

CALL FOR PAPERS
for the Ninth Digital DACH Victorianists Workshop
Friday, 26 June 2026, 10:00–16:00h, Zoom

**‘Terraqueous’ Victorians:
Global Geographies as Metaphor, Materiality, and Methodology**

Victorian Studies is in the midst of a large-scale conceptual reorientation. Since the new millennium, scholars have increasingly “dismantle[d] its historical and geographical boundaries” (Joshi 2011, 40) and encouraged “a [...] shift away from its traditional nation-based parameters” (Agathocleous 2015, 651). The ninth digital DACH Victorianists workshop seeks to contribute to this ongoing reassessment by putting Victorian Studies into global perspective and exploring how Victorian literature and culture were shaped by and, in turn, shaped what Margaret Cohen (2010, 658) calls ‘terraqueous geographies’ – a spatial and epistemological continuum which suggests that imperial, ecological, and cultural histories must be understood across the fluid threshold between terrestrial and oceanic spaces.

Kate Flint (2005, 230, 231) observes that the adjective ‘Victorian’ has long carried an “unmistakable national, and nationalist, overtone,” thus constraining a proper “understanding and conceptualization of transnational issues.” However, a growing body of research has begun to situate the Victorian age within global and planetary frameworks. In her monograph *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (2015), Charlotte Mathieson argues that the construction of new transport infrastructures during the period gave rise to a novel sense of national community: “New technologies of movement solidified internal connections bringing together the place of the nation, while opening up the world beyond as more readily and quickly within reach; the changing concept of nationhood thereby became integrally bound up with reshaping structures of space and mobility” (1). Mathieson’s argument is just one example of how recent contributions to the field of Victorian Studies have foregrounded the central role that transnational mobility played in the construction of Victorian identities. Various special issues, including Lauren Goodlad and Julia Wright’s *Victorian Internationalisms* (2007), Tanya Agathocleous and Jason Rudy’s *Victorian Cosmopolitanisms* (2010), and Pablo Mukherjee’s *Victorian World Literatures* (2011), as well as monographs such as Goodlad’s *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience* (2015) and edited collections like Martin Hewitt’s *The Victorian World* (2012), collectively signal a concern with “the interplay of domestic and global dynamics in the formation of Victorian orthodoxies” (cover blurb) and, as a consequence, the need to broaden the field’s spatial and methodological horizons. This endeavour has been energized by postcolonial studies representatives like Edward Said (1993) and Patrick Brantlinger (1988; 2009) who have disclosed “the particular inaptness of the national frame for the Victorian period” (Agathocleous 2015, 651).

A spatial concept that offers a productive lens through which to revisit and expand on these debates is that of the ocean. More recently, research in the field of the blue humanities, including the work of Bernhard Klein (2002), Ursula Kluwick (2019), Charlotte Mathieson (2016), and John Peck (2001), among others, has reconsidered Victorian literature and culture from maritime and oceanic viewpoints. To mention the latest example, Emily Cuming’s *Maritime Relations: Life, Labour and Literature at the Water’s Edge, 1850–1914* (2025) goes beyond canonical Victorian fiction and examines the diverse forms of life writing by Victorian sailors as well as their female relatives to demonstrate that maritime labour had the capacity to subvert “hegemonic ideas of nation and empire” (202). And if it is true that, as David Cannadine (2007, 4) argues, the Royal Navy and the merchant marine were central agents in building empire, we can assume that its literary and cultural formations were equally forged by watery routes, littoral encounters, and intercontinental flows. Against this backdrop, Cohen (2010, 658) calls for a move beyond the privileging of terrestrial settings – “the city, the factory, and the country; the public and the private; and the nation and the colony” – and towards “oceans and continents, islands, archipelagoes, and coasts, as well as the ship,” which together constitute the spatial logic of the Victorian era.

As it places Victorian Studies within this expanding terraqueous framework, the workshop aims to revise the terrestrial frames and forms through which the Victorian period is conventionally conceived. Drawing on approaches from the fields of mobility studies, postcolonial studies, and oceanic studies, among others, it proceeds from the premise that Victorian literature and culture emerged through the global mobility of people, commodities, and ideas, which produced dynamic networks of cross-cultural circulation and contact. By attending to the global geographies of the nineteenth century, we seek to explore how Victorians imagined the links between space and collective identity, as well as how these imaginaries were forged by oceanic and terrestrial encounters: What new insights arise when we consider notions of the Victorian community not as fixed, insular, and national, but instead as the sum of various “constellations of mobility” (Cresswell 2010, 17) that are defined by transnational crossings, the flow of narrative, culture, and art, as well as hybrid zones? How do terraqueous perspectives transform the interpretive frameworks of postcolonial, mobilities, and environmental scholarship? And which new methodologies are required to capture the transnational textures of the Victorian world? To answer these questions, our discussions will conceptualize maritime spaces not only as the natural and geographical settings against which naval adventures and imperial projects unfold, but as sites to negotiate mobilities and discourses that allow us to better fathom the scale ranging from imaginations of the nation to imaginations of the globe and the planet that shape Victorian culture and society.

We welcome **papers of 15–20 minutes** that engage with the dialectic between maritime and terrestrial dimensions of Victorian literature and culture through literary and cultural studies, postcolonial studies, (literary) mobility studies, spatial theory, ecocriticism, and/or the blue humanities. Contributions may cover any (inter-)disciplinary perspective and any medium; they are also expected to address “the imaginary geographies” (Cohen 2010, 658) of the Victorian age by conceptualizing oceanic and/or littoral spaces as metaphor, material environment, and/or methodological challenge. Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

Metaphor

- the use of oceanic and terrestrial imagery in representations of mobility, globalization, and empire
- the sea and shore as symbolic and narrative spaces and/or ships and vessels as “mobile chronotopes” (Peterle 2023, 109)
- ‘the ocean’ or ‘the sea’ as categories for the analysis of spatial representations in Victorian fiction
- approaches to (the) ocean(s) as a “contact zone” (Pratt 1992) or “meeting place” (Massey 1991)
- the relevance of littoral metaphors for processes of identity formation or societal and cultural transformation, as well as the negotiation of instability
- the role of aquatic metaphors in shaping Victorian conceptions of relations between the self, “imagined communities” (Anderson 2015 [1983]), and the world
- the use of transoceanic imaginaries in Victorian visual culture
- water as a conceptual framework for the study of human and nonhuman mobility, as well as the relationship between the human and the more-than-human world

Materiality

- railways, ports, docks, and canals as infrastructures of global connectivity
- circulations of bodies, goods, and technologies across imperial and colonial geographies
- water as a repository of cultural memory
- maritime labour and environmental transformation in the age of empire
- Victorian encounters with the nonhuman worlds and nonhuman worlds as agents of narrative
- the material culture of global Victorianism: archives, exhibitions, maps, and museums

Methodology

- methodological challenges of applying ‘global,’ ‘transnational,’ or ‘terraqeous’ frameworks
- reassessing Victorian Studies in relation to ecological, mobility, planetary, and oceanic turns

- comparative and transimperial methodologies: beyond Britain and its colonies
- the potentials and pitfalls of ‘contrapuntal reading’ (Said 1993), ‘traveling concepts’ (Neumann and Nünning 2012), ‘traveling genres’ (Cohen 2003), ‘terraqueous literary criticism’ (Mentz and Rojas 2017), and ‘seascape epistemologies’ (Ingersoll 2016)
- the use of digital humanities tools to map Victorian routes, networks, and exchanges

Please send **abstracts of 250–300 words** along with a **short bio** to the organizers Dr Carolin Gebauer (gebauer@uni-wuppertal.de) and Dr Hannah Pardey (hannah.pardey@hhu.de). The deadline for proposals is **1 March 2026**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by **1 April 2026**.

Continuing the tradition of the DACH Victorianists workshops, we also invite **flashlight papers** of 5–10 minutes outlining the aims and scope of a new research project (PhD thesis, postdoc project, etc.) that may or may not relate to the topic of the workshop. Please send **abstracts of 100–150 words** along with a **short bio** to the organizers until **1 March 2026**.

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. It offers a forum for academics of all career stages to present and discuss research and methodologies in Victorian Studies. For more information, see [DACH Victorianists](#) online.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. Verso, 2016 [1983].
- Agathocleous, Tanya. “Imperial, Anglophone, Geopolitical, Worldly: Evaluating the ‘Global’ in Victorian Studies.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43 (2015): 651–658.
- Agathocleous, Tanya and Jason Rudy, editors. *Victorian Cosmopolitanisms*, special issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38.2 (2010).
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies*. Edinburg UP, 2009.
- , *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914*. Cornell UP, 1988.
- Cannadine, David. “Introduction.” *Empire, the Sea and Global History: Britain’s Maritime World, c.1760–c.1840*, edited by David Cannadine, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 1–5.
- Cohen, Margaret. “Literary Studies on the Terraqueous Globe.” *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 657–662.
- , “Traveling Genres.” *New Literary History* 34.3 (2003): 481–499.
- Cuming, Emily. *Maritime Relations: Life, Labour and Literature at the Water’s Edge, 1850–1914*. Cambridge UP, 2025.
- Flint, Kate. “Why ‘Victorian’? Response.” *Victorian Studies* 47 (2005): 230–239.
- Goodlad, Lauren. *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience*. Oxford UP, 2015.
- Goodlad, Lauren and Julia M. Wright, editors. *Victorian Internationalisms*, special issue of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 48 (2007).
- Hewitt, Martin, editor. *The Victorian World*. Routledge, 2013.
- Ingersoll, Karin Amimoto. *Waves of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*. Duke UP, 2016.
- Joshi, Priya. “Globalizing Victorian Studies.” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 41.2 (2011): 20–40.
- Klein, Bernhard, editor. *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture*. Ashgate, 2002.
- Kluwick, Ursula. “Aquatic Matter: Water in Victorian Fiction.” *Open Cultural Studies* 3 (2019): 245–255.
- Massey, Doreen. “A Global Sense of Place.” *Marxism Today* 38 (1991): 24–29.
- Mathieson, Charlotte. *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- , editor. *Sea Narratives: Cultural Responses to the Sea, 1600–Present*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Mentz, Steve and Martha Elena Rojas. “Introduction: ‘The Hungry Ocean.’” *The Sea and Nineteenth-Century Anglophone Literary Culture*, edited by Steve Mentz and Martha Elena Rojas, Routledge, 2017. 1–14.
- Mukherjee, Pablo, editor. *Victorian World Literatures*, special issues of *The Yearbook of English Studies* 41.2 (2011).
- Neumann, Birgit and Angsar Nünning, editors. *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture*. De Gruyter, 2012.
- Peck, John. *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels, 1719–1917*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
- Peterle, Giada. “Narrative Mobilities: Moving Texts from Representation to Practice.” *Reimagining Mobilities Across the Humanities – Volume 1: Theories, Methods and Ideas*, edited by Lucio Biasiori, Federico Mazzini, and Chiara Rabbiosi. Routledge, 2023. 102–116.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1992.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Knopf, 1993.