

Call for Papers

Victorian Antipathies

4-5 November 2022

University of Stuttgart, Germany

Confirmed keynote speaker: Pamela Gilbert

In this conference, we aim to explore the neglected ‘opposite’ of sympathy: antipathy.

Sympathy has long been a focal point of Victorian studies, so much so that Carolyn Burdett (2020) has recently asked with reference to George Eliot: ‘Is there anything left to say about sympathy [...]?’ While sympathy in its various guises – as concept, feeling, intersubjective ideal, connection between characters, and ethical appeal to readers – has undoubtedly been a productive field of enquiry, this one-sided focus on sympathy in criticism carries the danger of overstating its role. Also referring to Eliot’s work, Rae Greiner points out that the ‘wealth of talk is disproportionate to the narrow fund of sympathy represented in [Eliot’s] novels’ (2009, 300). Besides sympathy, other, similarly important if less appealing, feelings and actions, including hatred and protracted conflict that may lead, in their extremes, to violence and murder, occupy a defining place in Victorian literature. This conference turns the spotlight on these various manifestations of antipathy in Victorian literature and culture to explore their literary and cultural significance, to determine their aesthetic implications, and to identify their progressive potential.

Victorian psychologist and philosopher Alexander Bain argued that the ‘very name “antipathy” implies the deathblow to fellow-feeling’ (1859, 183), suggesting that antipathy was, like sympathy, of concern to the Victorians. It features in explorations of relations between mental and physical aspects, self and other, individuals and groups. Bain defines antipathy as a ‘malevolent passion’ that ‘may arise without the provocation of injury, as in the antipathies of race, of caste, and of creed’ and has its ‘highest activity’ in ‘Warfare, Hostility, Combat’ (Bain 1870, 265). Similar to Bain, who explores the physiological basis of antipathy, his contemporary Sophie Bryant claims that ‘the physical accompaniment’ precisely distinguishes antipathy from mere dislike: ‘Antipathy is full of horrid thrill: it stirs the physical being like a shock: it is a thing of nervous tremors and heart-pangs and even deranged digestion’ (Bryant 1895, 366). Victorian writers, too, showed a keen interest in creative explorations of antipathy across a wide range of themes and in diverse fictional and non-fictional genres. In 21st-century Victorian Studies, therefore, Bryant’s assessment that the ‘analysis of antipathy and its relation to sympathy is a subject which may be worth more detailed and careful study than it appears as yet to have received’ (Bryant 1895, 365) remains as timely and urgent as it was in the nineteenth century.

Taking Bryant’s call for the study of antipathy as our point of departure, this conference aims to contribute to the growing research on unprestigious feelings with a specific focus on the Victorian age. As opposed to the cathartic effects triggered by pity and fear, for example, antipathetic sentiments are less likely to lead to purifying release, and feature in texts that ‘foreground[] a failure of emotional release ([... a] form of suspended “action”)’ (Ngai 2005, 9). Sianne Ngai in *Ugly Feelings* explores the political potential of such ‘ugly,’ non-cathartic and repressed emotions, while Zachary Samalin has recently focused specifically on Victorian cultures and the political aesthetics of disgust (Samalin 2021). Audre Jaffe has argued that affective cues and responses of distress, disgust, and shame shape representations of and reader responses to class identity (Jaffe 2017). Relatedly, we might ask in how far the ‘representation of class as affect’ (Jaffe 2017, 731) is a representation of class as antipathy. Arguably, the aesthetic ideals of realism and naturalism lend themselves to eliciting readers’ antipathies to discourage immoral behaviour and foster a sense of group (often middle-class) identity – aims that also inspire Victorian hopes for sympathy and its ethical effects.

We welcome papers addressing topics relating to antipathy broadly conceived. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- aspects of antipathy such as hatred, violence, disgust, irritation, shame, ...
- relationship between antipathy and sympathy, tolerance, forgiveness, ...
- antipathy in personal and social relations: marriage, imperial/colonial relations, class relations, ...
- affective, physiological, ideological aspects of antipathy
- antipathy as strategy to draw or upset boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, beliefs, people, literatures, ...
- antipathy and Victorian genres and modes: e.g. realism, sensationalism, aestheticism, non-fictional writing, performance, neo-Victorian literature ...
- antipathy and the act of writing/reading: antipathy as expression of contemporary readers' difference from Victorian texts and values; antipathy and/as critical practice

Please send us your **250-word** proposal for a **20** minute talk and a brief bio note to

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by **15 May 2022**.

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