

# Commercialisation of Medicine in Myla Goldberg's *Wickett's Remedy*

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## ABSTRACT

Literature has always been considered as a source of revealing facts that are restricted due to socio-political constraints. In pandemic literature, the adversities people have faced in fighting with the disease has been used to surface the hidden unethical practices that were prevalent during those times. The Spanish Flu of 1918 has affected the globe as terribly as the World War I. Money and greed have been channelised into the minds of commoners due to insufficient facilities regarding healthcare and food. This research paper explores the theme of the marketing of medicine in the novel *Wickett's Remedy* by Myla Goldberg, set against the backdrop of the 1918 influenza pandemic. The paper delves into the commercialisation of medicine during the crisis and examines the deceptive marketing strategies used by companies to sell patent medicines. It analyses the misrepresentation of medicine, the manipulation of public trust, and the impact on public perception of healthcare. Additionally, the paper discusses the socioeconomic implications of the profit-driven approach, including price gouging and disparities in access to remedies. Through a critical analysis of the novel, this research paper highlights the ethical concerns surrounding the commercialization of medicine and offers insights into the lessons that can be learned from this historical context in relation to contemporary healthcare practices.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Commercialisation, Medicine, Spanish Flu, Disease

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Wickett's Remedy*, the desperate search for a cure during the 1918 influenza pandemic is a central aspect of the story. The characters, including the protagonist Lydia Kilkenny, are faced with the overwhelming and deadly nature of the disease, and they seek solutions to alleviate suffering and find a cure. Lydia becomes involved in the marketing and promotion of a patent medicine called Wickett's Remedy developed by his husband Henry Wickett. This medicine claims to provide relief from the flu and becomes widely sought after during the pandemic. The desperation of the people leads them to believe in the promises made by such remedies, despite their questionable efficacy. As the pandemic rages on, it becomes clear that many of the remedies being marketed are ineffective in preventing or treating the flu. Despite the widespread use of various concoctions and tonics, the disease continues to claim lives.

The book explores the exploitation of people's fears and vulnerability during times of crisis. Various characters, including Lydia, witness the marketing plans used to sell dubious remedies. The profit-driven nature of the industry preys on requirement for cure despite having low to no chances of relief, giving false hope and making promises that often go unfulfilled. During the early 20th century, there were limited regulations on the sale and marketing of medicines. The novel reflects the absence of stringent oversight, allowing unproven remedies to be sold to the public without proper scientific evidence of their promising results.

The novel does explore the misrepresentation of medicine during the 1918 influenza pandemic. The story depicts the exploitation of people's fears and vulnerabilities, as well as the questionable marketing tactics used to promote remedies. The book focuses on the promotion and sale of patent medicines, including Wickett's Remedy, which claims to provide relief from the flu. These patent medicines were often marketed with exaggerated claims and false promises, preying on people's desperation for a cure. The novel portrays the misleading nature of these remedies, suggesting that they were more about profiting from the pandemic rather than genuinely helping those affected.

Try WICKETT'S REMEDY for a new lease on life!  
Find your spirits lifted, your outlook improved!  
All queries answered personally.

Send 25¢ and an accompanying letter to:  
Post Office Square, Box 27, Boston. (Goldberg 45)

The novel surfaces the marketing strategies used to sell patent medicines during the pandemic. The desperation and fear surrounding the disease make people vulnerable to exploitation. Advertisements, testimonials, and persuasive techniques are employed to convince individuals that these remedies are their best chance for survival. The commercialization of medicine during the influenza pandemic is also depicted as an opportunity for price gouging. As the demand for remedies increases, companies inflate the prices of their products, taking advantage of people's desperation and willingness to pay exorbitant amounts for a potential cure. This further emphasizes the profit-driven nature of the industry. The book portrays the dark side of such marketing strategies, revealing the profit-driven motives behind them.

Despite the claims made by the medicine manufacturers, the novel depicts the ineffectiveness of these remedies in combating the influenza virus. The characters, including Lydia, discover that the remedies they have been promoting or using are ultimately unable to prevent or cure the disease. This highlights the discrepancy between the marketing hype and the actual results of these medicines. This becomes evident when the “*Joint Board Endorses None of the Vaccines at Present in Use*”. The Board concludes:

- “1—The evidence at hand affords no trustworthy basis for regarding prophylactic vaccination against influenza as of value in preventing the spread of the disease or of reducing its severity.
- “2—The evidence at hand convinces the board that the vaccines we have considered have no specific value in the treatment of influenza.
- “3—There is evidence that no unfavorable results have followed the use of the vaccines.” (306)

The book also touches upon the scientific and medical efforts to find a cure or develop effective treatments during the pandemic. Researchers and healthcare professionals work tirelessly to understand the nature of the disease and develop interventions. The pamphlet carrying the information about the discovery to fight the flu entitled “NEW SERUM BARS PNEUMONIA” shows that microbiologists have been working tirelessly to provide relief, if not permanent cure, to the patients. However, the limitations of medical knowledge at the time and the rapid spread of the virus make progress slow and uncertain.

The novel also highlights the human capacity for resilience and ingenuity. Characters find ways to cope with the disease, support one another, and adapt to the challenging circumstances. The focus shifts from the reliance on dubious remedies to finding solace in human connections and the strength of community. Henry becomes the representative of those who have been trying to help people find peace of mind which the uncertainty of life has snatched from their minds. The restlessness can be overcome by care and acknowledging their existence which Henry addresses in his conversation with Lydia:

Henry's voice swelled. “If letters could bring us so much good, then what's to stop them from helping others? Sufferers of hypochondriacal illnesses will never find lasting relief from a bottle, but if my letters can offer them some pale happiness or companionship, then perhaps they will feel a small degree of rejuvenation that has blessed me, through you.” (32)

A sense of self and responsibility towards patients is the remedy for the commercialised medicine sold solely for making profit. The novel portrays the disappointment and disillusionment that accompanies the realization that these remedies cannot truly combat the influenza virus. It sheds light on the exploitative practices, false promises, and the emotional toll of relying on ineffective treatments. At the same time, it emphasizes the resilience and resourcefulness of individuals in the face of a devastating disease outbreak.

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