

It is a common assertion that during the Victorian age the experience of time changed radically. Numerous and various reasons could be offered, among others the effects of the industrial revolution, rapid technological developments and philosophical discourses and scientific discoveries like evolution theory, uniformitarianism, the second law of thermodynamics, Marxism and the faith in progress. But how did these changes affect the way time was experienced and conceived of? What are the characteristics of a specifically Victorian concept of time?

My research looks for answers to these questions by exploring the way in which time is represented in and shapes Victorian (chiefly lyric) poetry. By focusing on poetry, my interest lies not in sequential ordering and the imposition of narrative structures of cause and effect, but rather on the emotional, personal and subjective experience of time in the moment. Thus I examine attitudes and conceptions of time as they are expressed in Victorian poetry in order to trace qualitative and thematic differences between early and late Victorian texts. But I also ask what the changes in temporal concepts entail for the practice of poetry itself.

Drawing on the work of sociologist Barbara Adam, I will focus on four aspects of time:

1. I consider more closely Victorian *time frames* and ask on the one hand for the role of rational and mechanical time frames (as opposed to natural, religious or traditional ones) and on the other, for the interrelation between objective time frame and subjective time experience.
2. I ask for the role of *timing*, and thus the concept of the “right” or “wrong” moment in the dual context of the monotony of mechanical repetition and the belief in progress and radical change.
3. Considering *temporality* I argue that the increasing destabilisation of eternal guarantors, human, natural or divine, turns into a central problem for poetry’s self-understanding as striving to partake of the eternal, which ultimately results in a modernist appropriation of the new and unprecedented to justify the existence of poetry. On the other hand I examine the appropriation of narrative structures and historical perspectives in Victorian poetry and discuss them as an attempt to incorporate temporality within lyric frames.
4. In focusing on aspects of *tempo* in Victorian poetry I address the assessment of speed and haste as well as the depiction of idleness, of temporal stagnancy. My proposition is that Victorian poetry can be seen to be fundamentally torn between a condemnation of haste and a suspicion of idleness.

While some of our experience of time is universally human, much is conditioned by cultural and social practices and forms of knowledge. At the same time, such practices and discourses are in turn essentially structured by our experience of time. To show how specific experiences of time emerged in an age of increasing industrialisation is to help understand the preconditions and historical development of today’s temporal practices, making visible cultural, social and material structures which tacitly mould much of today’s dominant temporal experience in a globalised world.