

Victorian Affects

Online Workshop
DACH Victorianists Network

organised by

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With its burgeoning interest in materialism, physiology, and the body, Victorian culture can be seen as anticipating contemporary critical formulations of the affect concept (Cohn; Jaffe). Nineteenth-century writers like Alexander Bain (*The Emotions and the Will*, 1859), George Henry Lewes (*Problems of Life and Mind*, 1874–79), and Grant Allen (*Physiological Aesthetics*, 1877) explored the materiality and the somatics of emotions in ways that resonate with contemporary theorisations of affect. Modern affect theory, in turn, has developed an analytical language and a conceptual toolkit which provide, in Elisha Cohn's words, a "provocative critical vocabulary and approach for Victorian studies" (564).

Commonly defined as a set of pre-linguistic, pre-cognitive, and unconscious physiological intensities capable of moving and connecting bodies, affect has been understood as a force that crosses boundaries between the material and the immaterial as well as the human and the non-human. Located on the threshold between the body and its environment, affective energies "make things matter" (Ngai 54) without determining identity, orientation, or direction.

Whereas the "affective turn" (Clough and Halley) has prompted research in various fields within the humanities and social sciences, Victorianists have only recently begun to explore the potential of affect for the study of nineteenth-century literature and culture. As a series of important book chapters and monographs (see Ablow; Cohen; Dames; Gilbert; Gooch; MacDonald; Morgan; Samalin) as well as a recent cluster of essays in *Victorian Studies* (64.4, 2022) demonstrate, however, affect is emerging as one of the most exciting subjects in the field.

This workshop aims to bring Victorian notions of affect and contemporary theorisations of the concept into dialogue with one another. We seek to address a number of related questions: What can an affect-oriented criticism contribute to our understanding of Victorianism and its private, social, and "political emotions" (Nussbaum)? What methodological potential does affect theory have for readings of canonical and non-canonical Victorian writing? Conversely, what can the study of Victorian (con-)texts contribute to the critical vocabulary of affect-based literary and cultural criticism?

We are happy to announce that the workshop programme will feature a keynote lecture by **Elisha Cohn** (<https://english.cornell.edu/elisha-cohn>). The workshop is supported through funding from Deutscher Anglistenverband e.V.

We welcome contributions which

- investigate Victorian ideas of affect and related concepts (feelings, emotions, etc.)
- look at affect as a theme in, or a feature of, Victorian texts and contexts
- engage affect theory as an approach, methodology, or tool to analyse Victorian literature and culture
- explore overlaps and links between affect theory and other (recent) critical paradigms (new materialism, new formalism, gender and queer theory, animal studies, post- and decolonial studies, ecocriticism, etc.)

Papers may address, but are by no means limited to, topics such as:

- literary representations of affect(s) / writing and affect
- the function of affect in specific literary genres and modes (lyric and narrative poetry, sensation fiction, the social novel, realism, melodrama, etc.)
- the politics of affect
- the role of affect for the constitution of racial, gender, and/or class identity in Victorian literature and culture
- affect and Empire / the affective dimensions of Victorian imperial discourse
- ecocritical perspectives on Victorian affect and nature / the environment
- affect and (Victorian) scientific and disciplinary formations (philosophy, physiology, psychology, etc.)
- Victorian affect(s) and the reading experience / affect and reader-response theory / affect and aesthetic experience / affect and “the physiology of the novel” (Dames)
- affect and (new) materialism

Contributors can opt for one of the following two formats:

- A flashlight presentation of 5–10 minutes which outlines the scope and aims of a research project (such as a PhD thesis, a postdoctoral project, or a collaborative research project) situated in the field of Victorian affect studies, broadly conceived.
- A paper of 15 minutes which focuses on a case study or on specific historical, theoretical, methodological, or didactic aspects of the workshop theme (as outlined above).

Please send your **proposal** (250 words) and a brief **bio note** (100–200 words) to Anja Hartl (Anja.Hartl@uibk.ac.at) and Tim Sommer (Tim.Sommer@uni-passau.de) by **15 September 2023**. Please also indicate whether you would like to give a flashlight presentation or a paper.

On the DACH Victorianists Network:

DACH Victorianists is a network that brings together scholars from the “D-A-CH” region (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) whose research and teaching focus on Victorian literature and culture. For more information, see DACH Victorianists online:

<https://dachvictorianists.blogspot.com>.

Works Cited

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