

AGEING, PROGRESS, and DECLINE

DACH Victorianists' Winter Symposium: Call for Abstracts

6 December 2024, Online

Keynote Speaker: Jacob Jewusiak (Newcastle University, UK)

By the end of the Victorian era, the 'decline narrative' of ageing (Gullette) seemed firmly established in the zeitgeist, whether in fictional accounts that used the aged figure to personify an exhausted century or in the political usage of younger persons as the symbolic vehicle for progress and futurity. But other instances paint a more complex picture: aged characters rejuvenated by 'youthful' love plots; medical accounts that emphasise post-menopausal women's gains in strength and energy; and social commentaries that view the reproductive capacity of youth as a source of national decline rather than salvation.

This one-day workshop aims to explore what is gained for Victorian studies by bringing together topics of age and ageing with those of progress and decline. It is especially interested in cases that 'write against' the truisms of old-age loss and youthful gain, and ageing-as-decline, to spotlight a more complicated or contingent reality. The wider aim is to recover and reflect upon output that has exerted a strong legacy on contemporary experiences of age and ageing, and through which we might reconsider present-day debates about the opportunities and limits that can accompany the ageing process.

Proposals are welcome for traditional papers (c.20 mins) and 'flash' papers of 7–10 mins, from any (inter-)disciplinary perspective and covering any medium. Proposals might address the following topics, though these suggestions are by no means exhaustive or prescriptive:

- gains or losses in financial, political, and/or economic capacities with age and via ageing;
- gains or losses in physical, sexual, and/or mental capacities with age and via ageing;
- recovery, resurgence, and/or rejuvenescence in midlife or old age;
- gendered, classed, and raced differences in decline and progress narratives of age and ageing (e.g. menopause as the onset of women's decline or of renewed strength);
- narrating decline or progress through ageing: *Bildungsroman*, plot of decline, 'second chance' plots, *Reifungsroman*;

- scientific models and explanations of ageing as progress or decline (‘waste and repair’; the ‘physiological capital’ metaphor);
- divergent trajectories: ‘good old age’ as sustained productivity and independence; ‘bad old age’ as indolence and decline;
- depictions of age-based decline or progress in artistic media (*Lebenstreppe*, advertisements for anti-aging products);

Please send proposals of c.150–300 words accompanied by a short bio and contact information to the organiser Dr James Aaron Green (james.green@univie.ac.at). The deadline for submissions is **30 September 2024**.

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. For more information, see DACH Victorianists online: <https://dachvictorianists.blogspot.com>.