome relief from the fire and brimstone Calvinism of their Puritan forebears, epitomized by Jonathan Edwards’s sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741). For instance, Eddy’s spiritual autobiography, *Retrospection and Introspection* (1891), describes her disillusionment with the Congregationalist faith of her youth, particularly its emphasis on predestination and its “belief in a final

judgment-day, in the dangers of endless punishment, and in a Jehovah merciless towards unbelievers” (13). When Eddy developed the tenets of Christian Science later in life, she would largely erase these elements from her new religion, even if her writing retained a tinge of Calvinist rigor.²³

In their relentless optimism, nineteenth-century New Thought followers reacted against what they saw as morbid approaches towards spirituality and health that were doing real harm to faithful Christians. Many testimonials by New Thought converts describe how the writers were made ill by the stern Calvinism of their era and the belief that sickness is a visitation from God that must be stoically endured.²⁴ New Thought fiction includes similar anecdotes. In Henry Wood’s novel *Edward Burton* (1891), for example, the eponymous protagonist suffers from a protracted bout of neurasthenia after attending a religious seminary where Edwards’s sermons are held in high regard. After medical remedies fail, the hero discovers New Thought and quickly recovers. Wood’s tale mirrored the author’s own life, as he experienced a nervous collapse prior to his New Thought conversion.

For similar reasons, many members of traditional Protestant sects explored New Thought as a complement to (rather than a replacement of) their beliefs. For example, Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery, a lifelong Presbyterian and devout minister’s wife, wrote popular novels with New Thought content. She and her readers apparently saw no friction between the disparate religious views she espoused. Like Eddy, Montgomery turned to New Thought as a relief from the Calvinist beliefs in predestination and hellfire and as a treatment for her own ailments. In her private journals from 1891, for instance, Montgomery wrote that orthodox preachers “could never make me believe that God ordains any of his creatures to eternal torture ‘for his own good-will and pleasure’” (qtd. in Rubio, *Wings* 63). The author also experimented with various New Thought practices to reduce her neurasthenic symptoms, which included insomnia, headaches, and alternating moods of elation and depression. This example shows that heterodox believers like Montgomery could still be respected members, even leaders, of traditional Protestant congregations, without necessarily incurring the disapproval of their peers.²⁵ Another high-profile (but considerably more problematic) example is Trump, who is both a Presbyterian and a devotee of Norman Vincent Peale’s gospel of success, which is derived from New Thought (Burke; Dias). That one can hold New Thought beliefs alongside other religious views has vastly increased the movement’s reach and popular appeal.

While New Thought softened the sterner elements of early nineteenth-century Calvinism to create a kinder, gentler faith, it also required followers to embrace denial as a way of life – sometimes quite literally, as in guided meditations where believers affirmed positive thoughts (for example, “God is Love,” “Life is good”) and denied negative ones (Hopkins, *Class Lessons* 8–9). In the 1880s and 90s, for example, popular New Thought leader Emma Curtis Hopkins instructed her students to repeat “There is no SIN! SICKNESS! DEATH!” and “There is no reality in evil” until they could internalize these ideas (27). Rather than seeing the world as it is, such believers saw it as they wished it to be, for better or worse. Ehrenreich points out that positive thinking can be “delusional” if carried to extremes, and that a certain amount of “anxious vigilance” is necessary to survival (195, 199). Perhaps more ominously, she suggests how New Thought can be harnessed for purposes of social control. New Thought’s emphasis on optimism and personal responsibility, whether directed at disgruntled workers, the unemployed, or cancer patients, encourages individuals to focus on self-improvement rather than social change. While no one would recommend relentless negativity as an approach to life’s problems, Ehrenreich’s criticisms of New Thought seem well-founded.

One must also question whether New Thought in its various forms leads to personal happiness, as its proponents allege. Conventional wisdom suggests that positive thinking is good for you, like eating your vegetables. In a medical context, positive thinking has a placebo effect that may account for some of the apparently miraculous cures ascribed to New Thought and Christian Science (Harrington 103–138). Even skeptics would probably agree that optimism is at least better than unrelieved pessimism or a defeatist attitude.

But New Thought in its various forms can do considerable harm. Consider the tragic fates of children whose Christian Scientist parents refuse to seek medical assistance for treatable ailments such as earaches, diabetes, appendicitis, and so forth. Since the nineteenth century, accidental deaths of Christian Scientists’ children have spawned contentious legal cases and garnered negative publicity in America and abroad, as historians like Schoepflin have described. Such cases form the emotional core of Emily Fridlund’s bestselling novel *History of Wolves* (2017), which was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize, and of Fraser’s *God’s Perfect Child* – both written by current or former Christian Scientists.²⁶

Still other writers, like memoirists Greenhouse and Wilson, recount the agonizing deaths of adult Christian Scientists who refused medical

treatment for serious ailments until it was too late. These stories remind us that while adult Christian Scientists make the conscious choice to opt out of medical treatment – unlike children, who have no say in the matter – their decisions may still cause unnecessary suffering for themselves and their loved ones. Adult Christian Scientists may also be swayed by familial or peer pressure, like Greenhouse's late mother, whose husband made his living as a Christian Science practitioner. To protect his professional reputation, he concealed symptoms of his wife's advanced colon cancer from family and friends and discouraged her from seeking medical attention, thus hastening her death. Oddly enough, a similar case inspired the 1991 Metallica song "The God That Failed" from the commercially successful *Black Album*. Lead singer James Hetfield's mother was a Christian Scientist who died after refusing treatment for cancer.

Even in cases where no lives are at stake, relentless positivity can set people up for disappointment. It can also foster what Lauren Berlant has called "cruel optimism," that is, "a relation . . . [that] exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). She cites, for instance, the American Dream as one "fantasy of the good life" that may be less available to modern Americans than it was to their parents or grandparents, especially those who grew up during the relatively stable economic period following the Second World War (1).²⁷ Even though such optimistic fantasies can "make life bearable" in the present, striving for unrealistic goals eventually leads to frustration, dissociation, and cognitive dissonance (14).

While Berlant views cruel optimism as a distinctly modern phenomenon, there are striking similarities between the current cultural moment (which has been called the "new Gilded Age") and New Thought's heyday around the turn of the twentieth century. In the United States, the period from 1870 to 1900 witnessed economic booms and busts that fostered a sense of precarity among ordinary citizens. While robber barons like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller possessed the lion's share of wealth and influence, working-class laborers (especially women, people of color, and immigrants) struggled to earn subsistence-level wages. Then as now, New Thought tended to obscure the inequalities of American life, while giving people an illusory sense of control over their fluctuating personal circumstances. It is no coincidence that people in economically vulnerable demographics, such as women and African Americans, have numbered among New Thought's most visible and enthusiastic proponents, from the nineteenth century until the present day.²⁸

If New Thought sometimes trespassed against common sense – or foreclosed avenues for social awareness and political activism – it was nonetheless useful to early followers, who included an eclectic mix of proto-feminists, nervous invalids, and would-be millionaires striving for business success. In his satirical novel *Babbitt* (1922), Sinclair Lewis paints a humorous picture of a New Thought meeting circa 1920, led by the suggestively named “Mrs. Opal Emerson Mudge.” His description reveals much about the composition of the movement:

Here were gathered sixty-five women and ten men. Most of the men slouched in their chairs and wiggled, while their wives sat rigidly at attention, but two of them – red-necked, meaty men – were as respectably devout as their wives. They were newly rich contractors who, having bought houses, motors, hand-painted pictures, and gentlemanliness, were now buying a refined ready-made philosophy. (356)

As this passage suggests, New Thought was initially most attractive to middle-class white women, particularly during the 1880s and 1890s, when the movement’s main emphases were spirituality and healing. Many of the women drawn to New Thought suffered from neurasthenia. Faced with a daunting array of medical treatment options – from institutionalization to gynecological surgery to rest cures consisting of bed rest and force feeding – such women understandably viewed mind cure as a benign alternative. Still other women, like *Babbitt*’s neglected wife, Myra, used New Thought to cope with domestic troubles such as demanding husbands, misbehaving children, and downward economic mobility – though they might not say so outright. As Myra diplomatically explains to her spouse, New Thought appeals to her because “women need inspiration now” (Lewis 356).

But New Thought was more than a coping strategy. It also provided women with economic and leadership opportunities at a time when they were denied the vote and barred from entry into most professions. Women like the fictional Opal Emerson Mudge could earn a comfortable living as New Thought lecturers or healers, though few became anywhere near as rich or influential as Hopkins or Eddy. Moreover, as Satter emphasizes, New Thought allowed women to exercise a variety of soft power that circumvented conservative nineteenth-century gender norms, but still granted women unprecedented cultural and religious authority.²⁹ Most, though not all, of the New Thought novels discussed in this book, including those written after 1900, can be traced back to this earlier feminist strain of the religion. This may help to explain why some of the

titles I discuss, such as *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, or *Anne of Green Gables*, remain perennial favorites with women readers.

In contrast to the feminine atmosphere of early New Thought, the next generation of New Thought leaders attracted male converts by focusing on financial success and mental mastery of one's environment through positive thinking. This prosperity-oriented New Thought took root around 1900 and reached full flower during the Great Depression. The two "newly rich contractors" in Lewis's fictional New Thought meeting probably represent this later strand of the movement, which remains visible today in prosperity gospel and in works such as Napoleon Hill's enduring bestseller *Think and Grow Rich* (1937).³⁰ In the mid-twentieth century, pastor Norman Vincent Peale continued this tradition of New Thought success literature with his book *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), which sold millions of copies and spent 186 weeks atop the *New York Times* bestseller list (Burke).

Since then, corporations have turned to positive thinking to motivate stressed employees and maximize productivity, especially following the waves of corporate downsizing that began in the 1980s (Ehrenreich 108). New Thought-inspired gurus such as Tony Robbins, Zig Ziglar, and Tom Peters earn hefty speaker's fees at corporate-sponsored events by exhorting employees to harness the law of attraction to achieve their full potential. As Ehrenreich explains, such events frequently resemble political rallies or religious revivals rather than staid corporate affairs; employees often break down in tears or get caught up in the rush of "motivational adrenaline" that these charismatic speakers provide (106). On the flip side of the coin, prosperity gospel sermons may employ the same motivational platitudes offered by Robbins, Ziglar, and others. These alliances trouble the still prevalent assumption that religion and capitalism inhabit separate realms or follow separate historical trajectories, as scholars such as Graham Ward, Russel McCutcheon, and Michael Kaufmann have suggested (Branch 95–96).

In most histories of New Thought, financial success literature and prosperity gospel overshadow the feminist, health-conscious strain of New Thought popular in the late-nineteenth century. But both strands help us understand the current intellectual climate. When one examines New Thought novels, it becomes especially clear that the earlier, woman-centered strand of New Thought never died out – it simply went underground, surviving in fiction, self-help books, and certain types of psychotherapy.

Children's Literature and the Rise of "Mind Cure" examines these survivals among other legacies of New Thought novels. One reason for New

Thought's persistence, I argue, is its tendency to blur the line between sacred and secular. In a recent issue of *Nineteenth-Century Literature* devoted to new religious movements (NRMs), Charles LaPorte and Sebastian Lecourt observe that NRMs such as New Thought, Spiritualism, and Theosophy pose unique challenges to the secularization thesis: that is, the once widespread (and still surprisingly resilient) belief among religious scholars, philosophers, and historians that modernization goes hand in hand with increasing secularism. While NRMs might seem to provide evidence against the secularization thesis, they actually raise tantalizing questions about what counts as religion and why:

Are NRMs proof that we have never been secular? Are they evidence that modernity experiences moments of counter-secularization? Or might their existence somehow corroborate the secularization story? For in fact there exists a healthy sociological tradition of interpreting secularization as a process of religious compartmentalization that also enables proliferation. (LaPorte and Lecourt 149)

NRMs also suggest the triumph of the free market in the realm of religion as in other aspects of modern life: "Religion, unmoored from the domain of official power, migrates into the realm of consumer choice" (LaPorte and Lecourt 150). This is perhaps especially true of New Thought, which is historically allied with capitalist enterprise in ways other NRMs are not.

Fiction has helped New Thought survive by intentionally blurring boundaries between religion and entertainment. Novels like *The Secret Garden* package faith-based messages in appealing tales directed at lay readers and young people. As a result, their religious content is simultaneously absorbed and overlooked (or at least, overlooked *as religion*). In contrast to early twentieth-century readers who immediately recognized *The Secret Garden* as "a Christian Science book," modern readers are unlikely to view concepts like positive thinking, thought-transference, or the law of attraction as religious, perhaps because they have seen such ideas presented in secular contexts (V. Burnett 377). Predictably, such New Thought fictions have nurtured generations of "spiritual, but not religious" readers who often have difficulty pinpointing the sources of their views about God, spirituality, and the afterlife.³¹

This book also explores the interplay between New Thought literature and popular psychology. The works discussed here helped disseminate psychological concepts and practices we now take for granted, such as silent meditation, creative visualization, daily affirmations and denials, and the inner child.³² In twenty-first-century psychology and self-help

literature, the inner child stands for a person's true or spiritual self, which can serve as a reservoir of strength and untapped creativity. The inner child can also be wounded by past traumas and require healing to reach its full potential. This figure descends from the feminist strand of New Thought promoted by Hopkins, Eddy, and others in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Both then and now, the inner child has helped women negotiate conflicting demands on their time and intervene in ongoing debates about women's agency and status. Predictably, the antifeminist pushback to the idea of the inner child has been fierce, whether it comes from acerbic reviewers' pens, literary authors like Henry James, or sketch comedy shows such as *Saturday Night Live* (1975-present), which mocked this and other self-help concepts via Al Franken's recurring character Stuart Smalley in the 1990s. These examples suggest the degree to which New Thought and New Thought-derived ideas are subjected to ridicule or outright dismissal by scholars, journalists, and other cultural gatekeepers. Dismissing New Thought is potentially dangerous, however, because it leaves unexamined the many legacies of this religious movement in the twenty-first century.

Chapters

Children's Literature and the Rise of "Mind Cure" draws on a wide range of sources to explore the role of New Thought in society. But the volume's primary focus is on fiction as opposed to religious tracts, public lectures, or popular self-help books. Admittedly, some of this fiction was written by early New Thought leaders or Christian Scientists for didactic purposes. Such writers occasionally used literary works to convert nonbelievers or to demonstrate how one might apply the abstract principles of these faiths in daily life. The latter task was crucial given the sheer impenetrability of one of New Thought's central texts, Eddy's *Science and Health*, whose "unmeaning tangle of twists and snarls" confused even her most devoted followers, and provided ample comic fodder for Twain (Yates 222). To the extent that New Thought fiction taught believers how to "demonstrate" their faith through action, this study belongs to the domain of lived religion, a subfield of religious studies that emphasizes the everyday practices of laymen rather than church doctrine or textual exegesis, and that tries to "reclaim and establish the importance of texts and activities that all too readily are ignored or trivialized," in the words of historian David Hall (ix).

Didactic religious fictions like Wood's *Edward Burton*, Stockham and Hood's *Koradine Letters*, or Burnham's *Jewel* were arguably less concerned with "art for art's sake" than with "nonliterary ways of reading" that privileged emotional engagement, immediacy, and practical application of religious principles, as historian Erin Smith suggests (3). By contrast, the classic literary works foregrounded in this volume – such as *The Secret Garden*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Herland*, and *The Turn of the Screw* – are considerably more sophisticated and widely acclaimed. These works won popular success and critical accolades in their own day and continue to be widely read and taught in the twenty-first century. While these novels' New Thought content may have buoyed their initial success, their enduring fame has more to do with their literary quality than with any overt religious message. Indeed, the authors examined here range from New Thought devotees like Burnett to interested dabblers like Gilman and Montgomery to skeptics like James, demonstrating that New Thought's reach extended well beyond those affiliated with the faith.

Accordingly, few of the mainstream literary works discussed here promoted New Thought dogmatically or uncritically.³³ Burnett's novels entertainingly dramatize situations central to New Thought, such as the practice of faith healing or the achievement of prosperity through positive thinking (think of Colin Craven's miraculous cure or Little Lord Fauntleroy's rags to riches transformation). But while she was deeply interested in Christian Science, Burnett denied formal affiliation with the religion. She aimed to inspire and uplift readers rather than to convert them. Meanwhile, Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and its sequels use New Thought to soften the fire-and-brimstone Calvinism that dominates the Presbyterian community of Avonlea, thereby demonstrating the potential compatibility of New Thought and competing Protestant faiths. Gilman's *Herland* takes Eddy's views on the obsolescence of marriage and childbirth in surprisingly literal directions, suggesting intriguing overlaps between first-wave feminism and New Thought. Finally, James's *The Turn of the Screw* takes a critical view of New Thought in response to Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and its unrealistic ideal of childhood innocence.

These literary authors grappled with New Thought in the form as well as the substance of their works. Consummate literary stylist James famously creates a "trap" for readers of *The Turn of the Screw* by employing an unreliable narrator whose ambiguous prose raises more questions than it answers (Felman 101). His novella confounds readers seeking easy solutions to questions about spirituality, as discussed in chapter two. Only by

reading his work alongside *Little Lord Fauntleroy* – a seemingly unlikely counterpoint – can we discern James’s disapproval of New Thought attitudes towards children and child rearing. Gilman, by contrast, professes to be ignorant or unconcerned by matters of style in works such as *Herland*. But by employing a literary narrative as opposed to her usual genre – the political treatise – Gilman can present her ideas about childcare, eugenics, and women’s work in an unfamiliar fictional setting that helps insulate them from controversy. Choosing utopian science fiction as a mode, meanwhile, allows Gilman to sidestep the real-world problems that might arise if these controversial political ideas were applied in practice. As a result of these choices, *Herland* notoriously lacks suspense or individual character development. Yet these seeming “flaws” evoke the peaceful heaven on earth touted by New Thought leaders, where selflessness and maternal love reign supreme. These examples suggest the importance of literary style, even when authors deny its significance. As Gilman’s *Herland* shows, simply choosing to write fiction instead of polemic is a decision with far-reaching consequences.

This volume showcases multiple stylistic possibilities by covering novels from various genres (children’s fiction, popular romances, *Bildungsromane*, gothic horror, and utopian science fiction) that combine New Thought with a focus on childhood and adolescence. While some of these works are justly forgotten, others remain central to our collective cultural consciousness. Most obviously, *The Turn of the Screw* is one of the most widely taught and studied works in the English language. Though less canonical, *The Secret Garden* is no less well known. Large numbers of women feel an intense and lifelong attachment to Burnett’s most famous novel, as her biographer, Gretchen Gerzina, explains (xiv). Christian Scientists are even more likely than most to feel drawn to *The Secret Garden*, as I learned during a visit to the Mary Baker Eddy Library in 2015.³⁴ *Anne of Green Gables* – which has sold over fifty million copies since its first publication in 1908 – likewise serves as an important touchstone for many female readers (Gammel, *Looking for Anne* 13; Ross 422). *Anne* even enjoys an unlikely popularity in Japan, where it has spawned cartoons, a now-defunct theme park (“Canadian World” in Hokkaido), and a vogue for Prince Edward Island tourism (Trillin 216–217). New Thought played a role in this unique cross-cultural phenomenon. The translation of *Anne* into Japanese in 1952 coincided with the rise of Seicho-No-Ie, which attracted around two million members in the decades following the Second World War (Akamatsu, “Japanese Readings” 208; “Seicho-No-Ie” 214). This Tokyo-based New Thought movement primed Japanese readers to see *Anne of*

Green Gables as representing “a positive way of thinking” that “make[s] life more beautiful” (Akamatsu, “Japanese Readings” 208).

The above example shows that the popularity of New Thought novels is not limited to English speakers or to Western nations. But I suspect that these works have been most influential in Anglophone regions where they are routinely read during childhood. Accordingly, the book’s chapters focus on American authors like Gilman as well as British, transatlantic, and Canadian authors who helped import this religious movement to their native lands.

What these diverse authors have in common, aside from an interest in New Thought, is ongoing concern with mental illness. Three of the four authors discussed here – Burnett, Gilman, and Montgomery – experienced symptoms suggestive of bipolar disorder, while James’s family was riddled with mental illness, from his sister Alice’s nervous invalidism to his father Henry Senior’s religious hallucinations. These authors’ interest in and experience of chronic mental illness may help to explain why their New Thought fictions intersect with twentieth-century popular psychology in suggestive ways.

For instance, Chapter one examines Burnett’s New Thought blockbuster *Little Lord Fauntleroy* alongside contemporaneous New Thought writing to uncover the origins of the modern inner child. Emma Curtis Hopkins, the leading New Thought teacher of the 1880s and 1890s, described an idealized “Man Child” within each adult woman who could lead her to spiritual serenity and worldly success. Burnett fictionalized this figure in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, whose eponymous child hero helps his mother achieve undreamed-of wealth and status. He also serves as her proxy outside of the domestic sphere, allowing her to reach personal goals without appearing selfish or inappropriately ambitious. The novel’s enormous popularity may have had something to do with this symbiotic relationship between mother and son. Then as now, the inner child helped women reconcile social pressures to be selfless and giving with career pursuits and self-indulgent behavior. The persistence of the inner child suggests that contemporary feminism still has work to do in enabling women to embrace opportunities without guilt.

Chapter two turns to Henry James’s supernatural classic *The Turn of the Screw* to show the backlash of the literary intelligentsia against New Thought and the inner child. James’s famous ghost story and his earlier work *The Bostonians* (1886) number among several prominent literary works of the era that make fun of Christian Science and New Thought, including Lewis’s *Babbitt*; Edith Wharton’s short story “A Journey” (1899); Twain’s unfinished

work “The Secret History of Eddypus, World Empire” (1901–1902); and Twain’s essays about Eddy collected in the volume *Christian Science* (1907). This chapter reads *The Turn of the Screw* as a critical response to *Little Lord Fauntleroy* that mocks the book’s saccharine portrayal of innocent children and its New Thought overtones. While siblings Miles and Flora initially resemble Fauntleroy in their youth, beauty, and apparent innocence, their subsequent actions could not be more different. Whereas Burnett’s protagonist heals his grieving mother and depressed grandfather and brings them spiritual peace, Miles and Flora lead their governess to the brink of madness by consorting with evil spirits. James, who wrote so perceptively about the inner life of a child a year earlier in *What Maisie Knew* (1897), deliberately portrayed Miles and Flora as opaque, unsympathetic, and allied with dark forces. In so doing, he skewered New Thought’s relentless idealization of children as conduits to God. He also paved the way for more recent depictions of evil children in horror fiction and in films such as *The Bad Seed* (1956), *The Omen* (1976), or *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011).

Chapter three returns to Burnett, examining her classic work *The Secret Garden* as a feminist, Christian Scientist response to the rest cure. This cure, which was invented by Philadelphia neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell in the 1870s, involved bed rest, isolation, and force feeding. Burnett herself underwent at least three modified rest cures during her lifetime, but lasting relief of her symptoms eluded her. In *The Secret Garden*, child protagonist Mary Lennox stands in for charismatic leader Mary Baker Eddy, who died shortly after the serial version of *The Secret Garden* began its run in *The American Magazine* in November 1910. Mary Lennox heals her bedridden cousin Colin Craven by convincing him to abandon a regimen of enforced bed rest and social isolation. Colin’s father, Archibald Craven, is likewise healed of his depression when he sees the changes Mary has wrought in his son. By showing a young girl curing hysterical males, Burnett inverted the gender politics of the rest cure and contradicted its key principles.

Chapter four turns to Montgomery, the sole Canadian author in this volume. New Thought provided Montgomery with an escape from the rigid Presbyterianism of her rural Prince Edward Island community and helped to assuage her mental health complaints, ranging from chronic insomnia to alternating moods of elation and despair. Ultimately, New Thought was not enough to save Montgomery, who committed suicide in 1942 – a long-held secret finally revealed by her heirs in 2008. But New Thought permeates her fiction, particularly *Anne of Green Gables*, which features an inspired girl child in the New Thought mold. Anne Shirley’s revitalizing influence on her adoptive parents, her remarkable healing of

a dying baby, and her transformative imagination all signal her conformity to this role. So do her homosocial relationships with female “kindred spirits” like her “bosom friend,” Diana Barry. As Satter relates, unusually close relationships between women were a common feature of New Thought novels, which appealed to lesbian and bisexual readers and women seeking escape from oppressive marriages (134). The conclusion of this chapter turns to Montgomery’s later novel, the adult-themed comedy *The Blue Castle* (1926), to show that New Thought was more than a passing fancy for the author. Rather, it was a coping strategy that she returned to throughout her life and explored in various genres, from children’s literature to romances for adult readers.

Chapter five examines the work of feminist writer and lecturer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the only unequivocally American writer in this volume and the sole political activist. While not a children’s author per se, Gilman foregrounded motherhood and childcare in her polemical works and her fiction. She also included unexpected borrowings from New Thought in her novels and life writing. For instance, Gilman’s utopian novel *Herland*, which appeared serially in her self-published magazine, *The Forerunner* (1909–1916), resonates with Eddy’s *Science and Health*. Gilman’s all-female utopia, in which parthenogenesis has replaced sexual reproduction, resembles Eddy’s imagined future in which “there will be no more marrying nor giving in marriage” and women and men will increasingly resemble one another in body and mind (*Science and Health* 64).³⁵ The Herlanders’ worship of a loving “Mother Spirit,” their reverence for maternity, and their practice of communal child-rearing likewise mirror Eddy’s androgynous “Father-Mother God, all-harmonious” and her emphasis on maternal feeling. *Herland* thus fulfills Eddy’s millennial predictions as well as Gilman’s feminist ideals.

In selecting material for these chapters, I have had to make difficult choices. For instance, I could just as easily have devoted chapter four to *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* as *Anne of Green Gables*, two very similar novels written only five years apart. Both feature optimistic young orphans (or half-orphans, in Rebecca’s case) whose charming personalities win over their adoptive guardians and earn them a respected place in their communities. Though these “Growing-Girl” narratives chronicle the maturation of their heroines, they leave their protagonists arrested on the threshold of adulthood; Rebecca does not marry her benefactor Adam Ladd, despite many narrative hints to this effect, while Anne’s marriage to Gilbert Blythe is deferred until book five of the series (Hatch 32; Griswold 86).³⁶

In their heyday, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and *Anne of Green Gables* were similarly beloved and culturally influential. Both numbered among the top bestsellers of their decade and inspired popular screen adaptations in the teens, twenties, and thirties (Griswold vii–viii). Ultimately, I decided to focus on the *Anne* books due to their more enduring influence in the twenty-first century, as attested by a spate of recent film and television adaptations. I was also intrigued by *Anne*'s Canadian origins and by the book's popularity in Japan, both of which show the spread of New Thought beyond US borders.

Also unjustly neglected here is *Pollyanna*, a New Thought novel that enjoyed remarkable success upon its first publication, selling over a million copies and going through forty-seven printings by 1920 (215). The book also inspired thirteen sequels, a popular board game by Parker Brothers, and several film versions, the most memorable being Disney's 1960 adaptation starring Hayley Mills. But *Pollyanna* has not stood the test of time as well as similar predecessors like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* or the *Anne* books, perhaps because its heroine comes across as preachy and saccharine to modern readers. Though no longer widely read, the book survives in the popular lexicon (a "Pollyanna" refers, predictably, to an excessively cheerful or optimistic person). While I touch on *Rebecca* and *Pollyanna* in Chapter four and in the epilogue, I leave it to future scholars of New Thought fiction to give these works the extended attention they deserve.

These omissions notwithstanding, I have tried to evoke the richness and variety of New Thought novels as well as their coherence around woman- and child-centered themes. While many of these works are directed at young people, they address perennial feminist concerns such as the pursuit of meaningful careers, work–life balance, childcare, and the creation of a distinctively feminine spirituality. They also confront mental health problems like depression and anxiety with refreshing honesty, if also with a degree of wishful thinking. In part because they are often classed as popular or young adult literature, such works function as Trojan Horses disguising controversial messages as harmless entertainment. These are just some of the reasons why these works remain widely read, beloved, and immensely influential in ways that scholars are just beginning to understand.