

Sedating Dissent – Medical Practice and Women Addicts in Literary Texts of Late Victorian America

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Eugène Grasset, *La Morphinomane*, 1897, color lithograph

The typical habitual drug user in late nineteenth-century America: a white woman from the middle or upper classes. While U.S. writers at the time couldn't have possessed this sociological knowledge yet, their realist or naturalist texts feature female narcotic addicts prominently, but connect the issue to the medical profession and to warring ideologies of femininity in various, and often antithetical, ways: While works such as Rebecca Harding Davis' novel *Kitty's Choice* (1874) imagine that male physicians introduced women to morphine in order to sedate their discontent with the limited possibilities Victorian gender ideologies afforded them, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) worries that the *New Woman* had to rely on narcotics to withstand the stresses of working life. Robert Hichen's novel *Felix* (1902), by contrast, portrays morphine use as the desperate pastime of leisure women bored out of their minds in the confined, albeit luxurious, environment of their homes.

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Regina-Pacis-Weg 5
IAAK, Room A (1.004)

Dr. Katharina Motyl is assistant professor at the American Studies department of the University of Mannheim. Her second-book project is tentatively titled "Dependent in the Land of Liberty: Drugs, Addiction and Power in U.S. Culture from the Early Republic to the 'War on Drugs.'" Her publications include the special issue "Intimate Knowledge in American Naturalism and Realism" of the journal *Studies in American Naturalism* and the edited volume *The Failed Individual – Amid Exclusion, Resistance, and the Pleasure of Non-Conformity* (Campus, 2017). She co-leads the research network "The Failure of Knowledge – Knowledges of Failure," funded by the German Research Foundation.