

Queen Mary Centre for the History of the Emotions &
Birkbeck Centre for Nineteenth Century Studies

One-day Research Colloquium

Wandering Feelings: The Transmission of Emotion in the Long Nineteenth Century

Friday 11th November 2011, 10am-6pm, Queen Mary University of London



‘If we accept with comparatively ready acquiescence that our thoughts are not entirely independent, we are, nonetheless, peculiarly resistant to the idea that our emotions are not altogether our own.’

– Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (2004)

Although Brennan is surely correct in identifying the tenacity of our commitment to our feelings as our own, history shows that locating feeling has always been a problematic task. In the seventeenth century, a sore body part might induce a corresponding discomfort in another bodily region; in the eighteenth century, Hume wrote of the passions as highly contagious, passing ‘with the greatest facility from one person to another’. Feelings don’t readily stay in place: they wander, and get passed around.

This day-length colloquium seeks to investigate emotional transmission in the nineteenth century. In this period, the traditional location for ‘higher’ feelings – the soul – was challenged by theories of physiology which posited instead reflex actions and the localization of brain functions. At the same time, literature was pervaded by new anxieties about the consequences of too much feeling, and of feelings insufficiently under control. From Charles Bell’s idea that weeping might be produced of sympathy between the lachrymal gland and internal organs, to Gustave Le Bon’s accounts of the spread of panic among crowds, the contagion of emotions has called into question the composition of the body, the individual autonomy of feelings, and the possibility of an emotional self.

Speakers: Isobel Armstrong (Birkbeck), Geoffrey Cantor (UCL), Thomas Dixon (QMUL), Helen Groth (University of New South Wales), Susan Lanzoni (Wellesley College), Louise Lee (KCL), Alexandra Lewis (University of Aberdeen), Shane McCorristine (National University of Ireland/University of Cambridge), Gregory Tate (University of Surrey), Paul White (University of Cambridge) & Cheryce von Xylander (Technische Universität Darmstadt).

Organisers: Carolyn Burdett (Birkbeck, University of London) & Tiffany Watt-Smith (QMUL)

PROGRAMME

- 9.30am** **Registration**
- 9.50am** **Welcome and introduction**
- 10-11.15am** **Emotional Nations**
- Paul White (University of Cambridge) and Cheryce von Xylander (Technische Universität Darmstadt)
National Feeling: the emotional state in Britain and the German lands, 1790-1830
- Geoffrey Cantor (University College London)
"Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!" – Reactions to the Great Exhibition of 1851
- 11.15-11.45am** **Coffee**
- 11.45-12.45pm** **Emotional Freighting**
- Alexandra Lewis (University of Aberdeen)
Crisis and Contagion: Transmitting Traumatic Affect
- Susan Lanzoni (Wellesley College)
Feeling in Things: Empathy Aesthetics at the Fin-de-Siècle
- 12.45-1.30pm** **Poetics and Feeling**
- Isobel Armstrong (Birkbeck, University of London)
George Eliot and Spinoza: A Poetics of Feeling
- 1.30-2.30pm** **Lunch**

2.30-4pm

Roving, Dreaming, Travelling

Shane McCorristine (National University of Ireland/University of Cambridge)
Mesmerism, Technology and Affect in the Search for John Franklin's Arctic Expedition

Helen Groth (University of New South Wales)
Contagious Dreaming: Transmission and the Cultural History of Dreams

Gregory Tate (University of Surrey)
World-Wide Wandering: Travel, Motion and Emotion in Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologues

4-4.30pm

Tea

4.30-5.30pm

Giggling and Weeping

Louise Lee (King's College, University of London)
Darwin's Double Acts: Stooges and Jokers in the Comedy of Species

Thomas Dixon (Queen Mary, University of London)
Victorian Philosophies of Weeping: Performance, Sympathy and Emotion

5.30-6pm

Summing up and discussion

6pm onwards

Drinks reception

REGISTRATION

Full Registration £20

Student Registration £10

Places are limited. To register, please follow this link

https://eshop.qmul.ac.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?compid=1&modid=2&prodid=188&deptid=34&catid=1

LOCATION

G.O. Jones Building, Room 602, Mile End Campus

Queen Mary, University of London

Mile End Road

London

E1 4NS

For a map, please visit <http://www.qmul.ac.uk/about/howtofindus/mileend/>.

The G. O. Jones building is number 20 on the map.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, please contact Tiffany Watt-Smith: t.k.watt-smith@qmul.ac.uk

Front image : anonymous tintype of two women mourning.