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'Spasms in my side, and pains in my head': An Exploration of the Relationship Between Immorality, Scandal, and Conduct, and Sickness and Health in Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice.*

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Adeline Mowbray, an exploration of the implications of non-marital cohabitation in 19th century Britain, has long left critics questioning Opie's own stance on the issue. While some have read the text, and particularly the downfall of its female protagonist, as 'a critique of the 1790s and the radical theories popularized by Godwin, Holcroft, and Inchbald', others have proposed that the tale is not a condemnation of Godwinian, or indeed Wollstonecraftian politics, but instead 'a call' for additional texts to explore feminism and women's experiences, more generally.[1] Given that Opie herself was an 'early enthusiast for radical philosophy', as well as a close friend of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, on whom *Adeline Mowbray's* principal characters appear to be partly based, it seems unlikely that her text would deliberately condemn the behaviour of Adeline and Glenmurray.[2] However, the fate, and ill-health that these characters face may suggest otherwise. Written in 'an age of pandemic, of ever-present illness and high rates of infant mortality', it is perhaps unsurprising that sickness and death consistently appear throughout the text, yet the resurgence of these themes is far more unswerving, and seemingly deliberate, than in other texts from the period, such as *Pride and Prejudice,* often considered the 'lightest' and 'least didactic' of Jane Austen's novels.[3] Furthermore, in *Adeline Mowbray,* there appears to be a relationship between the potential immorality, and scandal of characters' behaviour, and sickness, complying with medical literature from the era claiming that 'passions' significantly affected health.[4] However, in *Pride and Prejudice* such a relationship is less apparent, despite evidence from the period suggesting a belief that 'temperance', 'vigour of body' and 'purity of mind', qualities that at least some of Austen's characters fall short of, lead to 'health and strength'.[5] This essay will explore the relationship between morality, conduct and health, in order to further understand potential readings of both texts, particularly in regards to how sickness may be read as a criticism of certain behavioural patterns, or society in the romantic period, more generally.

Throughout *Adeline Mowbray,* there is an implication that non-marital sex and cohabitation, as well as other immoral behaviour, leads to sickness, and even death. From the outset, Glenmurray is already in ill-health. Although little information is given regarding the origins of his sickness, it is understood that Glenmurray's controversial writings attacking various 'moral' institutions, such as marriage, quickly infiltrate the mind of the young Adeline.[6] As it was believed that health and morality were intertwined, the onset of Glenmurray's ill-health is likely due to his 'immoral' writings attacking the 'virtue' and 'purity of mind' of young women. Similarly, Glenmurray's health falls into rapid decline, and becomes physically visible, once he has 'seduced' Adeline, and begun cohabitation with her: 'the ravages of sickness were but too visible in Glenmurray's face and figure…the hollow paleness of his cheek, and the sunk appearance of his eyes'.[7] This sickness of course eventually leads to Glenmurray's death. However, it is worth noting that Glenmurray's health improves during time in an 'obscure' village near Falmouth, both in 'salubrious' air, but also in solitude from scandal, despite the lovers continuing to perform non-marital cohabitation. As it is 'happy love' that temporarily restores Glenmurray's health, Opie therefore may not be criticising non-marital sex, but society's condemnation of it, through Glenmurray's sickness.[8]

The location of the pair's initial acquaintance is also significant when considering beliefs from the period on both the morality, and health effects of Bath, a city which had developed into a fashionable

[1] Roxanne Eberle, 'Amelia's Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*: diverting the libertine gaze, or, The vindication of a fallen woman', *Studies in the Novel,* 26:2 (1994), 121-152, pp. 124, p. 128.
[2] Shelley King and John B. Pierce, 'Introduction', in Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, ed. by Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[3] Jane Moore and John Strachan, *Key Concepts in Romantic Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 71; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 197.
[4] Roy Porter, 'Introduction', in George Cheyne, *The English Malady,* 1733, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. ix-li, xiii.
[5] Mary Chandler, *The Description of Bath, A Poem*, 4th edn. (London, M.DCC.XXXVII: 1738), p. 5
[6] Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, ed. by Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 14.
[7] Ibid., p. 64.
[8] Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, p. 65.

hub within the first half of the eighteenth century.[9] As entry into its society was ungoverned by the strict rules applied in London, country squires or rich merchants, unaware of polite society's conventions, mingled with more affluent visitors, resulting in advantageous and unconventional marriages frequently being sought after.[10] Throughout the late Georgian era Bath was met with an ever-widening social profile of visitors and residents, resulting in rising levels of anxiety about public order (See *Appendix A-B*).[11] Additionally, medical 'experts' began describing health issues in Bath, despite many retreating to its waters for their supposed benefits.[12] For example, medical articles warned of misdiagnosis of 'fashionable' illnesses by Bath's doctors, also claiming that its crowded rooms and excessive heat and moisture from baths and fires were hazardous to health. Therefore, the medical view proposed that colds would be more easily caught by the healthy, and invalids would face more severe illnesses.[13] Thus, Glenmurray, in an attempt to improve his health, not only potentially damages it further, but also 'infiltrates' society's polite, eligible, young women, 'infecting' them with his own immorality. Sickness in this instance is therefore not only a symptom of immorality, but a catalyst for its infiltration into the wider community, conveying societal fears around both the social transgressions and medical risks of spending time in Bath.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia Bennett and Wickham also engage in pre-marital cohabitation, without their health being negatively affected. Though early reviews commended Austen for providing an 'excellent lesson' on the 'folly of letting young girls have their own way', the pair emerge from scandal relatively unscathed, experiencing only an 'unsettled' manner of living, and their affections sinking into 'indifference', rather than sickness.[14] In fact, the only character who faces physical sickness is the virtuous and moral Jane, after travelling on horseback to Netherfield in fierce weather conditions, much to the delight of her mother, whose 'lucky idea' to ensure Jane stays the night at Netherfield sacrifices her daughter's health.[15] Though it has been noted that this allows Austen to illustrate moral character, highlighting the shamelessness of Mrs Bennet 'marooning' Jane to promote her relationship with the affluent Bingley, it also portrays the potential dangers and hardships women faced in order to secure their position in society.[16] While it is understood that the novel creates a 'social synthesis', as both Elizabeth and Jane marry into higher ranks than their own family, Jane's sickness presents a manifestation of the struggle and pressure young women encountered in order to achieve such 'synthesis'.[17] Furthermore, an analysis of medical literature from the period reveals that Jane's sickness also works to convey the tensions, and hazardous effects of attempting to move one's social position too rapidly or sharply. Readers of such literature were warned to 'beware of too much' lavishness in their lifestyle or diet, suggesting that sudden acquisition of 'too much' luxury could result in ill-health.[18] Additionally, these texts cautioned against returning to comfort too hastily after spending time travelling in cold weather, warning that the more individuals attempt to heat themselves, 'the more chilly and uncomfortable you will become. For you are now in for a severe cold, which will be accompanied by a smart fever…Had you avoided the fire side and the heating liquors; and walked about in the cool…all had been well'.[19] As medical advice stated that heating the body too suddenly could result in colds, or even inflammatory diseases, we may therefore read Jane's sickness not as a result of 'getting wet through', but of afterwards spending the night in the luxuries of Netherfield. Mrs Bennet of course remains unaware of the dangers of positioning oneself in 'too much' luxury too rapidly, claiming that 'she will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well', thus highlighting her ignorance of the tensions and dangers that are created through the social aspirations she holds for her daughters.[20]

In *Adeline Mowbray,* the contagious quality of disease is paralleled with a seemingly 'infectious' and transmissible nature of immorality and scandalous behaviour. This is best exemplified through Mary Warner, who, after working for Adeline, gives birth to an illegitimate son, and lives under the alias of 'Mrs Montgomery'. Through working alongside, and in close proximity to Adeline, Mrs Pemberton claims

[9] David Gadd, *Georgian Summer: Bath in the Eighteenth Century* (Bath: Adams & Dart, 1971), p. vii.
[10] Ibid., pp. 53-4.
[11] Peter Borsay, *The Image of Georgian Bath: Towns, Heritage, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 291.
[12] James Makittrick Adair, *Medical Cautions, For the Consideration of Invalids (*Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1786).
[13] Ibid., pp. 18-19, 31-34.
[14] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice,* ed. by Donald Gray, 3rd edn (London: Norton, 2001), p. 253; Anonymous, 'Review of Pride and Prejudice', *Critical Review,* 1813, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments, Volume 1,* ed. by Ian Littlewood (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), pp. 271-274, 274.
[15] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice,* pp. 21-2.
[16] John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 5
[17] Butler, *Jane Austen*, p. 202.
[18] Thomas Beddoes, *A Guide for Self Preservation,* 3rd edn. (Bristol: Bulgin and Rosser, 1794), p. 15.
[19] Ibid., p. 15.
[20] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 22.

that Mary has 'lived in the contemplation of vice', with an 'air of respectability', thus making their connection all the more 'dangerous'.[21] It is therefore implied that despite spending only a small amount of time with Adeline, and being critical of her lifestyle choices, Adeline's supposedly dangerous 'immorality' has 'spread' to, and infected the lower class, and perhaps more susceptible, Mary. Mary's class is particularly significant as the lower classes were not only more vulnerable to sickness and disease due to the increasing cost and commodification of medicine, and the limited availability and success of the recently invented smallpox vaccine, but also as lower classes, and women in particular, were believed to be more susceptible to 'immoral' behavioural patterns, particularly those found in scandalous new novels, illustrated broadsheets and chapbooks aimed at less respectable audiences.[22] As illness was believed to index both class and moral behaviour, it is unsurprising that once the lower class Mary has been 'infected' with 'immorality', she soon becomes exposed to her son's smallpox. Though we never learn of Mary's fate, it is reasonable to assume that she may have contracted the smallpox which she was exposed to, as there is no mention of her having been vaccinated, and due to her lower position in society, this may have proven fatal. Regardless of this, her transgressive behaviour is severely punished through the death of her illegitimate child: 'My little boy have got the small-pox very bad, and has been likely to die from convulsion fits'.[23] Again, the implication is that sickness works as punishment for immoral and scandalous behaviour. Though some propose that Mary's 'sexual fall' took place prior to meeting Adeline, the insinuation is that Adeline's situation encourages Mary's immorality to 'grow' and 'multiply' far more rapidly and severely than it would have otherwise done.[24] Similarly, Mary's nonchalant attitude towards her immorality makes it all the more scandalous, therefore leading to her 'punishment.' It is interesting to note that the lower class, and less accomplished Mary, is punished more severely than Adeline, who succeeds in preventing her child from contracting the illness, implying that the effects of 'immoral' behaviour are more severe, persistent and perpetual for the lower classes, who were already more susceptible to disease.

Another particularly insightful aspect of health in *Pride and Prejudice* is the portrayal of Mrs Bennet's 'poor nerves'.[25] Certainly, critics have already examined the correlation between episodes of Mrs Bennet's 'nervousness', and moments when her daughters' futures are threatened, leaving her powerless to alter the situation. For instance, during Lydia's disappearance from Brighton with Wickham, she claims 'I am frightened out of my wits; and have such tremblings, such flutterings…such spasms in my side, and pains in my head, and such beatings at my heart'.[26] Her 'nerves' are therefore understood as a manner of 'recuperation', through which she may gain attention, if not genuine power and authority.[27] Similarly, it has been noted that throughout the eighteenth century many novels of sensibility depicted illness as a method of 'self-preservation' for female characters, perpetuating the view of the period that women's nerves were 'normatively' distinct from men's.[28] This view was also propelled into the public domain through medical texts claiming that 'the Fair Sex' were particularly susceptible to 'nervous distempers'.[29] However, more recently, warnings have been made regarding the danger of 'romanticizing and endorsing madness as a desirable form of rebellion', rather than the 'desperate communication of the powerless'.[30] Rather than 'romanticizing' Mrs Bennet's nervousness, I alternatively propose that it can be read as a critique of 'fashionable' diseases and the commodification of health and sickness, during the period. Social satire was already critiquing health commodification and over-diagnosis (see *Appendix C*), while medical writers claimed that the growth of chronic conditions, such as nervous maladies, hysteria and hypochondria, all conditions which appear to be experienced by Mrs Bennet, were due to 'our own creating', through urban affluence, multiplying wealth, and luxury.[31] Furthermore, other medical commentators suggested that the growth of 'nervousness' was due to its being in 'fashion', noting that prior to a publication on nervous diseases in the mid-eighteenth century, 'people of fashion had not the least idea that they had nerves', yet a 'fashionable apothecary' could now readily over-diagnose 'nervousness'.[32] This therefore resulted in the term

[21] Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, p. 121.
[22] Moore and Strachan, *Key Concepts*, p.72; John Barnard, 'Print Culture and the Book Trade, in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide,* ed. by Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 77-89, 78, 85.
[23] Opie, *Adeline Mowbray,* p. 205.
[24] Eberle, 'Diverting the Libertine Gaze', p. 141.
[25] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 4.
[26] Wiltshire, *Austen and the Body*, p. 20; Austen, *Pride and Prejudice,* p. 187.
[27] Wiltshire, *Austen and the Body,* p. 20.
[28] G. K. Barker-Benfield, *Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 32.
[29] George Cheyne, *The English Malady,* 1733, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 49.
[30] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 5.
[31] Thomas Beddoes, 1802-3, cited in Roy Porter, *Thomas Beddoes and the Sick Trade in Late-Enlightenment England* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 59-62.
[32] Adair, *Medical Cautions,* pp. 13-4.

becoming 'fashionable'. Mrs Bennet's conditions may therefore be viewed as a method of achieving social status, by appearing to be 'fashionable', in her sickness of choice. This certainly complies with her other goals, all of which centre on social climbing and materialistic, fashionable aspirations: 'Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have!'.[33] Yet more intriguingly appropriate, however, is the suggestion that by the late eighteenth century, biliary conditions became the new 'fashion', as 'nerves and nervous diseases were kicked out of doors'.[34] Mrs Bennet's nervous complaints therefore represent not only an attempt at social status acquisition through sickness, but a failed one, in which she is one step behind fashionable society, yet completely unaware of it, much like when she boasts of dining with 'four and twenty families' to Darcy's party, much to the amusement of Caroline Bingley.[35]

Though I have already noted that Adeline Mowbray is successful in protecting her child from the tragedy faced by Mary's son, she still encounters sickness as punishment for her perceivably 'immoral' behaviour. Similarly, the 'traces of the small-pox' visible on her face even after her recovery symbolise Adeline's 'immoral' past and signify its eternal effect on her reputation.[36] This appears to mirror Adeline's partial moral 'recovery' from being a mistress through her marriage to Berrendale, yet her past behaviour leaves a permanent soiling on her reputation in society, resulting in her mistreatment, as seen through the disrespectful manner in which Mr Langley behaves towards her, even after her marriage.[37] However, as Adeline's marriage so negatively impacts her mental wellbeing, resulting in loss of appetite, her feeling 'dejected', 'pensive', and with 'disappointed emotions', Opie could be critiquing the marriage, rather than the 'immoral' pre-marital cohabitation that Adeline had performed previously.[38] Similarly, when Adeline decides to marry Glenmurray to prevent their child being illegitimate, also believing that it may have a 'blessed effect' on Glenmurray's health, she is faced with 'anxiety and agitation', resulting in a miscarriage.[39] This suggests that perverting your own values and beliefs in order to conform to society's expectations and to avoid the scrutiny of negative public opinion leads to ill-health. This may also be a comment on wider society, and a metaphor for the negative effects of its rigid values and beliefs. Intriguingly, the 'symptom' presented, miscarriage, is a health issue which only women experience first-hand. While conservative thinkers believed sickness or death in childbirth highlighted 'the destiny of women', and 'the diseases to which they are liable', particularly if leading an 'immoral' life, as Adeline's miscarriage is experienced *after* agreeing to marry Glenmurray, Opie may be responding to attacks such as these, instead demonstrating the struggles women faced due to the restrictions and expectations placed on them by society.[40]

Despite this, sickness may also work as a catalyst for kindness, encouraging redemptive behaviour and relationship building. For instance, it is the 'constant recurrence' of indigestion and disturbed dreams which forces Berrendale to repent for his cruelty towards Adeline and to write a kind letter with enclosed funds, prior to being misinformed of her death.[41] Overall, though, sickness still works to punish his earlier cruelty as the 'intelligence' of Adeline's supposed death has 'a fatal effect' on Berrendale's health.[42] Similarly, sickness is responsible for the few moments of bonding and affection between Adeline and her mother. Despite failing in many motherhood duties, it is 'the tenderness with which Mrs Mowbray watched over her [Adeline] during an alarming illness' that excites Adeline's affection towards Mrs Mowbray, allowing her to feel like a mother, 'perhaps for the first time'.[43] Similarly, it is Adeline's self-induced sickness during the text's finale that reunites the pair, resulting in Mrs Mowbray telling Adeline 'never were you so dear to me as now!', bringing Adeline great joy, and peace, despite this sickness resulting in her death.[44]

It has previously been suggested that talk about health in Austen's work aids the constitution of community, allowing characters to express human solidarity by paying attention to the faces, bodies and symptoms of others.[45] This is indeed the case in *Pride and Prejudice,* in which queries and well-wishes around health and wellbeing work to express solidarity and civility, though colder enquiries around health, such as those from Caroline Bingley, also express superiority and disinterest in partaking

[33] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 247.
[34] Adair, *Medical Cautions*, p. 14.
[35] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 30.
[36] Opie, *Adeline Mowbray,* p. 227.
[37] Ibid., p. 202.
[38] Ibid., pp. 182, 184.
[39] Ibid., pp. 91, p.132.
[40] Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females* (New York: WM. Cobbett, 1800), p. 39.
[41] Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, p. 225.
[42] Ibid., p. 226.
[43] Ibid, pp. 6-8.
[44] Ibid., p. 268.
[45] Wiltshire, *Austen and the Body*, p. 6.

in more substantial conversation.[46] More significantly, it is during Elizabeth's time at Netherfield, due to Jane's sickness, which has already been examined, that Darcy is able to discover a more caring side of Elizabeth's character, aiding his growing affections towards her: 'Was there no good in your affectionate behaviour to Jane, while she was ill at Netherfield?'.[47] Sickness, therefore, may aid the building not only of familial and platonic bonding, but also of romantic attachments.

Although critics have long considered the presence of 'medicine' and its associated anxieties within romantic literary culture, these texts highlight the depiction of human experiences of a plethora of health complaints, including mental and chronic health issues, such as 'nervousness', and the variety of social commentaries and critiques which are revealed when considering them in detail.[48] Though Opie's use of sickness does, at times, appear to be condemning 'immoral' behaviour, such as pre-marital cohabitation, in other instances, such as Glenmurray's temporary recovery, and Adeline's miscarriage, it critiques the scrutiny, prejudice and rigidity of society. In *Pride and Prejudice,* analysis of medical literature from the era reveals that sickness is used not only to develop character, but also to critique, and expose, methods of societal climbing and positioning, and their dangers, despite many believing Austen had 'no interest in the broad concerns of national life'.[49] Both texts, chiefly Austen's, present sickness as an issue faced most often by women, particularly if the complaints are chronic or related to mental health, in line with public opinion endorsed by both medical and fictional literature from the period. However, rather than critiquing women, as seen in Polwhele's poetry, the complaints of women work to expose the constraints and stresses placed onto them by the conventions of society.

[46] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 114, 174.
[47] Ibid., p. 249.
[48] James Allard, 'Medicine', in *A Handbook of Romanticism Studies,* ed. by Joel Faflak and Julia Wright (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pp. 375-390, 377.
[49] Butler, *Jane Austen*, p. 161.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Rowlandson 'Comforts of Bath' satirical cartoon highlighting licentious behaviour in Bath: *Thomas Rowlandson, The Portrait, Comforts of Bath Series, 1798,* <*https://janeaustensworld.wordpress.com/2009/11/22/the-comforts-of-bath-1798-thomas-rowlandson/*>

Appendix B: Rowlandson 'Comforts of Bath' satirical cartoon highlighting tensions of intermingling of various social classes (see differing clothing/accessories) in Bath: *Thomas Rowlandson, King Bladud's Bath, Comforts of Bath Series, 1798 <King Bladud's Bath>*

Appendix C: Woodward and Rowlandson satirical cartoon highlighting scepticism around the increasing commodification of health and illness and 'fashionable' diseases:
George Woodward and Thomas Rowlandson, A Visit to the Doctor, 1806-7,
<*http://images.library.yale.edu/walpoleweb/oneitem.asp?imageId=lwlpr14628*>