



# **Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels (Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture)**

*Pamela K. Gilbert*

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Popular fiction in mid-Victorian Britain was regarded as both feminine and diseased. Critical articles of the time on fiction and on the body and disease offer convincing evidence that reading was metaphorically allied with eating, contagion and sex. Anxious critics traced the infection of the imperial, healthy body of masculine elite culture by 'diseased' popular fiction, especially novels by women. This book discusses works by three novelists - M. E. Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, and 'Ouida' - within this historical context. In each case, the comparison of an early, 'sensation' novel against a later work shows how generic categorization worked in the context of social concerns to contain anxiety and limit interpretive possibilities. Within the texts themselves, references to contemporary critical and medical literatures resist or exploit mid-Victorian concepts of health, nationality, class and the body.



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