

# FROM MEDICINE TO POISON

## DISCURSIVE SHIFTS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY OPIUM ADVERTISEMENTS IN SMALL TOWN NEWSPRINT IN THE UNITED STATES

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### /// Introduction

The availability and importance of psychoactive substances for legal and unregulated medicinal use, sold for a profit and consumed without medical supervision, remains an often overlooked aspect of the social history of the United States. Opium and opium-based products were available domestically long before the American Revolution (“Lately...” 1740). Despite their ubiquity, the passage of the Opium Exclusion Act of 1909 initiated a national prohibition of opiate use without a prescription. Interrelatedly, historically ambivalent opium discourses shifted to become decidedly antagonistic at this time (Derrida 1981; Rinella 2010).<sup>1</sup> Once viewed as a complicated cure-all throughout the United States, albeit with a known potential for habituation, by 1909 opiates had become nearly synonymous

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<sup>1</sup> While a detailed discussion is outside the scope of this article, I must acknowledge the striking parallels between the polyvocal discourse on opium considered here and Derrida’s discursive *trace* of the Greek word “*pharmakon*.” In *Dissemination* (1981), Derrida considers the multiplicity of meanings associated with “*pharmakon*” (as medicine, poison, and sensual intoxicant), “*alexipharmakon*” (antidote) and, strikingly, “*pharmakos*” (scapegoat). See Michael Rinella’s *Pharmakon: Plato, Drug Culture, and Identity in Ancient Athens* (2010) for a thorough consideration of the topic and its relation to opium and other psychoactive substances.

with vice, poison, and death (Aurin 2000; Foucault 2003). This seemingly subtle discursive shift was, in fact, a complex process, developing unevenly over time. Such a shift in the discourses on opium, from ambivalence to antagonism, is relevant historically and in the contemporary U.S. context.<sup>2</sup>

To be clear, nineteenth-century discourses on opium and other ostensibly medicinal substances can be characterised as ambivalent but not indifferent. To suggest a general indifference in the United States on the topic of opium in the nineteenth century would be an oversimplification. With few exceptions, opium was legal and available throughout the country for the entire century. However, the phenomenological practice of consumption, and the economic and socio-political contexts of opium in the United States, shifted episodically throughout the century and varied widely from place to place (Booth 2013: 180–184, 194–195). Thus, to characterise the nineteenth-century United States as *laissez-faire* fails to address the nuance of various rhetorical and socio-cultural breaks and flows (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

To better understand and contextualise the shifting discourse and its relation to social change, this article analyses a pre-eminently important medium of the day: newspapers. Rather than focusing, however, on news or editorial content, the paper will focus on newspaper advertising content. While newspapers often covered stories of deaths due to opium and opium-based patent medicines, advertisements for these same products were more consistently present, and thus the study of such advertisements allows for a more granular analysis of shifting signification.

Moreover, the ubiquity of print advertising for opium and other psychoactive substances suggests a tension within the United States, especially as the Gilded Age ended and the Progressive Era began – the tension between the capitalist desire for profit and the need for a readily deployable workforce (Foucault 2003; Fisher 2009). Thus, the occasional appearance of relevant news stories and the omnipresent advertising content juxtaposed a multiplicity of contradictory narratives, comprising a discursive polyvocality on psychoactive substances. It is this polyvocality, alongside the shifting configuration of local and national historical events, that ultimately transformed the opium discourse from ambivalence to hostility and caused opium to be seen no longer as a banal medicine but as an amoral poison.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the conditions are very different, the United States went through a series of shifts in medical and social discourses on opioids between 1990 and 2020, starting with the now infamous medico-pharmaceutical claim that opioids are addictive in less than one percent of the population when prescribed for pain management. See Quinones's *Dreamland* (2015) for more on this claim and the subsequent discursive shifts that resulted from it.

### /// Research and Method

To investigate the process of discursive flow, and to illustrate the difference between past and present socio-historical contexts, this study focuses on implicit and explicit discourses in the novel communications medium that was nineteenth-century newspaper advertising. By adopting a micro-historical perspective, the current study focuses on the availability of discourses and the discursive tone within a particular location over time (Brown 2003). To illustrate the importance of local contexts, this study centres on the small town of Sandusky, Ohio, in the period from the first publication of its local periodical in the 1820s to the enactment of the United States' Opium Exclusion Act of 1909. Such a focus provides an in-depth description of a local flow of opium discourses prior to the totalising social control of most psychoactive substances in the United States, and of the processes that led to that control.

I first conducted a keyword search in a digital newspaper archive<sup>3</sup> for mention of opiates and opium-based patent medicines.<sup>4</sup> I identified opiate advertisements and analysed their form, content, and rhetoric (Gill 2000). I included advertisements for non-opium products that mentioned opium keywords explicitly. I relied on an axial coding scheme, focusing on the discursive functions of the referent, the origination of the advertisement, and temporal changes in discursive themes. In this way, I placed discursive messages in both their socio-historical and local contexts. Since these ads were necessarily adjacent to news stories and other advertisements, I considered the discursive ambiguity or recontextualisation fostered through the juxtaposition of advertisements and their adjacent texts (Barthes 1977; Hodges 2015).

### /// Historic Background

Raw opium and opium preparations were widely available throughout all the British colonies, including the New England colonies, during the entire eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Early examples of colonial opium advertisements can be found in Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* as early as 1740 ("Lately..." 1740). Opium played a significant role in the

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<sup>3</sup> NewspaperArchive.com.

<sup>4</sup> Keywords included "opium," "morphine," "laudanum," "paregoric," "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup," and "Godfrey's Cordial." Post hoc keyword searches, including those for "liquor and opium cure" followed, as needed.

country's early trade economy and in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Booth 2013). The United States remained heavily enmeshed in the global opium trade, initiating its engagement in the illegal import of opium to China in 1811 (ibid.: 112–121). In the decades following the War of 1812, U.S. merchants increased their involvement in the international opium trade (Courtwright 2009).

Opium took on added importance during the Civil War. The reasons were twofold: not only did combat casualties call for massive amounts of opiate analgesics but opium was also used as a lifesaving treatment for diseases such as dysentery, pneumonia, and bronchitis, and thus it was in demand by both battlefield medics and hospitals throughout the country (Marshall 1942). Disease, in fact, killed a great many more Union soldiers than did combat-related injuries (Gilchrist 1998). Medical supplies such as quinine and opium were readily available throughout Union territory, but were in short supply throughout the South (Marshall 1942: 288). While most of the medical records for the Confederacy have been lost, it is likely that the inability to treat diseases such as dysentery in the field meant the Confederacy may have suffered a still higher rate of disease-related mortality than did its Union adversaries (Cirillo 2008).

After the Civil War, the United States experienced a precipitous rise in opium use defined as habitual (Aurin 2000). This was due, in part, to the Civil War, but even more to the invention of the hypodermic syringe and the widespread popularity of patent medicines (Courtwright 1978, 2009). Hypodermic syringes facilitated morphine injection, a route of administration which did not proliferate in the United States until after the Civil War, and which accelerated the use of morphine in the states as well as the incidence of overdose deaths (Courtwright 1978).

Proprietary medical concoctions, or patent medicines, further complicated the available drug market during this period. Patent medicines, many of which originated in England, where they had been in use as early as 1630, were sold in the United States with names such as “Godfrey’s Cordial” or “Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup” and were marketed in such a way as to obscure their ingredients and formulae (Griffenhagen & Young 1959; Estes 1988).<sup>5</sup> Often unbeknownst to their consumers, many patent medicines contained significant amounts of opium, alcohol, or other psychoactive substances. These medicines were sold directly to consumers

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<sup>5</sup> While the original popularity of patent medicines in the United States can be traced to 1824, with a formulary published by the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, the exact formulae and potency were not common knowledge.

without regulation or oversight, and without the necessity of a prescription (Musto 1991). The administration of patent medicines to children as young as a few days old occurred throughout the nineteenth century, contributing to the historically high infant illness and mortality rates (Jordan 1987; Booth 2013). All this unregulated consumption of patent medicines coincided with broad institutional changes, including the professionalisation of medical practice, the medicalisation of addiction, and the moralisation of substance use (Waddington 1990; Rimke & Hunt 2002; Conrad & Schneider 2010).<sup>6</sup>

### /// The Research Area

Settled in 1818, Sandusky, Ohio, has a long maritime tradition. Sandusky Bay, which was accessible to seafaring vessels between Johnson's Island and two peninsular outcroppings on either side, made Sandusky an ideal port town (Williams 1879). The port, and the area's natural supply of coal and limestone, fuelled Sandusky's rapid economic and population growth during the first half of the nineteenth century (ibid.: 30–37, 41). By the 1840s, Sandusky had become a central hub for manufacturing and shipping; passenger service was provided by two railroad lines and regular steamboat lines (Dickens 1842). Later, as the Progressive Era brought industrialisation to the region, the relevance of Sandusky as a central shipping port diminished (Williams 1879: 35–37; Baughman 1909). By the early twentieth century, the town was part of the burgeoning automobile industry. J.J. Hinde, founder of the short-lived Sandusky Automobile Company, maintained a relationship with Henry Ford and may have made early contributions to what would become Ford's production strategy, which is now known as Fordism ("Where Ford..." 1919: 49; "Sandusky..." 1980: 261–272).<sup>7</sup>

The utility of Sandusky as a local case for analysis was multiple. The area residents have a long tradition of documenting their local history, beginning in 1857 with the quarterly publication of the *Fire-Lands Pioneer* (Baughman 1909). Sandusky's first newspaper, the *Sandusky Clarion*, began publication in 1822, and most of its copies were successfully archived for posterity, as were

<sup>6</sup> The concept of "addiction" overtook and subsumed the milder concept of "habituation" during the later decades of the nineteenth century. Despite retaining the terminology of habit, addiction is characterised as patently amoral and desperate, whereas habituation comprised a more pitiful signification.

<sup>7</sup> The friendship between Hinde and Ford began about ten years before the Ford assembly line was initiated. Hinde's role in the assembly line concept is unverifiable and the subject of conjecture. Hinde did, however, hold the patent for a "power transmission," which Henry Ford would later own and employ in his own vehicles.

the publications of successive newspapers (Williams 1879: 65). Sandusky had several stores, selling everything from foodstuffs and dye to raw opium and patent medicines containing opiate tinctures, such as laudanum or paregoric. General stores, and later druggists focusing solely on providing medicines to area residents, began advertising their wares in area newspapers as early as 1822. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Sandusky as a case is that the town maintained a relatively small population throughout its history. Unlike high-population news markets such as New York or Chicago, I argue that such a small town demonstrates the ubiquity of social and discursive trends throughout the country before widespread urbanisation.

### **/// Early Opium Advertisements and International Contexts**

The first print advertisement for opium in the area appeared in the *Sandusky Clarion* every Wednesday for seven weeks in 1824. Upon arriving in port, Dr Anderson advertised his shipful of “Fresh Drugs and Medicine” from 26 May to 7 July of that year. Dr Anderson’s maritime medicine operation hailed from New York and boasted regular supplies from Buffalo. The *Clarion* advertised that the druggist was operating “a few rods south of the Steam-Boat Wharf” in Sandusky. His wares were listed in a plain, ledger-style print. Among his products were gum opium and Godfrey’s Cordial, a popular patent medicine containing laudanum (United States Pharmacopeial Convention 1916). Dr Anderson’s various medicinal wares were not meant to be sold directly to the general public, but “Medical Gentlemen, in particular” were “requested to call” (“Drugs...” 1824). This wholesale approach was largely an exception, as much of these early opium products were sold directly to consumers.

The next such advertisement was printed three times between July and August 1832, and plainly listed raw opium among other wares at the Lower Sandusky Drug Store. The establishment essentially operated as a general store, selling Turkish opium both wholesale and retail alongside other medicines, dry goods, paints, and dyes (“Lower...” 1832). Another drugstore, operated by local druggist Jas. K. Lockwood, advertised opium alongside lard and olive oil (“Lockwood...” 1843). These early advertisements focused almost exclusively on listing their available products, without flourish or fanciful calls to purchase. At this time, and in this context, opium represented a mundane commodity.

The matter-of-fact nature of opium advertising served several social and political functions, of course. In the years before and during the Opi-

um Wars, American merchants simultaneously undercut the British East India Company's monopoly on the opium trade and amassed fortunes through smuggling Turkish and Indian opium into China and the United States (Downs 1968). The fortunes of America's first millionaires, John Jacob Astor and Warren Delano, grandfather of the future President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, were built on profits from the opium trade (ibid.; Meyer 1997). The open peddling of raw opium and morphine in advertising in Sandusky newspapers signalled that opium was not considered particularly problematic within the population ("Lower..." 1832; "C.S. Burdsal..." 1848). Local businesses advertised opium and morphine in local newspapers in this same manner fifty times between 1832 and 1850, with most of the ads being printed after 1848. In contrast, the Opium War was only mentioned once in Sandusky newspapers in that period and even then only as an analogy, years after the war had ended ("Japan" 1848).

Whether intentionally obscuring the contents of their wares due to lack of information or deliberate misinformation, further discursive manoeuvring occurred. Local ads only mention Turkish opium. However, historical documentation shows that America widely traded in contraband opium from India. To admit this would have been an acknowledgment of the United States' role in the illegal opium trade in China (Downs 1968; Booth 2013). If the misinformation was deliberate, it is unlikely that it originated from the owners of local drug stores. Still, we now know that the opium of that era arrived in the United States through less than legal means.

### **/// Erasing Opium from Advertisements**

Patent medicines containing opium, morphine, or various other preparations of opium were sold in the local area as early as 1824. It was not until 1852 that these products began to be advertised independently and not as part of a list of mercantile stock. While some patent medicines contained opiates in the form of morphine, others included laudanum, a solution of opium and alcohol, or paregoric, another solution of opium consisting of anise, benzoic acid, and camphor (United States Pharmacopeial Convention 1916). Laudanum, paregoric, and morphine were the primary active ingredients in mixtures sold under brand names such as Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup and Godfrey's Cordial, which were both marketed for use on infants and children, and Dr. Fosgate's Anodyne Cordial, which was marketed to adults (Oleson 1903; T.E.C. Jr 1981). All these preparations were advertised in Sandusky area papers during the 1800s.

## Unacknowledged Opiates

An infamous opium-based curative, Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup, was initially created in 1807 for the mothers of teething babies (McNutt 1872; Strongman 2017). The primary active ingredients in this concoction were morphine and alcohol, and it contained over fifty percent sugar by volume ("The Composition..." 1912; Strongman 2017). The product's infamy came from thousands of accidental infant deaths in the United States and Britain throughout the nineteenth century due to its use (Levinthal 1985). Despite earning the moniker of "the baby killer," Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup was sold under the same name even after the morphine concentration was reduced to a fraction of its original formula (Bause 2012; Strongman 2017). Even after the shifting legality of over-the-counter opium forced manufacturers of the soothing syrup to do away with all morphine content, the brand continued to sell for fifteen more years (Bause 2012).

From 1859 to 1909, Sandusky newspapers featured advertisements for the soothing syrup no less than 143 times.<sup>8</sup> These advertisements were often long lines of text repeatedly extolling the product's efficacy, safety, and dependability, in direct opposition to the product's infamy. In one such ad for the product (see Image 1), the text refutes the negative press, stating "Never did we know an instance of dissatisfaction by anyone who used it," claiming "all are delighted" with the product's "magical effects and medical virtues." It should be noted that hyperbolic praise, such as claiming "magical effects," were a hallmark of most ads for patent medicines (Estes 1988). These extravagant claims served to direct attention away from the fact that the actual contents of the patent medicines were either obscured or non-existent (*ibid.*).

It is important to note that Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup advertisements never mention the elixir's active ingredients, as did most, but not all, opium-based patent medicines. This omission appears to have been a strategic decision. Rather than acknowledging the morphine content in Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup or the laudanum in Godfrey's Cordial (which was marketed as a sleep aid for infants and children), the advertisers asserted the safety of their product, while neglecting to explain how they achieved their "magical effects." Similarly, Sandusky newspapers featured ads for Dr. Fosgate's Anodyne Cordial over fifty times between 1852 and 1854 but never mentioned that its main ingredient was paregoric (United States Pharmacopeial Convention 1916).

<sup>8</sup> Counts reflect available data. Some print editions may be unavailable or uncounted.



# MRS. WINSLOW,

An experienced Nurse and Female Physician, presents to the attention of mothers, her

## SOOTHING SYRUP, For Children Teething,

which greatly facilitates the process of teething, by softening the gums, reducing all inflammation—will allay ALL PAIN and spasmodic action, and is

**SURE TO REGULATE THE BOWELS.**

Depend upon it, mothers, it will give rest to yourselves and

**RELIEF AND HEALTH TO YOUR INFANTS.**

We have put up and sold this article for over ten years and can say, in confidence and truth, of it, what we have never been able to say of any other article of medicine—**NEVER HAS IT FAILED, IN A SINGLE INSTANCE, TO EFFECT A CURE,** when timely used. Never did we know an instance of dissatisfaction by any one who used it. On the contrary, all are delighted with its operations, and speak in terms of highest commendation of its magical effects and medical virtues. We speak in this matter "**WHAT WE DO KNOW,**" after ten years' experience, and *pledge our reputation for the fulfilment of what we here declare.* In almost every instance, where the infant is suffering from pain and exhaustion, relief will be found in fifteen or twenty minutes after the Syrup is administered.

This valuable preparation is the prescription of one of the most **EXPERIENCED** and **SKILLFUL NURSES** in New England, and has been used with **NEVER FAILING SUCCESS,** in

**THOUSANDS OF CASES.**

It not only relieves the child from pain, but invigorates the stomach and bowels, corrects acidity, and gives tone and energy to the whole system. It will almost instantly relieve

**GRIPING IN THE BOWELS, & WIND CHOLIC,**

and overcome convulsions, which, if not speedily remedied, end in death. We believe it the **BEST** and **SUREST** remedy in the world, in all cases of **DYSENTERY** and **DIARRHEA** IN CHILDREN, whether it arises from teething, or any other cause. We would say to every mother who has a child suffering from any of the foregoing complaints—*Do not let your prejudices, nor the prejudices of others, stand between your suffering child and the relief that will be SURE—yes, ABSOLUTELY SURE*—to follow the use of this medicine, if timely used. Full directions for using will accompany each bottle. None genuine unless the fac simile of **CURTIS & PERKINS, New York,** is on the outside wrapper.

Sold by druggists throughout the world. Price 25 cts. per bottle.

Principal Office, No. 13 Cedar St., New York jal-dwis

Image 1. Advertisement for Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup for Teething Children, published 8 January 1859 in the *Sandusky Daily Commercial Register*.

For patent medicines that included opium as the principal ingredient, there was more than enough incentive to obscure the narcotic contents. Considered a common and effective pain reliever, even during America's colonial period, the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought with them a dualistic conception of opium that remains to this day (Musto 1991). Literary publications, such as De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater* (1821), sensationalised opium consumption, offering florid descriptions of celestial highs and painful, hellish lows (De Quincey 2013). De Quincey also provided an early and influential depiction of how opium use could shift from medical to habitual use (Milligan 2005; De Quincey 2013). As early as 1818, the American medical community lauded opiates as a cure for many ailments, while simultaneously warning of the potential harm that chronic opium use could have on the body (Musto 1991). While the "opium habit" was a concern, the largely unregulated body of physicians and druggists recommended and administered an increasing number of opiates – rough estimates point to upwards of a sextupling of opium use in the United States from the year 1827 to 1898, even after adjusting for the population (Courtwright 2001). Thus, as the nineteenth century progressed, the banality of opium dissipated, which in turn, in advertisements for most opium-based patent medicines, inspired the obfuscation of its presence.<sup>9</sup>

## The Cholera Cure

There is a noteworthy exception to the above rule. In early 1849, news spread of an international cholera outbreak ("4th of July..." 1849). Panic struck when the pandemic made its way to the port city of New Orleans, causing residents to flee the cities and spread the disease throughout the country within a matter of months (Daly 2008). By May 1849, "the cholera" had made its way to Cincinnati, the largest city in Ohio and a central hub for the state at the time, as well as to the port city of Buffalo, New York. On 23 July 1849, the *Daily Sanduskyian* printed an article entitled "Cholera in Sandusky," in which it stated that the town had almost certainly been experiencing an outbreak "for a week or two" ("Graham's..." 1849). By 29 July, at least sixty area residents had died and been buried in a common grave in what would later be known as the town's Cholera Cemetery (Ouriel 2018).

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<sup>9</sup> While prior to the 1870s there were few examples of editorials in Sandusky newspapers decrying the dangers of opiates, the rhetorical use of opium as poison in advertisements for non-opiate patent medicines shows that the duality was well-known.

**CHOLERA! CHOLERA! Dr.**  
**CANNON'S** celebrated New Orleans Cholera  
 medicine. Dr. Bird's Sulphur and Charcoal remedy,  
 in the form of Pills, constantly on hand. It is  
 well for the citizens to be prepared to meet this terrible  
 disease, and have some preparation on hand at  
 this critical time, in case of an attack. It has not  
 yet made its appearance among us, but is liable to,  
 any moment So be prepared. For sale at  
 July 2. **GRAHAM'S Drug Store.**

Image 2. Advertisement for Dr. Cannon's New Orleans Cholera medicine, published 5 July 1849 in *The Daily Sanduskian*.

By 7 September of the same year, the number of confirmed cholera deaths had grown to 357 in Sandusky (*ibid.*).

Since neither the cause nor adequate treatment had been discovered at the time, editorial and advertising content proffered several potential preventative measures and treatments for cholera – many of them involving opium (Courtwright 2001; Daly 2008). One such product, dubbed “Dr. Cannon’s New Orleans Cholera Cordial,” was advertised out of a Sandusky drug store (“Cholera...” 1849). Initially, the brandy-and-laudanum cordial was advertised without any mention of its ingredients under the heading “Cholera! Cholera!” alongside another patent medicine purported to treat cholera: “Dr. Bird’s Sulfur and Charcoal remedy” (see Image 2) (“Graham’s...” 1849).

The first ad to mention Dr. Cannon’s New Orleans Cholera Cordial was dated 2 July and printed 5 July. The ad stated that “[i]t [cholera] has not yet made its appearance among us, but is liable to any moment” (“Graham’s...” 1849). That same day, however, the *Sanduskian* was reporting on the splendour of the town’s first successful celebration of U.S. Independence Day in years, with “citizens, strangers ... men, women, and children” marching along with a major procession of fire engines, their brigades beside them, and a German band playing from one end of town to the other (“4th of July...” 1849).

The content of local area advertising for the cholera cordial shifted concurrently with the rapid approach of the cholera epidemic to the area. While the exact dates of the cholera outbreak in the area seem to be lost to history, the earliest mention of cholera in Sandusky suggests that the

outbreak may have started on or before 10 July 1849 (“Cholera...” 1849). At this point, not only was Graham’s Drug Store promoting Dr. Cannon’s New Orleans Cholera Cordial, but rival purveyor McCulloch & Thorpe began to advertise in the *Sanduskian* as well. On 11 July, McCulloch & Thorpe published a detailed advertisement asserting the cholera cordial’s supremacy over Dr. Bird’s Sulfur and Charcoal Remedy, insisting that theirs was the only legitimate supply of the medicine, and warning that the copycat product contained “laudanum enough in it to kill the patient the second dose” (“McCulloch...” 1849). This was not just an attack on the safety of a rival druggist’s product, but also a deliberate acknowledgement of an opiate as a product’s main ingredient.

The risk associated with opium-based products, which was the likely reason that ads for Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup and Dr. Fosgate’s Anodyne Cordial failed to mention morphine or paregoric, were overshadowed by the panic inspired by the cholera outbreak in town. Graham’s Drug Store, perhaps in part to refute McCulloch and Thorpe’s slander, went a step further after the outbreak was confirmed, printing the entire ingredient list for Drs. H. & C. Cannon’s New Orleans Cholera Cordial in four advertisements in the *Sanduskian* between 28 July and 3 August (see Image 3) (*ibid.*). The reason for the subtle name change is unclear, but the motive behind this unorthodox advertising tactic seems to have been

**RECIPE FOR DRs. H. & C. CANNON'S NEW ORLEANS CHOLERA CORDIAL.**

3 galls.	best 4th proof Brandy,
12 oz.	Gum Camphor,
6 "	Gum Catechu,
24 "	Laudanum,
8 "	Peruvian Bark,
20 "	Blackbury Root Syrup,
8 "	Tinct. Capsicum,
2 "	Extract Oak Bark,
12 "	Anodine Root,
16 "	Tinct. Rhubarb,
14 "	Essence Cinnamon,
10 "	" Pepermint,
6 lbs.	Loaf Sugar.

**H. & C. CANNON.**

The above prescription for sale at **GRAHAM'S**  
**Drug Store.**  
**Sandusky City, July 28, 1849.** dit

Image 3. Advertisement for Dr. Cannon’s New Orleans Cholera medicine, published 3 August 1849 in *The Daily Sanduskian*.

intended to suggest safety through the novelty of transparency. Whether solely spurred on by professional rivalry or intended as a reminder to those consumers who believed preparations of opium to be a cure for cholera, this brief interlude serves as one of the only examples of a product advertised in the Sandusky area acknowledging its opium contents.

There were cholera outbreaks before the 1849 pandemic, including one that effected the Americas in 1832. The port town of Sandusky had a minor outbreak in June of that year due to a sick ship's captain from Buffalo. The outbreak ended in the deaths of thirty to thirty-five residents and resulted in the passage of a town ordinance requiring an inspection of all vessels to arrive in port before personnel or cargo were permitted to leave the vessel (Ouriel 2018). Therefore, the town maintained an acute awareness of cholera, and Sandusky newspapers regularly printed recommendations for cholera preventatives and cures – including an 1848 recommendation for a preparation involving opium and calomel (mercury chloride) (“Cholera” 1848).

Including the ingredients in advertising of opium-based patent medicines did not become a wider trend – the above being the sole example within the area. During this brief period, when cholera had gripped the nation and was causing high mortality rates, especially devastating small midwestern towns, the discourse in regard to opium seemed to experience a brief shift: from the duality it had had after De Quincey's confessions appeared, back to viewing opium as an unproblematic salvific medicine. Opium would soon thereafter go back to its peculiar duality of being both magical elixir and, as the next section makes abundantly clear, poison. This temporary interlude, when opium moved back to the heroic position it had enjoyed for millennia and in the American colonies, presaged a more important set of discursive patterns yet to come.

### **/// Opium as a Poison in Advertisements**

It was not long until druggists returned to advertising their elixirs without acknowledging the morphine and laudanum therein. For a time, during the Civil War, the frequency of local advertisements mentioning opium in any context had decreased. This was likely due, in part, to the scarcity of opium-based products for non-military purposes during wartime (Booth 2013). The few advertisements printed at the time were not for opium-based patent medicines. Instead, ads urged mothers to stop using morphine to quiet their children and to use the advertiser's products instead.



After the war, the ads for patent medicines containing opium returned. However, it was during this time that the mention of opium or morphine became a commonly used advertising pejorative. Mentioning opiates in advertisements for non-opiate patent medicines served the function of a non sequitur; it conveyed the idea that a product was safe and effective simply by mentioning the absence of another, more dangerous, product. The negation of opium suggested, often fallaciously, the presence of safety and efficacy.

The first reference to opium as a dangerous poison in Sandusky newspaper advertisements occurred in 1847, with an ad for Brandreth's Pills. Brandreth's is now widely recognised as a "quack" remedy, doing nothing and claiming everything (Wheeler 1839; Horrocks 2008). Ads for these useless pills contended that they could "not only purify the blood" but also reduce the "quantity" of blood, and "make the quality better" ("Brandreth's..." 1847). Furthermore, ads also claimed that Brandreth's Pills could counter "the effects of opium" ("Brandreth's..." 1847). What "effects" the ad described is unclear.

### **Contains Neither Opium, Morphine, Nor Minerals**

A children's remedy, Castoria, was advertised over 2,500 times in Sandusky-area newspapers between 1872 to 1922 (over 1,500 times before the end of 1909). Castoria was described as "a vegetable preparation containing neither Minerals, Morphine nor Alcohol" ("Castoria" 1872). Castoria, formally known first as Pitcher's Castoria and later as Fletcher's Castoria, is a senna-based laxative (Steensma and Kyle 2017). While Castoria had no known pain-relief agent, the 1870s ads claimed it was both "soothing" and "particularly adapted to crying and teething children" ("Castoria" 1872). This allusion to "teething children" suggests that the sellers considered Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup to be their direct competition, as they mentioned both a portion of the product's name and its primary ingredient. As many patent-medicine advertisers had done, Castoria's advertisers sought to suggest that it provided miraculous remedies for a wide variety of unrelated ailments and, more specifically, that it served as a safe alternative to various opium-based products (see Image 4).

Every advertisement for Castoria in this study made reference to narcotics, often listing several ("Castoria" 1880; "Castoria" 1889; "Castoria..." 1904). A 1904 ad in the *Sandusky Evening Star* even included a copy of the product's label, which read "Promotes Digestion, Cheerfulness and Rest.

**Castoria—a substitute for Castor Oil**  
**—a vegetable preparation containing**  
**neither Minerals, Morphine nor Alcohol.**  
 It is pleasant to take, does not nauseate,  
 and operates when all other remedies have  
 failed, Dr. Pitcher has been experimenting  
 fifteen years in producing a preparation  
 more efficient than Castor Oil, without its  
 horrid taste. The Castoria regulates the  
 system; cures constipation, stomach ache,  
 croup and flatulency, and kills worms. It  
 does not gripe. By its quieting, soothing  
 effect it produces natural sleep, and is par-  
 ticularly adapted to crying and teething  
 children. No article has ever met the  
 same endorsement from physicians, or  
 found such immediate sale. Insist that  
 your druggists order it for you. It costs  
 but 50 cents. Sample bottles sent to physi-  
 cians gratis.

**J. B. Rosz & Co.,**  
**53 Broadway, N. Y.**

je20-






Image 4. Castoria advertisement printed 20 June 1872 in the *Sandusky Daily Register*.

Contains neither Opium, Morphine, nor Mineral. NOT NARCOTIC” (emphasis in the original) (“Castoria...” 1904). The allusion to opium-based products as harmful is clear and, though the claim may be warranted, the suggestion that Castoria was both safe and effective relied on opium and morphine being viewed as a fear-inducing counterpoint.

Advertisements for Castoria were, by far, the most prolific in the study. The discursive power of this ad campaign comes from its persistence over time. Regardless of the news of the day, advertisements such as those for Castoria extended discursive messages extolling the dangers of opium in nearly every local newspaper from the 1870s to the 1920s. Such consistent use of this specific narrative also suggests that, in an era of increasing medicalisation in healthcare and the increasing influence of the Temperance Movement, the repudiation of any suspected opium content was either necessary or advantageous (Hiatt, Sine & Tolbert 2009).

By the end of the nineteenth century, news involving opium-related deaths appeared with increased regularity, both nationally and within the sample (“An Overdose” 1901; “Woman...” 1904; Burns 2018). On more than one occasion, these stories would be printed alongside advertisements for Castoria (“Will Investigate...” 1903). In 1904, the *Sandusky Evening Star’s* Castoria Drops advertisement was placed adjacent a news item entitled “Woman Begged for More Morphine,” reporting the story of a Sandusky woman who had apparently died due to an addiction to morphine in the nearby city of Lorain (“Castoria...” 1904; “Woman...” 1904). The actual cause of death – heart failure or overdose – was not reported at the time. Stories like these suggested the singular dangers of the drug. Advertisements such as those for Castoria seemed to derive a useful rhetoric from such news stories, which then, in turn, maintained an active discourse about the perilousness of opiates through the consistency of the ad content.

### /// Deceptive Advertising

Most of the advertisements for the patent medicines mentioned thus far were straightforward in their content and structure. The Castoria and Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup advertisements were clearly about a single product and were designed to influence consumers to make a purchase. The advertisements for Dr. Cannon’s Cholera Cordial may have been a bit more confusing as one appeared at first glance to be a story about cholera, and the other appeared to be a recipe for the nostrum – but still, most readers would likely realise instantaneously that their eye had been drawn to a product being sold. This, however, was not always the case. To varying degrees, many of the advertisements in this study masked both the contents of their product and the true nature of their sales message, hiding their call to action behind what appeared at first glance to be a news story.

### Simulating Distress

An early example of sponsored content, as such advertisements are known today, appears in what is seemingly a news report, entitled “Distress in Chicago.”<sup>10</sup> The headline precedes a ten-paragraph faux public-interest piece which is ostensibly about the pain associated with rheumatism. The

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<sup>10</sup> The term “sponsored content” best fits this early example of a misleading advertisement fashioned to look like a news article. There is an ongoing debate among people who study advertising as to the difference between sponsored content and advertorials.



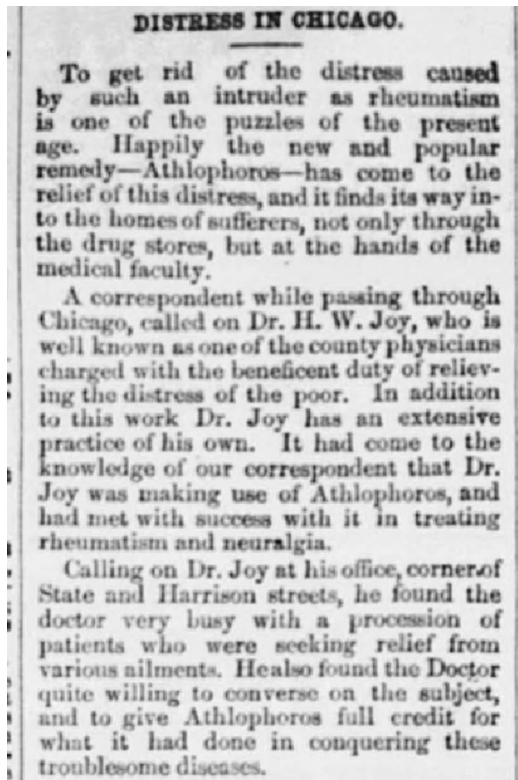


Image 5. Excerpt from Athlophoros advertisement, printed in the *Sandusky Daily Register* on 23 March 1885.

text then expounds upon a “new and popular remedy” called Athlophoros (“Distress...” 1885). The ad, a simulacrum of a banal news story, enlists fictitious characters, a reporting correspondent, and an endorsement from the slyly named Doctor “Joy” to sell the reader on the product’s virtues (see Image 5) (Baudrillard 1975). Ultimately, this advertisement occupies a liminal position as simulacrum – since, as it is read, the banal rheumatism story oscillates, revealing its advertorial nature. Athlophoros was advertised in Sandusky newspapers over 1,300 times between 1884 and 1920. Still, almost all ads for the product published in the area in 1884 resembled other patent medicine advertisements – glowing testimonials, insistence on the renown and esteem of Athlophoros’s creator, the Reverend J.E. Searles, company information, and directions on how to purchase the product.

Between 1885 and 1889, Athlophoros ads appeared in nearly every issue of the Sandusky newspapers available within the digital archive.

Most Athlophoros ads appeared to be a pastiche of news articles. As time passed, Athlophoros's sponsored content further obscured itself. Vague non-stories about then-President Grover Cleveland, a death at Niagara Falls, and one bearing the headline "Another Sudden Death" claimed that rheumatism could potentially cause heart disease and suggested that Athlophoros was a proven "positive cure" ("The Giant..." 1886; "Castoria" 1889).

Athlophoros relied heavily, though not exclusively, on both the sponsored content format and on the derogation of opiates. From the first Athlophoros ad printed in the *Sandusky Daily Register* in January 1884 until the end of 1886, approximately 150 of the 691 sponsored content adverts mention morphine in a negative light, serving the same rhetorical function as in the Castoria ads – suggesting safety and efficacy by way of contrast. A common clause within the Athlophoros copy reads "it is not an opiate to lull pain, as morphine does, but it carries away the cause of the pain, which is far better."

It is possible that Athlophoros itself contained morphine, even as ads promoting the product claimed the opposite. Athlophoros's earliest formulation, the one advertised in 1884, contained morphine (Bause 2010). The earliest available publications of ingredients, printed in 1896, listed two different formulations of the product: one containing morphine, the other containing solely potash, salicylate, sugar, caramel, and water. Later publications list only the latter, non-opiate, formulation (Ebert & Hiss 1896; Oleson 1903). Both were sold under the product name Searle's Athlophoros at one time or another but when, and under what circumstances, Athlophoros contained morphine is unknown. Perhaps the truth of the product's opium contents is lost to history, but what remains are a series of long advertisements disguised as news – a few of which mention the elixir's lack of opium and morphine as a way of boosting the presumed safety of the product.<sup>11</sup>

## **A Child Killed**

Athlophoros was not the only product to be marketed through a combination of mimicry of common news content and a reliance on the fear of opiate substances. Advertisements promoting Acker's Baby Soother appear to

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<sup>11</sup> In researching this issue, I reached out to Dr G.S. Bause, M.D., for clarification. He suggested the 1885 Athlophoros ad may well have been accurate, as it was around this time that "opiates fell out of favor, and into regulation."

**A CHILD KILLED.**

Another child killed by the use of opiates given in the form of soothing syrup. That mothers give their children such deadly poison is surprising when they can relieve the child of its peculiar troubles by using Acker's Baby Soother. It contains no Opium or Morphine. Sold by Melville Broa.

Image 6. Acker's Baby Soother advertisement, printed in the *Sandusky Daily Register* on 6 June 1889.

be an extreme example of this form of deceptive advertising. Acker's Baby Soother was advertised in the local area thirty times between May 1889 and March 1890, all in a way that could deceive inattentive readers into believing they were reading a real news story. An ad initially bearing the headline "A Child Killed" might appear to be one of many short articles on incidents throughout the country, which often appeared in short, boxed sections, separate from the local news. In this case, the faux news story is one of a very tragic nature – "Another child killed by the use of opiates given in the form of a soothing syrup." Such a statement hearkens back to the familiar rhetorical device employed by those advertisements that sought to suggest the safety of their product by reminding consumers that "soothing syrups," such as Mrs. Winslow's, were thought to be inherently dangerous. In this case, however, the advertisement goes a step further in suggesting that a death had, in fact, occurred.

The Acker ad meets deception with feigned moral indignation, as according to the unnamed author, "That mothers give their children such deadly poison is surprising when they can relieve the child of its peculiar troubles by using Acker's Baby Soother" (see Image 6). Importantly, although deaths related to opium-based children's remedies were known to happen, the publication of the "A Child Killed" advertisements did not coincide with any such news story in the local area. In fact, upon further investigation, there is no evidence of a child or infant death involving any opium product in the state of Ohio for either 1889 or 1890.<sup>12</sup> What did exist

<sup>12</sup> I conducted several keyword searches for the years 1888 to 1891 using the original keywords for opiates plus additional phrases "child killed," "child dies," "child has died," "child dead," or "child overdose" and the same phrase formations for "baby" and "infant" for the entire state of Ohio. Several news articles came up, but none of the stories retrieved included reference to opiates as a cause of death. Many children were said to have died by fire, smallpox, or violence. One story

were the same ads for Acker's Baby Soother in Xenia, Defiance, Lima, and Marion, Ohio.<sup>13</sup> While no bona fide news story coincided with the Acker's Baby Soother ads, the deaths of infants due to opium had been a common-enough occurrence in the past to remain part of the discursive construction of opiates for some time (O'Keeffe 2011; Strongman 2017).

The Acker ads not only benefitted from the lingering collective memory of these tragic events, but also helped to extend that memory through the synthetic repetition and simulation of tragedy (Baudrillard 1975). The publication of the Acker ads coincided with the apogee of opium importation and use in the United States in the nineteenth century. Without evidence to the contrary, we are forced to assume that this period likely also maintained the highest rates of infant consumption of opiates and, hence, of the related infant mortality (Courtwright 2001; Booth 2013). In this way, longstanding intertextual discourses about children dying due to overdoses of soothing syrups served to legitimate the advertisement qua fictitious news story. In effect, real events and macro-level social trends were fodder for an advertising discourse of fear.

### /// The Liquor and Opium Cures

While the early 1890s marked the greatest opium use and the highest estimated addiction rates per capita in the nineteenth century, far higher than anything seen in America until the 1970s, many Americans sought to trade addictive habits for health and vigour (Courtwright 2001). The first advertisements for commercial cures for habitual opium use began appearing in the *Sandusky Daily Register* in January 1884. Decades of unregulated medicines had caught up to American consumers, and many Americans sought help in ending habitual narcotic use (Trickey 2018). It is also worth noting that this increased concern for health and vitality coincided both with the moral perfectionism of the Temperance Movement and the beginning of the Progressive Era, which brought with it expectations of a different sort of sobriety. Thus, on 15 January of that year, wedged between two ads for Castoria on the same page, a small ad appeared; it had tiny print save for the words "Opium Habit," and it promoted a cure from addiction by the well-

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references a child being poisoned but was about a court case involving the death of a child in 1887. In addition, the phrases "overdose death" and "child overdose" yielded no results.

<sup>13</sup> I conducted an ex post facto search for evidence of the Acker's Baby Soother ad throughout the United States from 1880–1900 and located 83 advertisements, though only 19 "A Child Killed" ads. All Acker ads were printed in newspapers in Ohio.

known physician Dr H.H. Kane (“Opium...” 1884). Kane, author of the 1881 book *Drugs That Enslave*, was promoting a version of his cure for the opium habit “whereby anyone can cure himself at home quickly and painlessly” (“Opium...” 1884). The advertisement suggested writing to a New York address to receive further details. No further information was given about the form or content of Kane’s remedy, but his recommendations in 1881 included the use of bromides (including potassium bromide – a sedative), belladonna, strychnine, cocaine as a “nerve tonic,” cannabis indica (marijuana), chloroform, hot and cold showers, and electricity administered throughout the body via electrodes (Kane 1881).

On the same page, under the smaller of the two Castoria ads, was an advertisement for a local sanitarium. Dr E. Gillard’s Electro-Medical and Surgical Sanitarium, operating in Sandusky, offered aid in the treatment of several ailments, including rheumatism, “diseases of the woman,” and “the opium habit” (“Opium...” 1884). The sanitarium advertised the use of “the most perfect Electro-Thermal Bath.” Dubious claims about the miraculous power of electrical baths were not new and are generally referred to as pseudoscience today, but the extension of this method to the treatment of opiate addiction and other substance-use problems was at least new to the local area (Boyle 2013; Resor 2019). In the years that followed, a mixture of patent medicines and self-proclaimed medical experts tried their luck in “curing” the opium habit.

For a time, there was money to be had in “curing” inebriety whether it be through alcohol, opium, cocaine or, in the case of patent medicine users, potentially a combination of all three. Medical professionals, who once readily provided morphine to patients, shifted their focus to the treatment of addiction due, in part, to the relative wealth of those who wished to be rid of their habits in the 1870s and 1880s (Aurin 2000). Those who were able to afford trips to sanatoria for extended convalescence due to ailments such as inebriety and morphinism encountered a dramatic increase in the available options for care (Kane 1881; Aurin 2000). To be sure, there were still regular notices for liquid cures for substance abuse in the Sandusky papers, including several ads, which took up a third of a page, for “The Giant of Medicines,” Warner’s Safe Cure, which claimed to cure the opium habit, along with blood disorders, rheumatism, consumption, and dozens of other ailments (“The Giant...” 1886). Still, the market was no longer solely the domain of patent medicines, whether they contained opium or were designed to relieve the desire for it.

## New Life for Victims

On 24 November 1892, the *Sandusky Daily Register* ran an article heralding the arrival of a sanitarium company relocating from the nearby town of Findlay. A week later, The American Liquor and Opium Cure Company began operation in town (“Liquor...” 1892). Within a year, the Liquor and Opium Cure was mired in lawsuits, including two for wrongful death, and had undergone a change in management as a result. All this played out in the *Sandusky Daily Register*, often alongside adverts for the sanitarium.

The Liquor and Opium Cure maintained a regular advertising campaign in the local paper, despite the bad press. From December 1892 to June 1893, ads that were two columns wide ran approximately 135 times, all with the same wording announcing in bold print a “New Life for Victims of the Liquor and Opium Habits” (see Image 7). Ads for the Liquor and Opium Cure also prominently announced that they used “Purely Vegetable Remedies!” The first ad for the sanitarium ran opposite an ad for J. Kuebler & Co, local brewers, and national news stories received by telegraph of desperados, fugitives hanged, and a short piece on the veracity of an insanity defence in the murder trial of the infamous Lizzie Bordon (“Is Lizzie...” 1892). The sensational content of the adjacent stories likely brought the eye to the Liquor and Opium Cure ads and, if anything, the juxtaposition next to an ad for a brewery may even have drawn more attention to the sanitarium ad. On 20 December 1892, less than a month after the Liquor and Opium Cure opened, the newspaper published a story reporting the first of two deaths at the sanitarium (“Was Too Far...” 1892). The news story, which seemed to blame the deceased for being “too far gone,” was conspicuously printed next to an advertisement for the sanitarium.

The above example, in which the American Liquor and Opium Cure simultaneously proclaims its value next to a news story about the death of one of its patients, is emblematic of the era’s complicated and contradictory discourse surrounding opium, and alcohol for that matter. After the Civil War, but before the legal changes in the 1900s, the United States was a morass of conflicting medical and pseudo-medical products and advice. While perennially profitable, patent medicines were also always suspect (Baker 2014). American medical practitioners were not yet entirely professionalised, and many were unlicensed and untrained – there were quacks, hucksters, and charlatans to use the parlance of the era. Incidentally, the short-lived sanitarium craze was more an extension of the preceding patent medicine craze than an aspect of medical professionalisation – sanitarium ar-

IN THE BEHALF. FROM THE THE ABOVE.

**NEW LIFE**

—FOR—

**Victims of the Liquor and Opium Habits**

Absolute Cure Guaranteed by

**Purely Vegetable Remedies !**

Entailing no Harmful After Effects.

Patients received, boarded and treated at the Sanitarium,  
Sandusky, O., or treated privately, as preferred.  
For information as to terms, etc., address or apply to

**THE AMERICAN**

**LIQUOR & OPIUM CURE CO.,**

Sandusky, O. Sanitarium—Hayes Ave.

Image 7. The Liquor and Opium Cure Co. advertisement, printed in the *Sandusky Daily Register* on 2 December 1892.

rived as more affluent Americans were seeking to be rid of their addictions and disappeared when wealthier people stopped frequenting these places of extended convalescence (Aurin 2000).

The “new life” being offered in The American Liquor and Opium Cure sanitarium may have been a discursive manoeuvre to link the business to the intertextual connections of the sobriety and self-control discourses of the Temperance Movement, and the moral perfectionism of nineteenth-century American religious revivals (Gusfield 1986). Various temperance societies made this interconnection explicit in their charters and resolutions. The National Temperance Convention of 1865, for instance, asserted that drunkenness was “not only a social evil” but also “a sin against God” (“SARATOGA...” 1865).

If the Sandusky sanitarium’s ads were subtle in their reference to religiosity and temperance, other “cures” for intemperance were not so restrained. In 1891, local druggists advertised Dr. Haines Golden Specific, a patent medicine comprised of capsicum and ipecac and said to be a cure for the liquor habit (Hall 2013). The target audience was not the chronic drinker but the drinker’s family and loved ones. Ads included the tagline “in all the world there is but one cure” and the unsubtle suggestion of covert dosing – “it can be given in a cup of coffee or tea, or in articles of food,

without the knowledge of the patient, if necessary” (Crosby 1881; “Dr. Haines...” 1891). Dr Haines, a Cincinnati-area Quaker minister, educator, and homeopathic physician, claimed that his Golden Specific was endorsed by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) (Hall 2013).

Temperance societies were active in the Firelands area as early as 1833, but it was around 1859 that the Sons of Temperance began holding weekly meetings in downtown Sandusky (“On the 14th...” 1833; “Temperance...” 1852; “Sons...” 1859; “Editors...” 1860). The appearance of ads echoing temperance rhetoric in order to sell patent medicines is a testament to the relevance of the movement’s increasing discursive power. While liquor and opium use continued to be commonplace in the area, the two substances remained inextricably linked at the time, both as medicine and as vice. The Temperance Movement’s admonishment and scorn of inebriety and the opium habit grew more prominent in print media throughout the nineteenth century, presaging the eventual prohibition of drink and drugs.

### **/// Discussion**

The moral perfectionism of the nineteenth-century temperance and religious revivalist movements in the United States followed the overarching trend of merging strict moralism and Protestant religiosity which began with the Puritans and remains a recurring theme in American law and political discourse (Erikson 1966). The anti-alcohol fervour of the Temperance Movement, with the associated religious rhetoric, was extended to include opium by the powerful and far-reaching Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1880 (Tyrrell 1991; Reckner and Brighton 1999; Courtwright 2001). By 1886, the WCTU had become internationally influential, due in part to their anti-opium stance, coupled with their “missionary impulse,” which led them to adopt a global platform of opposition to all psychoactive substances (Tyrrell 1991: 1–28). By the turn of the twentieth century, one result of this impulse was a proliferation of rhetoric proclaiming the sinfulness of alcohol, opium, and other psychoactive substances (Frank & Nagel 2017). The WCTU asserted a discourse of moral perfectionism which promoted self-control – the original meaning of temperance – as virtuous, and habitual use of psychoactive substances as nothing more than sinful vice.

This discourse of moral perfectionism was not new when the WCTU obtained its international influence, but the various findings of this article show that its dominance was not inevitable (Kunyk, Milner & Overend 2016). Moral perfectionism joined a multiplicity of interrelated discourses



– the discourse of fear and the health discourse illustrated in this article – along with deep-seated racism, ultimately inspiring the Opium Act of 1909 and the Harrison Act of 1914 (Booth 2013). The Opium Act and Harrison Act made any use of opiates without a prescription illegal in the United States. These legal changes effectively solidified the discourse on opium and opium-based substances in the United States for decades.

During the eighteenth century, opium was considered a generally safe, relatively unproblematic medicine (Musto 1991; Booth 2013). Until the appearance of advertisements marketing non-opiate patent medicines asserted the dangers of opium to suggest their products were efficacious through omission, the ads treated opium-based products as an ordinary commodity. From that point on, ads generally hid their product's opium contents, except during the deadly cholera outbreak of 1849 when local advertisements once again treated opium as a “heroic substance” (Booth 2013: 67–80). As soon as the threat of cholera went from stark reality to fearful memory, however, the discourse on opium and morphine returned to complicated ambivalence.

Any analysis of advertising in the United States over time ultimately, even if unintentionally, reveals aspects of both the country's civil religion and its complicated socio-economic and socio-political history. The two driving elements of capitalism in the United States – profit and control – appeared to conflict when mass production required clear heads as the Gilded Age made way for progress and efficiency (Clarke 1990; Alexander & Karns 2008). Industrial assembly lines precipitated the need for an easily trainable, predictable workforce. This predictability required an increase in bodily control over the individual (Foucault 1978, 2003). Mind, body, and – according to moral perfectionism – soul were all required to be chaste of intemperance and pliable for Fordist hegemony. In this sense, virtue meant a sober mind and a relatively healthy body ready for industrial labour. The peculiar tension between profit from the consumer and control over the worker then favoured productivity. Alternatively, and perhaps interrelatedly, the regulation of psychoactive substances became relevant only after these substances' market potential expanded from local to global – from Graham's Drug Store selling Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup to the Sears-Roebuck catalogues marketing Bayer Heroin (DeLanda 2000: 44–46; Hager 2019).

Moreover, the collective misremembering of opium and morphine usage served the same productive purpose (Wertsch & Roediger III 2008). Sandusky, for instance, is a town with a keen collective local memory. Resi-

dents are well aware that their town was the penultimate stop before Canada for many taking the Underground Railroad (Siebert 1896; Wertsch & Roediger III 2008).<sup>14</sup> Still, much like the rest of the United States, Sandusky residents have collectively forgotten the, at times, sordid history of local druggists and the unfettered sale of opium and opiate patent medicines.

### /// Conclusion

A few findings of this study were unexpected and have seldom been explored in previous research on advertising discourses. First, many print ads marketing patent medicines focused on opium-based products to reinforce the illusion of their own product's safety. While many patent medicines avoided divulging their ingredients, Dr. Cannon's Cholera Cordial's opium content was highlighted to ensure people knew that it contained the temporarily sought-after preventative ingredient. Later, as patent medicine ads returned to demonising opium-based products, and making advertisements that resembled actual news stories became a common trend, the Acker's Baby Soother ads took the practice a step further with the shocking fabrication of a dead child to sell the product. The transition of discursive tonalities from ambivalent banality to antagonism and moral dread proved uneven and situationally dependent. This unevenness might appear implausible if considered solely at a macro-level, whereas in this case, it seems that religion, politics, and even the economic system itself aligned against the discursive subject.

By focusing on a sample in a localised study area, I uncovered a series of discursive shifts in advertising for opium and related medical products over time. I have provided an example of how advertising content can be used as a fruitful data source for analysing social change through intertextual discourse analysis. The consideration of advertising discourses within a local context provides depth to the, at times, granular analysis necessary to connect changing social conditions, shifting rhetoric, and the disposition of the subject. Over time, advertising replaced diaries, court proceedings, transcribed records of political speeches, and religious tracts to be among the pre-eminent medium for the *vox populi*. This transition in discourse coincided, also unevenly, with shifts in the legal disposition of the psychoactive subject. In 1909, the first of many legal changes in the United

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<sup>14</sup> Several residents of Sandusky aided in the safe passage of runaway slaves prior to, and during the Civil War. This is common knowledge in the town. A monument commemorating Sandusky's role in the Underground Railroad was erected in 2007.

States rendered the legal nature of opium inert. Eventually, the dominant discourse on the topic became static as well, for a time. The future of psychoactive substances' legal or discursive dispositions is unclear, but they will be inextricably yet unevenly linked.

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### /// Abstract

Before sweeping legal changes in the United States in the early twentieth century, opium and other psychoactive substances were publicly available and advertised in various media. This article analyses rhetoric relating to opium and opiate products in advertisements through the dynamic consideration of available newsprint advertising and adjacent news stories from a single community and geographic area, Sandusky, Ohio, between 1825 and 1909. The results illustrate non-linear trajectories for opium-based patent medicines from banal to heroic, to useful negation, to poison. The findings include deceptive ads fashioned to look like tragic news stories, non-opiate patent medicines, and local sanitarium promoting liquor and opium cures. This research illustrates the systematic use of print advertising

content for micro-historical social analysis within a local context, providing depth to an otherwise forgotten social phenomenon.

Keywords:

opium, advertisements, discourse, social change

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