

Liberalism, Literature, and the Emotions in the Long Nineteenth Century

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OVER THE LAST THREE DECADES OR SO, the word most closely associated with the term “liberalism” has been “crisis.” We read about the crisis of liberalism in Argentina, in Thailand, in Poland, and in a host of other countries. Quite what the crisis is depends on the author’s perspective. For many, it has to do with economics, especially the effects of globalization, or more concretely the policies of neoliberalism; for others, it has to do with democracy and in particular the questions of inclusion/exclusion and equality. Searching the phrase “crisis of liberalism” in Google throws up 11,600,000 results. As Paul Piccone argued in *Telos* as far back as 1991, “the bankruptcy of liberalism has been forecast so often that a sense of impending doom has become part of its very definition.”¹

The sense of crisis was also acute at the turn of the twentieth century. In France, Célestin Boublé, a collaborator of Emile Durkheim, published *The Crisis of Liberalism* in 1902. In England, the same title was given by J. A. Hobson to his 1909 book, the result of a number of essays published earlier in the decade. In the preface to *The Crisis of Liberalism*, Hobson comments that “for over a quarter of a century Liberalism has wandered in this valley of indecision, halting, weak, vacillating, divided, and concessive. Not gaining ground, it yielded it.”² For Hobson, the enemy was Imperialism, with “its natural ally Militarism,” and he had in his sights Joseph Chamberlain and other Liberal Imperialists who deserted the party over William Gladstone’s Irish Home Rule

¹ Paul Piccone, “The Crisis of Liberalism and the Emergence of Populism,” *Telos* 89 (1991): 7. For a more recent restatement of the same theme, see Pierre Manent, “The Crisis of Liberalism,” *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 1 (2014): 131–41.

² J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909; Brighton: Harvester, 1974), viii.



bill. Looking toward the recently elected Liberal Party's program of taxing wealth to pay for the planks of what was to become the Welfare State, he goes on to argue that "every really dangerous onrush of progressive forces has always been checked by a free desertion of moderate Liberals to the enemy. As the new social-economic policy opens out into an 'attack on property' there will be a further shedding of 'the Whigs.'"³

Hobson's account of liberals abandoning liberalism's fundamental principles of reform and progress is replicated in many recent narratives of the crisis in liberalism. A more common version, though, couches it in terms of a problem with liberalism's purported valorizing of rationality over emotion, and abstract individualism over lived experience. Even Lionel Trilling, that doyen of mid-twentieth-century liberalism, criticized an abstract, ratiocinated liberalism that, in its tendency to "organize the elements of life in a rational way," "drifts toward a denial of the emotions and the imagination."⁴ In this context, Trilling followed a long line of thinkers, from Coleridge to Arnold, in conceiving of literature as an important antidote to depersonalizing reason and therefore as a vehicle for revitalizing liberalism.⁵

Recently, scholars have begun turning their attention, once again, to the emotional aspects of liberalism so often overlooked by its adherents and opponents. Noting that "just as passion can contribute to a vibrant political community, it can also contribute to political violence and repression," Cheryl Hall, for example, contends "that the liberal mandate to keep passion out of politics is neither feasible nor desirable."⁶ For Leonard Ferry and Rebecca Kingston, the lack of positive interest in human emotions "among political theorists of contemporary liberalism and liberal democracy" is deficient for two reasons: it can "increase political apathy and cynicism within our political communities," and it is grounded on "an incomplete, if not manifestly false, concept of the human subject."⁷ John Gray works from a similar set of assumptions. In an extensive jeremiad on the negative effects of the "secular, rationalist and universalist political movements" initiated during the Enlightenment, such as liberalism, especially the contemporary "legalist or jurisprudential" liberalism of John Rawls, he argues:

Like much else in modern moral and political theory that has been influenced by Kant and by utilitarianism, Rawls's theory of justice equates the moral point of view with that of impartiality, and thereby denies moral standing to personal projects and attachments.... It is obvious that this liberal position cannot address, save as an inconvenient datum of human psychology, the sense of injustice arising from belonging to an oppressed community.... [H]uman beings individuate themselves as members of historic communities having memories that cross the generations, not as specimens of generic humanity or personhood having a history only by accident.⁸

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (1950; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 14, 13.

⁵ See Stefan Collini, *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 105.

⁶ Cheryl Hall, *The Trouble with Passion: Political Theory beyond the Reign of Reason* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.

⁷ Leonard Ferry and Rebecca Kingston, "Introduction: The Emotions and the History of Political Thought," in *Bringing the Passions Back In: The Emotions in Political Theory*, ed. Leonard Ferry and Rebecca Kingston (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 3.

⁸ John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995), 65, 4–5.

Hall, Ferry, Kingston, and Gray are just a few of a growing number of contemporary political philosophers who, as Susan James puts it, “have started to articulate some of the key values of liberalism in more emotionally charged terms.”⁹ The aim of this issue of *Occasion* is to contribute to the reinscription of the emotions as a core (albeit contested and changing) dimension in liberal thought during a crucial period in its formation and development. To that extent, it not only speaks to recent work in political philosophy but also contributes to the extraordinary expansion of scholarship devoted to the history of the emotions.¹⁰ Unlike recent political philosophy, the focus of the current collection of essays is the long nineteenth century, and in particular how the vexed relationship between liberalism and the emotions during that long period might be examined through the prism of literary studies.

The cross-disciplinary focus of this special issue, especially its emphasis on historical context, addresses what we see as some problems in recent scholarship on both “liberalism and the emotions” and “liberalism and literature.” Political philosophy in particular has been the field where the relationship between liberalism and the emotions has been of most interest in the last several years. Here, the primary concern has been with the role of passion or emotion in public political activity and debate, especially in democratic polities, and specifically with reference to liberal arguments. Generally, it has not been preoccupied with the historical dimension, except where earlier political thinkers have addressed the problem of emotions in the political or governmental realm.¹¹ While political theory has begun to highlight the contested nature of both “liberalism” and “emotions,” it continues to understate the historically changing and dynamic meaning of what might be meant by both terms. And even those studies that combine political philosophy with intellectual history, like Duncan Kelly’s excellent recent interpretation of

⁹ Susan James, “The Politics of Emotion: Liberalism and Cognitivism,” in *Political Philosophy*, ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 231.

¹⁰ On the history of emotions, see, e.g., Susan Broomhall, ed., *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and Sociabilities in Britain, 1650–1850* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2015); Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, eds., *Doing Emotions History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014); David Lemmings and Ann Brooks, eds., *Emotions and Social Change: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2014); Jan Plamper, *The History of the Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History—Lost and Found* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011); Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle’s Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Stuart Walton, *A Natural History of Human Emotions* (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). There is also a body of scholarship on the history of specific emotions. See, e.g., Clark Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Adam Potkay, *The Story of Joy: From the Bible to Late Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2006); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005). In addition, for excellent recent studies of emotional practices, see Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹¹ The essays in Ferry and Kingston’s collection, *Bringing the Passions Back In*, for example, discuss “the emotions and the history of political thought” (the subtitle of the editors’ introduction), addressing political philosophers such as Aristotle, Rousseau, Hume, and Smith.

liberalism as an exercise in propriety,¹² tend to concentrate on a handful of key thinkers and ignore the ways in which their ideas were received and modified by a range of writers using an array of genres. This is surprising, given the burgeoning scholarship on the history of the emotions and the substantial body of criticism on the history and literature of liberalism. We hope that the current collection will add to an emerging dialogue between what have been two largely separate fields of study.

In relation to liberalism, the historical shifts are especially important. Although the subject of an enormous body of work in political history, these shifts tend to be muted in both contemporary political philosophy and work on the emotions, as well as in literary studies. The term itself as applied to a political position emerged only in the 1820s, when, as Michael Freeden notes, it “began to mean more than ‘generous’ or ‘ample’ and assumed the connotations of ‘radical,’ ‘progressive,’ or ‘reformist.’”¹³ Concepts such as “early liberalism” and “protoliberalism” are typically used to refer to the complex antecedents of post-1820s liberalism. As Mark Bevir has argued, nineteenth-century liberalism developed out of the confluence of a number of intellectual traditions, including the Whiggism of the Scottish Enlightenment, Bentham’s radical Utilitarianism, elements of Romantic organicism, and aspects of Evangelicalism. Given that liberal thought consisted not merely of political assumptions and arguments but also of ethical, psychological, and epistemological ones, Bevir suggests that the various components of an individual’s liberalism could be drawn from a mix of any of those traditions.¹⁴ As early forms of liberalism became overlaid with new challenges and vocabularies, so recognizably distinct varieties emerged. These have often been conveniently called classical liberalism (sometimes with Mancunian, sometimes with Gladstonian, variants), the New Liberalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and more recently neoliberalism. The extent to which these versions of liberalism overlap has always been problematical for scholars, and we have not tried to address it in this collection. Rather, we take a position akin to that of Edmund Fawcett, who sees liberalism as an outlook that, in “a destabilized world of ceaseless change” following the upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sought forms of order that were dynamic, not static. Order, in short, was not to be imposed from above but was to be generated from within, “an unsteady, creative tension,” “a frame of order and stability that was flexible enough for adjustment as the forces in conflict changed.”¹⁵ This is an outlook that liberals would come to promote through concepts such as self-regulation, a concept perhaps more creative than insidious when viewed in this context. Guiding such an outlook, Fawcett suggests, were four ideas that we all recognize as central to liberalism: the notion of inescapable social conflict; a distrust of power; faith in human progress; and a respect for other people. Tensions between these ideas, and emphases on one rather than

¹² Duncan Kelly, *The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions, and Judgement in Modern Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

¹³ Michael Freeden, *Liberalism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20. This is in the United Kingdom. In Spain, the *liberales* pressed for a return to constitutional rule following the suspension of the constitution in 1814 by Ferdinand VII, and the term was taken up in France and then anglicized to “Liberal” in England. For the complex history of the term, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (1976; London: Fontana Press, 1988), 179–81.

¹⁴ See Mark Bevir, “The Long Nineteenth Century in Intellectual History,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 6, no. 2 (2001): 313–35.

¹⁵ Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4, 56.

another, also contributed to the numerous versions of liberalism with which we have become familiar—hence our focus in this collection on the long nineteenth century.

The deep intersections of liberalism with the emotions and literature are perhaps most obviously encapsulated in J. S. Mill's narrative of his well-known 1826 mental "crisis" in his *Autobiography* (1873). In it, Mill recounts how, at the age of twenty, he suffered a nervous breakdown and entered into a state of depression that lasted two years. For Mill, a major cause of this personal crisis was the education he received from his father. This education excluded the cultivation of the emotions, the consequences of which were the development of a habitual analytical frame of mind and an associated corrosive self-consciousness. As he narrates the experience, it was this "habit of analysis" that undermined the happiness associated with his life's purpose as "a reformer of the world." "All my happiness," he reflects, "was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing else to live for."¹⁶ Mill traces his subsequent recovery over the next two years to reading Marmontel's *Memoirs*, listening to Weber's *Oberon*, and finally immersing himself in the poetry of Wordsworth. The last in particular was to have a powerful impact:

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind.¹⁷

The preoccupation with feelings in the *Autobiography* is played out in numerous ways,¹⁸ but the point worth stressing here is not just that Mill's rediscovery of his feelings has a personal, therapeutic dimension ("a medicine for my state of mind") but that the states of "sympathetic and imaginative pleasure" engendered by Wordsworth's poems are "social" in direction and conducive to his project as a social reformer. The potential social effects of the feelings are highlighted throughout his works. *Utilitarianism* (1863), for example, is replete with references to them. Concerned there to put the record straight for those who affirm "that utilitarianism renders men cold and unsympathising; that it chills their moral feelings towards individuals,"¹⁹ he

¹⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 137, 139. The *Autobiography* was published in 1873 just after his death but had been drafted and redrafted over much of the preceding twenty years.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 151, 153.

¹⁸ Mill regularly uses the locution "thoughts *and* feelings" (emphasis added), for example, to represent cognitions in relation to action, ethics, and social reform. He uses it too in his accounts of the mental life of people he knows, particularly in his portrayal of Harriet Taylor Mill. His wife, he writes, combined "hard intellect with noble and elevated feeling" (*ibid.*, 195); these "qualities of mind and heart" (195) were superior to his own, "and but for her intellect and her high moral feelings leading me on" (235), he believes he would not have developed as far as he did. Their partnership, he considers, was "a partnership of thought, feeling, and writing" (247).

¹⁹ J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1910), 18. *Utilitarianism* was compiled from previously written papers that were published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1861, before their 1863 publication as a book.

is at pains to instate a whole range of emotional conditions generated by a similarly wide range of experiences as constituting the elements of utilitarian “happiness.”²⁰

Mill, of course, is not the only liberal who assigns literature and the emotions key roles in political thought and activity. His disposition was shared by many other nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformist liberals. Alexander Bain is probably best known for *The Emotions and the Will* (1859), but he was not simply a psychologist and social philosopher, becoming Regius Professor of Logic and of English at Aberdeen in 1860. While Bain’s own literary interests were primarily to do with grammar and rhetoric and the analysis of style,²¹ liberalism’s emotional register and its associated engagement with literature stretch back into the eighteenth century. After all, the culture of sensibility generated a concern for marginalized figures as well as a taste for lachrymose novels.²² In the context of the French Revolution and the reaction to it in Britain, the debate over reform led to the politicization of emotions,²³ as callous aristocrats were contrasted with disconsolate laborers, or dispassionate radicals were compared with affectionate loyalists. Lynn Hunt, for example, locates the invention of human rights during the late eighteenth century in the effects of reading “accounts of torture or epistolary novels,” preeminently the celebrated sentimental novels of Samuel Richardson and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “new kinds of reading (and viewing and listening) created new individual experiences (empathy), which in turn made possible new social and political concepts (human rights).”²⁴ For Harriet Guest, English women writers in the 1790s, such as Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson, both of whom “were liberal in their politics,” made use of “a language of feeling which is hospitable to diverse opinions.” Thus, in Smith’s superb poem *The Emigrants* (1793), the “adroit handling of the politics of sensibility would have enabled her to endorse ideals of social reform while distancing herself from any association between reformist ideals and revolutionary violence.”²⁵

Given their recognition of the centrality of the emotions in cognition and behavior, Mill and other liberals consequently placed great store on what he called the “cultivation of the feelings,” which, as he said, “became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed.”²⁶ It was a cardinal point for many others, too. Charles Bray, for instance, a Unitarian and something of an Owenite, had wide success with *The Education of the Feelings* (1838), which was reprinted many times. Bray was a follower of Samuel Wilderspin (1791–1866), who, in his *Infant Education: or, Practical Remarks on the Importance of Educating the Poor* (1825), argued that “the fundamental

²⁰ His analysis of justice, for example, concludes thus: “Justice remains the appropriate name for certain social utilities which are vastly more important, and therefore more absolute and imperative, than any others are as a class (though not more so than others may be in particular cases); and which, therefore, ought to be, as well as naturally are, guarded by a sentiment not only different in degree, but also in kind; distinguished from the milder feeling of convenience, at once by the more definite nature of its commands, and by the sterner character of its sanctions” (ibid., 60).

²¹ Alexander Bain’s books on these topics included *An English Grammar* (1863), *Manual of Rhetoric* (1872), and *On Teaching English* (1887).

²² For classic studies of sensibility, see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986).

²³ Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993).

²⁴ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 33–34.

²⁵ Harriet Guest, *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

²⁶ Mill, *Collected Works*, 1:147.

principle of the Infant School system is love; it should be the constant endeavour of the master to win the affections of the children, and thus cause them to feel pleasure in submitting to his will.”²⁷ Bray’s commitment was not just theoretical but also practical, as he was instrumental in bringing Wilderspin’s system of infant education to Coventry in the 1830s. Mill, too, in his 1834 article “Reform in Education” approved of the infant school movement and argued that it should be “designed exclusively for the cultivation of the kindly affections.”²⁸ Within this imperative, the focus on “the kindly affections” was paramount. Literature and art more generally were typically seen as the means by which such emotions could be inculcated, though the home, too, and the church were regarded as important places for the support of this affective education. The intersections between the development of children’s literature, the increasing number of popular women writers, and the emphasis on the evangelical mission of the churches reveal the practical consequences of what Michael Freeden has called, in a different but related context, “liberal emotionalism.”²⁹

In short, the connections between liberalism, literature, and the emotions have been multiple and various, and they have certainly mutated over the last two hundred years. In this special issue, we have limited ourselves to just some of the ways in which the specifically affective content and function of literature promoted, confronted, or undermined liberal assumptions, values, ideals, and states of behavior over the long nineteenth century, a period when many liberal concepts were not only first formulated but then vigorously contested as they became a central feature of public debate.³⁰ Of course, this collection of essays does not pretend to completeness, nor to theoretical uniformity. Rather, it takes the form of several “case studies,” as it were, which we hope will open up the larger issues for further exploration and debate.

²⁷ Quoted in Thomas Dixon, “Educating the Emotions from Gradgrind to Goleman,” *Research Papers in Education* 27, no. 4 (2012): 486.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 487.

²⁹ Michael Freeden, *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 23–24.

³⁰ There has been an important body of scholarship in recent years devoted to the affective dimension of nineteenth-century literature. See, e.g., Anne-Marie Millim, *The Victorian Diary: Authorship and Emotional Labour* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013); Rachel Ablow, ed., *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011); Adela Pinch, *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); William Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Anthem Press, 2007); Christopher Lane, *Hatred and Civility: The Antisocial Life in Victorian England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). However, none of this work addresses the topic in relation to Victorian liberalism (except briefly in the case of the Ablow collection). Scholarship on Romantic literature has also been influenced by the affective turn. Among numerous studies, see, e.g., Joel Faflak and Richard C. Sha, eds., *Romanticism and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Nancy Yousef, *Romantic Intimacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); James P. Carson, *Populism, Gender and Sympathy in the Romantic Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Noel Jackson, *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Christopher C. Nagle, *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Andrew Stauffer, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

The varieties of liberalism in the long nineteenth century, sometimes changing over time, sometimes developing alternative emphases, and sometimes competing with one another, illustrate the way in which different emotions came to be associated with different liberal outlooks. We tend to think of hope, sympathy, happiness, compassion, and the like as typically “liberal” emotions, or at least as emotions that typically preoccupied liberals. Yet as Fawcett neatly reminds us, there were other emotions also at stake, especially at different times and in different circumstances. These include, for example,

- Zest for competitive challenges (associated with recognition of conflict)
- Hatred of domination (associated with distrust of power)
- Pride or shame in one’s society (associated with the ideal of progress)
- Outrage at maltreatment (associated with respect for others)

But, as Fawcett recognizes, “those liberal feelings had darker counterparts,” including “envy and resentment,” “self-punishing scrupulosity,” “fear of disorder,” and “anxious longing for calm.”³¹ Identifying some of these many emotions, their function in liberal thought and habitus, and their changes over time begins a process of filling in the experiential quality of “living” liberalism in a way that is missing from Elaine Hadley’s impressive book of the same name. For Hadley, there is a contradiction in “living liberalism,” which she calls “abstract embodiment.” Liberal cognition, she argues, comprises “a wide range of strikingly formalized mental attitudes . . . such as disinterestedness, objectivity, reticence, conviction, impersonality, and sincerity,” which include “quite specific techniques of thought production and judgment, such as ‘free thought,’ reflection, abstraction, logical reasoning, and internal deliberation.” Homing in on Mill’s *Autobiography*, which “seeks to synthesize the virtues of the father’s imperfect pedagogy with a temperate education of the feelings,” she argues that these are “feelings for abstractions” or “abstract feelings, such as tolerance . . . or altruism.” It is here that a central contradiction resides in “the difficulties of living liberalism, of simultaneously being interested and disinterested, of being a body and an abstraction.”³²

Yet Mill and many other reformist liberals, though committed to disinterestedness and what he called, following Goethe, “many-sidedness,” were also deeply engaged in the hurly-burly of public life. He himself entered Parliament and, like other liberals, was an active participant in a wide range of progressive causes. This typically took the form of engaging in the public sphere through contributing to or editing periodicals. Indeed, many liberals saw writing as a critical form of public action. In a number of cases, too, they were passionately involved in marches and other forms of direct action. That is to say, there is a substantive, as well as a formal, dimension to liberal cognition, one that is embodied in action-in-the-world and the emotional register of that embodiment. Liberal cognition is not simply abstract. Formal and procedural though it is, it also has *content* in specific situations, and this includes emotional content. Charles Masterman’s diary for 30 June 1900 reveals just one example of the emotional needs felt and articulated by liberal reformers: “Deep loathing of the political reform and (as it were) sordid, metallic, mechanical aspect of things with which have been concerned in past few days. . . . All so vacant, ineffectual.

³¹ Fawcett, *Liberalism*, 20.

³² Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism: Practical Citizenship in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 9, 101, 48, 103.

Attempt to write introductory essay to our social reform. Essays productive of nothing but vanity and wind. . . . A cause wanted. Breathe upon these dry bones that they may live.”³³ Masterman might have felt frustrated with his “dry bones,” but, a century earlier, when the concept of liberalism was still under formation, the visceral anger of Leigh Hunt’s attacks on the Prince Regent—leading to his and his brother’s imprisonment for two years in 1813—offers a different kind of emotional register. Even when toned down after his release from jail in 1815, it was still highly charged. Here he is, for example, in the *Examiner* in 1820 attacking Castlereagh, a particular target at the time. The Tory foreign secretary and Leader of the House is a man “whom an intelligent mind would not give twopence to converse an hour with,” someone who has been exposed “a hundred times” by the *Examiner* for “the genteel nonentity of his intellect, his mistake of cold-bloodedness for dignity and obstinacy for resolution, the awkward contradiction which his superiority suffers from his grammar, and the flagrant instance which he has exhibited in his own person of parliamentary corruption.”³⁴

It is not just that the kinds of embodied emotions we see in Masterman and Hunt were an acceptable and well-utilized part of nineteenth-century liberals’ being in the world. Many liberals were also clear about their fundamental importance. In the words of L. T. Hobhouse, one of the leading theoreticians of the New Liberalism, “the philosophies that have driving force behind them are those that arise . . . out of the practical demands of human feeling. The philosophies that remain ineffectual and academic are those that are formed by abstract reflection without relation to the thirsty soul of human kind.”³⁵ Moreover, the richness and variety of this emotional content were also explored by several liberals, the most well known of whom was Mill’s friend, collaborator, and biographer, Alexander Bain. In *The Emotions and the Will* (1859),³⁶ a massive book (almost seven hundred pages long), he attempted to classify the whole gamut of emotions: wonder, terror, sympathy, irascibility, the “ethical” emotions, and so on. Bain is widely discussed in the literature as a key player in the shift to a more physiological understanding of the emotions, as this came to characterize later nineteenth-century thinking about the emotions, especially after the publication of Darwin’s *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and the Animals* in 1872. Thomas Dixon traces this out as a shift from “passions” to “emotions,” though Bain himself remarks at the beginning of *The Emotions and the Will* that “emotion is the name here used to comprehend all that is understood by feelings, states of feeling, pleasures, pains, passions, sentiments, affections.”³⁷

Bain is typically understood to be interested in how to control or “manage” the emotions. Anne-Marie Millim, for example, draws attention to his recommendation that a diary be used “in rational decision-making, presenting techniques through which the individual can contain his or her emotions by the power of the will.”³⁸ In this, she follows William Reddy, who traces out a shift in France between an eighteenth-century belief in “natural sentiment . . . out of which virtue grew” and “a normative emotional management regime” in the early nineteenth century, when “virtue was regarded as an outgrowth of the exercise of the will, guided by reason, aimed at

³³ Quoted in Lucy Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman: A Biography* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1939), 32–33.

The book on social reform to which Masterman is referring is *The Heart of the Empire* (1901), which he edited.

³⁴ *Examiner*, no. 637 (12 March 1820): 171; *Examiner*, no. 658 (6 August 1820): 497.

³⁵ L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (1911; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 51.

³⁶ This followed earlier work in *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855).

³⁷ Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859), 3.

³⁸ Millim, *Victorian Diary*, 1.

disciplining passions.³⁹ Millim is interested primarily in the way diaries can be used to construct an authorial persona.⁴⁰ By contrast, Reddy's concern is with the ways early nineteenth-century French liberals such as François Guizot and Victor Cousin, like Bain, considered diaries as a kind of scientific analytical tool for the study and management of emotions. Because "sentiment alone could not serve as a foundation for morality," Cousin turned to what Reddy calls a type of "scientific introspection"; emotions were not to be discarded but analyzed "as signs, supports, aids to reason." And here was the problem that we will see in Mill, albeit in a slightly different form: "both Cousin and Maine de Biran expressed nagging fear of the effects which the cold light of reason might have, when turned on one's most treasured hopes and enthusiasms," the moment when, in Cousin's words, "the careless and serene confidence of sentiment is replaced by reflection with its sad train."⁴¹ What follows can be anxiety, powerlessness, resentment, shame, or fear, depending on the circumstances.

This is the kind of context that lends credence to responses such as Hadley's, when she remarks: "That mid-Victorian liberalism still seeks a normative order amid this programmatic eccentricity and pursues passionate eccentricity even in the midst of a studied reliance on 'good form' is what makes it such a fascinating and frustrating model for living the good life."⁴² Gesa Stedman and Gal Gerson construct the issue in similar terms. For Stedman, "authors of texts on the emotions oscillate between the call for total emotional control and the sometimes only grudgingly admitted individual and social necessity of emotional expression," and in the case of the New Liberals, so Gerson argues, there is an attempt to "accommodate" "heterogeneity with unity, reason with emotion, responsible citizenship with festive expressivity." In each case, though, reason and order win out against emotion; the "torrent," to use Stedman's term, is necessary but always to be "stemmed," albeit with a shift in emphasis over the course of the century from control to expression. Hadley considers such a position to be a "contradiction"; for Stedman, it is "an almost unsolvable dilemma"; and for Gerson, a "double focus" that is in essence flawed.⁴³

It is fair to say that Hadley, Stedman, and Gerson accurately replicate the binaries that liberals themselves used. Attempting to "balance" or "accommodate" or "juxtapose" the poles of a binary, and seeing only contradictions and dilemmas as Hadley and the others do, however, is to engage in what we might call "spatial" thinking. Yet as Hadley herself notes, Mill's ideal, disembodied character is marked by "principled independence, a state of mind won in the throes of an exercised liberty, accomplished over time."⁴⁴ Hadley is speaking here of the long process of character building, but while the temporal segments may be shorter in the more local case of the emotions, there too it is a process in which emotional cognition and reflective cognition (which might or might not be strictly "rational") occur over time. It is precisely this temporal dimension that is key to a specifically liberal understanding of the emotions, just as it is key to the kind of flexibility and self-adjustment that characterizes liberal notions of political order. Regulation and management of the liberal kind take the form of an endless process internally organized, a

³⁹ Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 217, 216.

⁴⁰ Millim (*Victorian Diary*, 4) argues that "for all these diarists, their emotional excitability determines their fundamental value as authors because it provides the emotional resources through which art can be created."

⁴¹ Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 222, 220, 224, 225.

⁴² Hadley, *Living Liberalism*, 53.

⁴³ Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent*, 55, 226; Gal Gerson, *Margins of Disorder: New Liberalism and the Crisis of European Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 184, 191.

⁴⁴ Hadley, *Living Liberalism*, 98.

series of adjustments to immediate contingencies, driven by a desire for individual and social improvement, rather than imposed once and for all.

Bain's account of the emotions offers us a very clear picture of liberalism's conceptual reliance on temporality as the means by which supposedly conflicting states are mediated. "Our conduct," he argues, "is ruled by our pleasures and pains, through the proper and legitimate operation of the Will, and by our other emotions through the stand they take as *persisting ideas*." No feeling, he goes on to say, "can be devoid of some degree of persistence, otherwise it would fail wholly to excite the will." "Among the effects produced by states of emotion," he concludes, "are to be reckoned with those that enable us to store up impressions of the outer world, constituting the materials of our knowledge or intelligence."⁴⁵ This argument about the temporality of the emotions comes, significantly, in a section titled "Intellectual Characters of Emotions." It is clear from this that Bain sees emotions and ideas as existing on the same continuum, a continuum differentiated by time. His explanation hinges on the science available at the time. In the case of habitual or routine actions, he argues, "the less is the feeling that attends their exercise," the reason being that "the originally diffused wave that accompanied them has become contracted within some narrow circles of the brain." "This remarkable narrowing of the sphere of influence of a sensational or active stimulus," he continues, is also "one of the effects of education." Such education works through what we might call a feedback loop:

It is the power of education to change the natural and primitive course of the emotional currents, and to determine an artificial mode in the spread of the cerebral wave. . . . These changes in the allocation of the members that receive the recoil of a state of mental exhilaration have no slight influence in changing the character of the consciousness; for it is not the original stimulus alone, but this, in conjunction with all the reflected waves, that determines the nature of the resulting mental condition. Each organ affected is itself a source of sensibility, and may be the beginning as well as one of the terminations of a cerebral undulation.⁴⁶

Bain is describing here a process in which stimulation occurs over different parts of the brain, and where the effect of education or "cultivation" (a word he also uses) is to localize the kind of stimulation occurring.

Bain's portrayal of the temporality of emotions has much in common with recent "cognitive" theories of emotion, such as those of Robert Solomon and Martha Nussbaum. There are significant differences between Solomon and Nussbaum, but they share a broad approach that we might simplify as the "intentionality" of the emotions. In both theories, emotions are understood as complex processes that exist in time. As Solomon puts it:

In current scientific research, with its emphasis on more or less automatic expressions, neurology, and brain processes, an emotion is typically defined as a very short-term physiological episode "triggered" by some event. . . . But the emotions that count in our lives endure in ways that are hard to measure by such techniques. . . . Emotions are *processes*, which by their very nature take time and may indeed go on and on. . . . They also transform themselves, in all sorts of ways, into desires and courses of action.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Bain, *Emotions and Will*, 37 (emphasis added), 40, 42.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10, 11, 12, 14–15.

⁴⁷ Robert Solomon, *True to Our Feelings: What Our Emotions Are Really Telling Us* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5–6 (emphasis in original).

For Nussbaum, emotions are “forms of evaluative judgments,” and while recognizing that they “are in every case taking place in a living body,” this “does not give us reason to reduce their intentional/cognitive components to nonintentional bodily movements”; they are, she claims, “beliefs—often very complex—about the object.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Solomon argues that emotions “orient us to the world”; they are “*strategies* for getting along in the world.” They are “essential to happiness” and integral to a full conception of the good life, while for Nussbaum they are concerned with “the person’s own flourishing.”⁴⁹

Bain does differentiate kinds of emotion, attributing “qualitative differences” to them, and it comes as no real surprise that these differences reflect class biases: “refinement” and the “delicate” emotions are valued over the coarser emotions in a parallel discourse to that of taste. Significantly, though, the more refined emotions are those most shaped by temporality: “It is one of the devices of human life to carve out those enduring pleasures, and to adapt the human frame to a prolonged enjoyment of all that constitutes delight; our notion of refinement supposes something of that sort.”⁵⁰ This is the effect of cultivation, of reflection, of the self-analysis driven by reason. To compare one end of the continuum with another is to focus on significant difference, the understandable consequence of which is to construct a binary. Bain himself resorts to binaries and even the need to “suppress” emotions in the sciences. Yet if we think of the place of the emotions as part of a temporal process, a physiological continuum driven by neurological feedback, then it is not a matter of reason versus the emotions but of ways to regulate or shape the effects of the emotions in a species whose fundamental characteristic is sociability. No wonder Mill and other liberals thought that emotions were so critical to individual and social reform; and no wonder their cultivation played such a large part in liberal political philosophy, ethics, and indeed aesthetic theory.

As Mill’s *Autobiography* and other numerous nineteenth-century liberal autobiographies and memoirs make clear, literature, of course, played a seminal part in cultivating liberal emotions. However, it is also through literature that the temporality of emotions, the complex processes by which emotional states build and are attenuated over time, are best teased out and concretized. Or if not “best” teased out and concretized, at least done so in ways that for generations have captured a sense of their significance for readers. And this is generally the case whether we are speaking of the Romantic lyric or the Victorian three-decker novel. Moreover, it is here that we can also begin to grasp the concrete emotional flavors of liberalism across the long nineteenth century—hence the reason for our particular focus on “literature” in this special issue on liberalism, literature, and the emotions. Despite the recent interest in liberalism and the emotions, this scholarship has not been especially concerned with literature, with the notable exception of work by Martha Nussbaum, who, like Mill, views literature as crucial to the maintenance of liberal freedom, precisely because it facilitates the cultivation, transmission, and interrogation of the emotions.⁵¹ As scholars originally trained in literary studies, we are familiar with the reassessment of “liberalism and literature” that has been such a powerful direction in literary studies over the last decade or so, especially in relation to nineteenth-century literature. Crucially,

⁴⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22, 25, 28.

⁴⁹ Solomon, *True to Our Feelings*, 3 (emphasis in original), 30.

⁵⁰ Bain, *Emotions and Will*, 27.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013).

though, that reassessment has been notable for the downplaying of the emotional dimension of liberalism, even by leading revisionists such as Amanda Anderson (in *The Powers of Distance*) and David Thomas (in *Cultivating Victorians*), who, in their accounts of mid-Victorian liberalism of the Mill-Arnold variety, stress its “aspirational” nature (Anderson) and its regulative, rather than constitutive, knowledge.⁵² More recently, Anderson has extended her work to generate emotionally richer accounts of liberalism’s aspirations to achieve disinterestedness. In *The Way We Argue Now* (2006), she contends that disinterestedness is a form of “embedded practice,” an “ethos.” “The book,” she notes in her introduction, “concludes by resituating the concepts of ethos and character within an analysis of proceduralist theory and liberal institutions . . . as a way of answering to some of the most pointed critiques of reason and liberalism’s purported impersonality.”⁵³ Anderson’s project of confronting the supposed opposition between the emotions and “liberalism’s purported impersonality” has much in common with our own; her focus, though, is on contemporary theory and theorists (particularly the ways in which questions of affect have been subsumed under the politics of identity) rather than on the intersections between liberalism, the emotions, and literature. In her forthcoming book, *Bleak Liberalism*, Anderson takes up what she calls liberals’ “bleak” view of history in the long term, in contradistinction to the more positive emotional tones, such as hope and confidence, that characterize situated actors. This is a valuable corrective to characterizations of liberalism as a simplistic ideology of progress, but her overall argument that opposes hope to skepticism does not specifically take up the breadth of emotional tones and concerns we see in nineteenth-century liberalism.⁵⁴

Another advantage of focusing on “literature” is that it enables us to remain alert to the complexity of liberalism as an ideology comprising diverse and often contradictory elements, not least to the way in which such elements, from Utilitarianism to organicism, free trade to social responsibility,⁵⁵ have been represented by poets and novelists as influencing the emotional experiences of individuals, groups, and societies. Since at least the time of Wordsworth, literature has been conceived of as a laboratory for examining the role and meaning of the emotions in public and private life. Accordingly, literature that engages with liberalism offers an unrivaled source for exploring the value that liberalism attributes to the emotions, including the privileging of some emotions over others, their purported propensity and function in particular groups of people, and their association with different domains of thought or activity.

Given the chronological range of this special issue, from early Romanticism to early modernism, we might be regarded as contributing to the recent attempt to redefine liberalism as an affective ideology by imbuing it with a Romantic impulse. Liberalism is often seen to be in conflict with Romanticism, in large part because of the assumption that the latter elevates the imagination while the former stresses a notion of reason linked to calculation.⁵⁶ But as Nancy Rosenblum has observed, despite this difference, liberalism shares with Romanticism an emphasis on individual self-expression and self-development. And by identifying the affinities between these traditionally

⁵² Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); David Wayne Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁵³ Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 6.

⁵⁴ Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁵⁵ On the diverse elements of liberalism, see Freedman, *Liberalism*, 40–50; Bevir, “Long Nineteenth Century.”

⁵⁶ Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 80–82.

opposed discourses, she argues that the ideology can be recast as spontaneous rather than legalistic, purposive rather than instrumental, and a source of revitalizing feeling rather than a vehicle of depersonalizing reason.⁵⁷ In an intriguing variant of this theory, it has even been suggested that, since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, a Romantic conception of liberalism associated with self-expression has become the dominant strand of progressive thought, causing the marginalization of the older, rationalist conception of liberalism that originated in the Enlightenment and triumphed in the following century.⁵⁸ This might explain why the idiom “follow your heart” has come to be regarded as an illustration of both freedom and justice rather than as an example of impulsive or egocentric behavior. But, as this special issue makes clear, liberalism in the long nineteenth century was never as uniformly hostile, suspicious, or unaware of the emotions as philosophers like Rosenblum imply, as evidenced by Mill’s enthusiasm for the culture of feeling conveyed in the poetry of Wordsworth. On the contrary, a focus on literature demonstrates that, while uncertainties persisted regarding the relative value of reason and the emotions, the complex connections between affective and cognitive experiences of the world have been a constant theme in imaginative writing about liberalism and in writing with a liberal inflection.

Cognitive and neuroscientific approaches to literature have recently reinforced the notion that aesthetic appreciation involves a combination of affective and cognitive dimensions, adding to the current interest in the emotions.⁵⁹ Indeed, the insights of neuroscience have shown that literature might be able to play an important role in training or reforming the emotions of readers,⁶⁰ though, as critics like Alan Richardson have pointed out, we should be wary of divorcing the affective aspects of a text from its ideological and historical circumstances.⁶¹ According to Suzanne Keen, for instance, although the novel became dignified through its association with empathy in the Victorian period, there is little evidence that it fostered this quality in contemporary readers, and such fellow feeling with fictional characters was arguably as liable to produce apathy as activism in the actual social world.⁶² On the other hand, Mark Bracher has argued that cognitive science might provide the basis for a mode of literary criticism more oriented to social change than the historicist and theoretical approaches that often take social change as their ultimate goal. This is because such criticism, grounded in an account of the workings of the human mind, does not simply reveal the ideological foundations of injustice by explicating falsifiable representations. Rather, it has the capacity to alter the cognitive schemas that reproduce faulty and harmful perceptions of particular types or groups of people, along with the emotions that attend these perceptions. For Bracher, literary criticism is able to replace, alter, or override these cognitive schemas precisely because it can recalibrate the “prototypical emotions” that reinforce them, so that, for example, perceptions of marginalized figures in a novel might become

⁵⁷ Nancy Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). See also Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). For a literary perspective on this relationship, see Thomas Pfau, “Beyond Liberal Utopia: Freedom as the Problem of Modernity,” *European Romantic Review* 19, no. 2 (2008): 83–103.

⁵⁸ Nomi Maya Stolzenberg, “Liberalism in a Romantic State,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 5 (2009): 194–215.

⁵⁹ Patrick Colm Hogan, “Literary Brains: Neuroscience, Criticism, and Theory,” *Literature Compass* 11, no. 4 (2014): 297.

⁶⁰ Mark J. Bruhn, “Introduction: Integrating the Study of Cognition, Literature, and History,” in *Cognition, Literature, and History*, ed. Mark J. Bruhn and Donald R. Wehrs (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

⁶¹ See, in particular, Alan Richardson, *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 2–5.

⁶² Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48–55.

associated with compassion rather than disdain.⁶³ If, as Patrick Colm Hogan notes, neuroscience demonstrates that emotional responses are triggered more forcefully by concrete images than by abstract propositions, then literature—perhaps even more than political philosophy—has an important role to play in cultivating the kinds of emotional habits that are necessary to sustain and extend a just society.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, as the essays in this special issue suggest, there has always been considerable debate among writers about which emotions are conducive and which are detrimental to liberalism. Today it is perhaps online social media rather than literature that link politics and the emotions, at times supporting liberal ideas and at other times expressing intolerance, disgust, and other illiberal sentiments. There is no question that social media have altered the character of the public sphere, increasing the availability of political communication. But media scholars are divided on the implications of this mode of communication in relation to political activity.⁶⁵ For Clay Shirky, social media are, by and large, vehicles for advancing freedom since, by enabling individuals to connect with one another around political issues, they strengthen the public sphere and act as a fillip to reform. It is for this reason, notes Shirky, that authoritarian governments seek to limit access to the Internet.⁶⁶ Such an optimistic conclusion echoes the claim by Manuel Castells that social media, like the Internet more generally, tend to stimulate social movements, largely because they facilitate the communication of political emotions like outrage and hope, thus mobilizing a public and enabling the coordination of any subsequent activity.⁶⁷ By contrast, a number of scholars have dismissed this optimistic view as an expression of technological determinism. For Evgeny Morozov, among others, the style of activism facilitated by social media is often a form of “slacktivism,” a superficial, promiscuous mode of political engagement that reduces citizenship to consumption.⁶⁸ From this perspective, social media may act as an impediment rather than a spur to reform, permitting individuals to feel good about their political participation without requiring them to take the risks and incur the inconveniences that are necessary for bringing about change in society at large. While the Internet, then, may have made the emotions more central to politics than ever before, it is not at all clear in what ways this has enhanced or undermined specifically liberal politics, giving rise to a strange mixture of hope and despair, awareness and apathy.

This special issue on the relationship between liberalism, literature, and the emotions in the long nineteenth century begins with an analysis of several Romantic writers and texts, including political and economic prose as well as imaginative literature. It was during the Romantic

⁶³ Mark Bracher, “Schema Criticism: Literature, Cognitive Science, and Social Change,” *College Literature* 39, no. 4 (2012): 96–102.

⁶⁴ Patrick Colm Hogan, “On Being Moved: Cognition and Emotion in Literature and Film,” in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 246–47.

⁶⁵ For an excellent overview of this debate, see Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: Sage, 2014), 179–209.

⁶⁶ Clay Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2011): 28–41.

⁶⁷ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2012).

⁶⁸ Evgeny Morozov, *Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 189–91. See also Jodi Dean, “Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics,” *Cultural Politics* 1, no. 1 (2005): 51–74; Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” *New Yorker*, 4 October 2010, 42–49.

period that the discourses associated with liberalism—politics and economics—came to be perceived as inimical to literature, especially poetry, despite the fact that, as Philip Connell has disclosed, this apparent separation belied much common ground regarding many social issues.⁶⁹ As is well known, the Enlightenment saw the publication of several founding texts of classical liberalism. What is perhaps less well known outside literary scholarship is that from John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) to Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776), there was a major genre of poetry—the English georgic—that, like political economy, celebrated the growth of agricultural and commercial wealth, examined its causes and effects, and praised property as the basis of a free, just, and happy polity. By the time of Wordsworth, however, the role of poetry had been reclassified as the expression of personal feelings, causing it to become divorced from the discourses of politics and economics, which, by contrast, were increasingly seen to be characterized by pragmatism, reason, and scientific calculation. This is the context for Peter Denney’s essay “Toward Liberalism: Politics, Poverty, and the Emotions in the 1790s.” Focusing on political propaganda, Denney examines the ways in which the emotional habits of the poor are depicted by radical, conservative, and liberal contributors to the debate on the French Revolution. He then shows how this debate informed accounts of the emotions of the poor in Malthus’s *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) and Wordsworth’s “The Old Cumberland Beggar” (1800), a poem purportedly written to protest against Malthus’s theory despite endorsing some of its conclusions. These contrasting views of the poor and their emotional dispositions reveal, among other things, the fragility, or ambivalence, of the distinction between poetry and political economy that underpinned the formation of liberalism in the early nineteenth century.

One of the many critics of Malthus was the essayist William Hazlitt, who published a series of letters on poor-law reform that repudiated the “illiberal” principles of the theory of population in the most “illiberal” terms. In Kevin Gilmartin’s essay “Hazlitt’s Illiberal Hatred,” this aspect of Hazlitt’s writing is analyzed alongside the contradictory commitment to disinterestedness, moderation, and civility that underpin his liberal political stance as well as his liberal cultural criticism. For Gilmartin, Hazlitt resists the separation of poetry and politics, fusing the different emotional registers of each genre into a heterogeneous, fluid, and often paradoxical rhetorical style. Accordingly, he combines a range of conflicting emotions in his writing, mixing anger with nostalgia, and sympathy with antipathy, while blending the optimism of the reformer with a sense of disappointment about the failure of Jacobinism in the 1790s and its later betrayal by intellectuals.⁷⁰ In this way, Hazlitt demonstrates that the bleak character of liberalism, as theorized by Anderson, was present even when the ideology was first coming into being. And he also illustrates that the emotions were as central to the journalism as to the imaginative literature of the Romantic period. Furthermore, as Gilmartin shows, an attentiveness to the emotional extremes in Hazlitt’s prose, especially hatred, enables us to discern an often neglected combative strain of early nineteenth-century liberalism. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), Hazlitt chastises Lord Byron for being a liberal in political affairs but an aristocrat, or elitist, in matters of taste—a criticism, of course, as appropriate to the essayist as to the poet. This forms the beginning of Clara Tuite’s essay “Lord Byron’s Preposterous Liberalism: Perversity, or The Fear That Pleases.” Concentrating on Byron’s satirical mystery play *Cain* (1821) and his involvement in the

⁶⁹ Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of “Culture”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ For a full account of this rhetorical style, see Kevin Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Italian revolutionary movement known as the Carbonari, Tuite examines the complex connections between politics, aesthetics, and the emotions that characterized the writing of the poet, who came to embody, for Matthew Arnold, the archetypal “bleeding-heart” liberal.⁷¹ For Byron, poetry provides a vehicle for exploring the kind of emotional ambivalence he attributes to political activity—namely, the commingling of hope and fear, pleasure and sorrow, and desire and doubt. At the same time, as Tuite argues, there is a tension in Byron not only between his aristocratic privilege and his support for progressive and laboring-class causes but also between, for example, the aristocratic style of his genius—imperious, seductive, and prone to incite excessive emotions—and the democratic ethos of his broad political position. While it is true, therefore, that the Romantic period witnessed a perceived dissociation of poetry and politics, this was more frequently expressed as a tension than as a separation, with the literature of early liberalism everywhere revealing a highly ambiguous relationship between reason and the emotions, moderation and militancy, and intellectuals and the crowd.

Victorian fiction, like liberalism, had an ambiguous attitude to the crowd, being both fascinated by its collective energy and political power and repelled by its emotional volatility, intellectual conformity, susceptibility to demagoguery, and proneness to disorder.⁷² Lamenting the fact that individuals had become “lost in the crowd” in modern, industrial society, Mill regarded displays of popular communal feeling as a threat to liberal culture, not least because they undermined qualities such as autonomy, reflectiveness, and diversity.⁷³ The riot, in particular, was viewed with suspicion by most liberals, since it exemplified the way in which the collective political emotions mobilized by public opinion generated illegitimate violence rather than meaningful action. This was a position shared by novelists like Dickens, Gaskell, and Charlotte Brontë, as Helen Groth explores in her essay “Rioting, Nineteenth-Century Fiction, and the Limits of Liberalism.” Groth draws on Alan Badiou’s recent account of the riot as an ambivalent phenomenon: as a transformative political force that might make it possible to imagine an alternative to the present neoliberal world order but that might also take on a destructive, chaotic orientation, corrupted by the collective rage of its participants. According to Groth, a similar ambiguity characterizes representations of the riot in Victorian fiction, with Dickens, Gaskell, and Brontë all deploying this form of crowd behavior to investigate the limits of liberalism and, in doing so, to affirm the role of the novel as an appropriate mode of political representation. Specifically, these novelists emphasize the chaotic affective energy of the riot while at the same time expressing sympathy for individuals caught up in this type of uncontrollable event. Rescuing individuals from the crowd, they juxtapose positive and negative emotions and their capacity to either forestall or facilitate the advancement of a liberal polity. If demonstrations of collective emotional expression were seen as a threat to the developing liberal polity of nineteenth-century Britain, this is partly because of the growing association between freedom and privacy. Liberalism presupposed a right to privacy, and yet it also celebrated curiosity, giving rise to a distinctively modern tension between publicity and concealment, openness and secrecy.⁷⁴ This is the topic

⁷¹ For an extended analysis of the motif of the “bleeding heart” in Byron, see Clara Tuite, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 139–67. For Byron and liberalism, see Jonathan David Gross, *Byron: The Erotic Liberal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

⁷² See John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

⁷³ See, in particular, “Of Individuality,” chapter 3 of *On Liberty* (1859). The quotation comes from Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government*, 123.

⁷⁴ David Vincent, *Privacy: A Short History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 70–71.

of David Ellison’s essay “Privacy and Its Discontents: Illiberalism at Home.” In an analysis of G. W. M. Reynolds’s bestseller *Mysteries of London* (1844) and Linley Sambourne’s collection of nude photographs, Ellison argues that the Victorian home was not simply the site of free exchange, authentic selfhood, and domestic affection that liberals assumed it to be. Rather, it was represented as potentially destructive of privacy, an illiberal space in which residents could spy on each other, dissolving confidentiality and generating suspicion. Furthermore, as Reynolds’s text, in particular, makes clear, the growing privacy of the home produced a popular fascination with the domestic lives of public individuals, as readers took delight in reading about the emotional entanglements of others, as they occurred behind closed doors. In this way, there was no impermeable boundary between the home and the outside world, and the privacy that was regarded as a constituent ingredient of liberalism permitted the flourishing of all sorts of illiberal emotions, from frustration to voyeuristic pleasure.

As we saw earlier, the emergence of New Liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contributed to a growing emphasis on the emotions by some political writers, as the Utilitarian strain of classical liberalism was criticized for the prominence it attributed to calculation, self-interest, and a de-moralized model of economic activity. One response to this separation of ethics and economics was aestheticism, a movement that embraced individualism but rejected the reduction of taste to consumer preference.⁷⁵ Another response was that of James Joyce, who—especially in his early writing—was highly critical of the way classical liberalism saw “contract” as the essential form of relationship between agents. There he expressed a sense of disenchantment with liberalism for two different but related reasons: its failure to bring about Irish Home Rule, as promised by William Gladstone; and its reduction of social relations to contractual relations. This formed part of a distinctively modernist reaction against what was perceived to be the shallow optimism of a previous generation, as John Attridge argues in his essay “The Crisis of Liberalism: Contracts and Promises in Joyce’s Political Journalism and *Dubliners*.” In his analysis of *Dubliners*, for example, Attridge shows how Joyce attacks liberalism for fostering a bureaucratic culture in which the sociability of clerks and lower-middle-class individuals reproduces the models of economic exchange and mechanical repetition that contracts had made central to the idea and experience of freedom. Needless to say, Joyce views such freedom from below as a form of discipline, one that attenuates the emotional lives of individuals, leading to sterility and insincerity. At the same time, in his journalism, he condemns the overblown emotionalism of liberal rhetoric deployed by Gladstone in his advocacy of Irish Home Rule, for this rhetoric, according to Attridge, sharpens his denunciation of the subsequent betrayal of Irish Nationalism. In this sense, Joyce associates liberalism with a paradoxical mixture of hollow sentimentalism and cold rationalism.

Unlike Joyce, John Galsworthy repudiated classical liberalism by drawing on the emotional orientation of New Liberalism, especially its stress on cooperation, hope, and human flourishing. Although Galsworthy was not a self-professed New Liberal, he had many New Liberal associates and clearly shared many of their views. In *The Forsyte Saga*, his trilogy about the decline of the Forsyte family across three generations, as Jock Macleod demonstrates in “Liberal Futures? Emotional Investment, Surplus Value, and *The Forsyte Saga*,” Galsworthy constructs something like an allegory of the degeneration of the Utilitarian strain of liberalism, as various members of

⁷⁵ Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

the family internalize habits of self-interest and calculation, often in their pursuit or protection of property, resulting in the neglect or suffocation of their emotional experience and affective energy. In this context, it is no coincidence that Galsworthy links the stasis and deterioration of the Forsyte family to the risk-averse habits of its leading members. As Macleod shows, risk-taking was a central feature of New Liberal ideology, a quality that valorizes the emotions and, in doing so, encourages the desire for beauty or freedom, say, rather than profit. One effect of this version of New Liberalism was a reconnection of politics, ethics, and aesthetics, as beauty was conceived as fundamental to the good life, and individual self-development was redefined as coterminous with the flourishing of all citizens in society.

The association of liberalism with self-interest, rationality in pursuit of efficiency, and the reduction of social relations to market relations is largely a consequence of the process by which, during the last half a century or so, liberalism has come to be conflated with its bastard offspring, neoliberalism. This has added respectability to neoliberal ideology while silencing the earlier emphasis on social responsibility, emotional fulfillment, and human flourishing that had attached to liberal thought in the decades before and after the First World War. Not only has neoliberalism undermined the achievements of an older liberalism in Western societies, but it has also promoted a form of economic globalization that treats the world as merely a market for capital accumulation and transfer, with wealth being redistributed from developing countries to multinational corporations. This vexed relationship between liberalism, neoliberalism, and globalization is a key source of the current “crisis of liberalism.” It is also the topic of the concluding essay in this special issue, Regenia Gagnier’s “Global Circulation and Some Problems in Liberalism, Liberalization, and Neoliberalism.” In this important, wide-ranging essay, Gagnier probes the meanings of liberalism and neoliberalism in both literature and contemporary global economic policy, as they have circulated across time and space, from the translation of Mill’s thought in nineteenth-century China to the neoliberalization of large parts of Latin America in the aftermath of the Cold War. For Gagnier, a global, transcultural perspective on liberalism is vital if we are to appreciate the variable meanings of the ideology, along with the diverse effects it has had on different places at different historical moments. In the novel *Rickshaw Boy* (1936–37), for instance, Lao She highlights the unfeeling character of liberal individualism as it affects a peasant who has recently migrated from the countryside to Beijing, with the narrative formulating a more communitarian liberal discourse informed by Chinese traditions. On the other hand, as Gagnier notes, the recent narrowing of liberalism to neoliberalism has resulted in liberal rhetoric being deployed by various national and corporate agencies to justify the destruction of local traditions in the name of development, freedom, and a benign globalization. In this context, is it any wonder that liberalism is now seen to be in a state of chronic crisis, bringing despair rather than hope, generating resentment rather than devotion, and offering bleakness rather than confidence? And yet, if liberalism today seems bleak because of the neoliberal ideology that thwarts its original realization, societies less affected by neoliberal policy might still view liberalism with hope, especially in those forms that emphasize emotional experience, social responsibility, and the ethical dimension of economic activity.

This collection of essays does not purport to offer answers to the challenges facing liberalism today, whether in the Western world, in postcolonial democracies like India and South Africa, or in a host of states around the globe where movements for democracy and equality are being enabled and often suppressed in the name of liberal principles. But as we know, many of

the critiques of contemporary Western liberal culture are generated through literature. And as we also know from struggles in Russia, Malaysia, and Iran, as well as from the volatility of the so-called Arab Spring, writers immersed in the liberal principles of the great progressive novelists of the nineteenth century are frequently central players in those movements. It is precisely the place of literature—and especially its emotional tenor—in the history of liberalism and the emotions that this collection addresses. We hope its focus on the long nineteenth century, the period of liberalism’s emergence and consolidation in the West, will add a new dimension to contemporary discourses about liberalism’s prospects globally. A