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Editorial: Environment, emotion and early modernity

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How do humans feel about, and with, the physical environments they inhabit? How do emotions shape interactions between humans and their material worlds, and how do those material worlds shape emotions in turn? These questions have exercised political theorists, literary scholars, philosophers, and environmental activists in recent years, who have sought to understand both how people conceive of themselves as related to their environments, and how emotions emerge from and mediate those relationships. Commentators assume an important, if complex relationship between human feelings about environmental influences and approaches to discourses of environmental sustainability, climate change, and resilience thinking. The early modern period has been identified as a point of rupture in this relationship. Carolyn Merchant famously declared the ‘death’ of nature in the modern world, and the associated characterisation of matter as ‘inert’. She traced the roots of an anthropocentric worldview in which human power to direct and control non-human environmental forces was central to discourses of ‘improvement’ that emerged strongly amongst early modern colonising states.¹ More recently, Amitav Ghosh has identified how processes of literary change, and particularly the emergence of anthropocentric novels, have occluded reflections on the power of non-

¹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (Harper and Row, 1980)

human, climatic forces to effect dramatic historical change. In Ghosh's opinion, a worldview that is characterised by an obsession with the minutiae of human lives, limits the imaginative possibilities for taking large-scale environmental forces seriously.² Ghosh, like Merchant, located the origins of this worldview within the epistemic shifts ushered in by early modern scientific and colonial projects, shifts that rendered environments mechanistic and essentially inert, and people discrete from them.

This collection challenges this characterisation of early modern ways of conceptualising human-environment entanglements by examining the multiplicity of ways in which early modern people and communities understood, channelled, and adapted to environments in their daily lives, alongside the efforts of states, governors and natural philosophers to exert control over those influences. Early modern Europeans in particular did become increasingly self-aware as active agents of environmental change. Yet the shift in power relations between humans and environmental forces that has long been associated with this period has served to disguise the extent to which early modern people understood themselves not just as environmental actors but also as environmental products. Recent scholarship has demonstrated this point through studies of the theory and practice of early modern politics, and the history of ideas about climates, bodies and environments.³ This collection adds to this literature by locating the theory and practice of environmental entanglement in an area as-yet under-explored in environmental history: the history of emotions.

² Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

³ Sara Miglietti and John [author] (eds), *Governing the Environment in the Early Modern World: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2017); Sara Miglietti, 'Between Nature and Culture: The Integrated Ecology of Renaissance Climate Theories', in Pauline Goul and Phillip Usher (eds), *Early Modern Ecologies: Beyond English Ecocriticism* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020); Anya Zilberstein, *A Temperate Empire: Making Climate Change in Early America* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Once understood as products of the mind, emotions offer a stimulating opportunity to rethink early modern ways of relating to the world. This collection draws on timely recent work on ‘embodied emotions’ which emphasises that emotions have a history that goes beyond linguistic changes and shifting frames of reference within which people feel. Through this recent work, we now understand emotions as embodied and as constituted by a network of interactions between bodies, environments and materials. As practices and performances, emotions derive part of their historicity from their embodiedness; as Monique Scheer argues, emotions are historically contingent ‘because the practices in which they are embodied, and bodies themselves, undergo transformation.’⁴ This realisation opens up many possibilities for thinking environmentally about emotion. Of course, environments also undergo transformation, and thus by situating bodies within historical environments, we can begin to write an environmental history of emotions which pays heed to historically-contingent materialities. Following recent work by Gaynor, Broomhall and Flack, and Jørgensen, we can begin to sketch an emotional history of environments. These recent interventions make clear the contribution of feeling to self-conscious environmental action; emotion shapes engagements with the natural world and indeed even what of the world is understood as natural.⁵ Such work draws on a long tradition of scholarship focusing on perceptions of environments, but differs in that it foregrounds emotions as distinct from culture, as affective practices and experiences, rather than disembodied images, values or discourses. Contributors to this volume historicise emotion in situated environmental moments, but also in extended chronologies and across different scales and types of landscape. This juxtaposition of temporal and geographical range offers historians of emotion a new way of thinking about the

⁴ Monique Scheer, ‘are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion’, *History & Theory* 51, 2 (2012), 220.

⁵ Andrea Gaynor, Susan Broomhall, and Andrew Flack, ‘Frogs and Feeling Communities: A Study in History of Emotions and Environmental History’, *Environment and History* (advanced access); Dolly Jørgensen, *Recovering Lost Species in the Modern Age: Histories of Longing and Belonging* (The MIT Press, 2019).

composition and transformation of emotional ‘communities’ and/or ‘regimes’ across extended timeframes, over human-nonhuman divides, and in expansive spatial range. This volume insists that environmentally-situated emotions mediate relationships between people, things and landscapes – their integrated histories are thus pivotal to the way that historians construct causal explanations of historical change.

This realisation carries with it an important moral message: we live and feel within and through our environments. ‘*The environment*’ can seem an unfeeling thing. As Paul Warde, Libby Robin and Sverker Sörlin have recently argued, the modern idea of ‘the environment’ has been configured over the last seventy years as an aggregation of empirical observations of the physical world, grounded in metrics and computationally modelled to produce forecasts for the future. This modern environment is knowable only through collaboration, interpolation and, ultimately, data. Our early modern history reveals a very different environment, one of felt things, energy and materials that were known and experienced through the body and which shaped the emotional worlds of its inhabitants. The important work of Alexandra Walsham, Dolly Mackinnon and Nicola Whyte has shown how landscape shaped and was shaped by processes of reformation, community reproduction and socio-economic change.⁶ Our collection seeks to expand on these works and demonstrate how despite claims of disenchantment and affective severance implied by Merchant and Ghosh, early modern environments – as landscapes, ecologies and material assemblages – retained a crucial emotional immanence.

Our contributors examine how early modern understandings of the body, and concepts of selfhood (both crucial to histories of emotion), were acutely environmental. The early

⁶ Dolly Mackinnon, *Earles Colne's Early Modern Landscapes* (Ashgate, 2014); Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Nicola Whyte, *Inhabiting the Landscape: Place, Custom and Memory, 1500-1800* (Windgather, 2009).

modern body was conceived as a worldly thing, composed in similar manner to the Earth itself. Combinations of heat, cold, wetness and dryness characterised both the body's four humours and the Earth's four elements. Those humours in turn determined health, character and emotion, just as those elements shaped the nature of a place. Given the unifying conceptual schema within which the body and the Earth were placed, their boundaries could be porous, their edges frayed and in places indistinct from one another. The mind, the spirit, the body and its emotions were all influenced by the physical characteristics of particular places, and these concerns about the relationship between the physical environment and people's health and disposition were manifested in a wide range of beliefs and practices that are explored in this collection. Early modern urban dwellers were concerned to create healthy indoor environments through manipulating air-flows, and to sanitise their cities by managing their odours and waters.⁷ Agricultural treatises praised and damned the character and 'heart' of different lands and their effects on the characters of resident labour forces and livestock.⁸ Overseas travellers fretted over the effects of foreign climates, food and clothes, as they ascribed homesickness to a range of environmental factors.⁹ In the highest offices of state, governors concerned themselves with the relationship between certain environmental conditions and the loyalty and productivity of their subjects.¹⁰ Amidst all this, new Protestant materialities challenged the affective and embodied spiritual power of relics and sacramental objects, while re-inscribing landscapes and climatic conditions with heightened and highly emotive soteriological significance.¹¹ Therefore, for early modern subjects, a world of matter was a world of feeling.

⁷ Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey, *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸ Walter Blith, *The English improver improved* (Printed for John Wright, 1653), p. 10.

⁹ Rebecca Earle, 'Climate, Travel and Colonialism in the Early Modern World', in Miglietti and [author] (eds), *Governing the Environment in the Early Modern World*.

¹⁰ Raphaël Morera and John [author], 'Les dessèchements modernes: des projets coloniaux? Comparaison entre la France et l'Angleterre', *Études rurales* 203 (2019), 42-61

¹¹ Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape*.

The case studies in this collection show that there was a widespread understanding of how environments, operating through the body, played an active role in shaping inner lives. Early modern environmental history teaches us that people were particularly concerned with how they might manipulate all manner of environments and the products derived from them (cities, marshes, tropical islands, foodstuffs etc.) to promote everything from health and fertility, to intelligence and rainfall.¹² Our authors examine precisely how environments were adapted to suit specific and desired emotional states; how environments were used to express and influence emotions; and how early modern understandings of the body, as particularly enmeshed in its environments, help us to historicise emotion. As such, the collection highlights three ways in which we can view the environmental history of emotions; as:

1. Interfacing – environment and emotion apprehending or provoking one another; how an environment makes one feel, or how one’s feelings direct environmental action (e.g. attitudes or practices).
2. Influencing – biophysical and material relationships between environments and emotion; how particular chemical, material or other aspects of environments influence emotional states.
3. Entangling – the environmentally distributed and embedded practise of emotion; how certain feelings are enacted with and through environments (e.g. emotions are envired in the same way they are embodied).

Research that links environments and emotions is already underway. Environmental history might claim to be the materialist historical discipline par excellence – at its heart, we might say, lies a concern with actual things that are not people. For some environmental historians, this means using methods and data from the hard sciences to explain changing

¹² Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion , Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

environmental relationships. Likewise, some within the history of emotions have made strong overtures towards neuroscience, insisting on the primary importance of the physical structure and operation of the brain in producing emotion. This can lead to fruitful interdisciplinary collaboration: for example, Wolfgang Behringer has attempted to link the Little Ice Age with widespread seasonal affective disorder, and recently Rob Boddice and Daniel Lord Smail have argued that historians of emotion should pay much greater attention to historical ‘ecolog[ies] of chemical stimulants’ to understand population-level emotional trends.¹³ Indeed, recent research in environmental health has indicated a possible association between levels of particulate and chemical pollution and depression and suicide.¹⁴ This research raises interesting and challenging questions about the production of historical emotions that fundamentally rely on empirical approaches to environments.

However, collaboration between historians of environments and emotions need not, and should not, be undertaken along these lines alone. Acknowledging the place, use and agency of matter can bring historians of environments and emotions closer together and help generate fresh insight into the experiences of people in place. Historians of emotion have recently turned towards material culture as both a source and a methodology for understanding the depth and texture of historical emotional lives.¹⁵ In these analyses, the materiality of things is critically important; making and using loom large, and the possibilities and constraints presented by different materials are placed back into historical emotional regimes. This collection is intended as a logical continuation of these exciting new developments within the history of emotions

¹³ Wolfgang Behringer, *A Cultural History of Climate* (Polity, 2009), 115-120; Rob Boddice, ‘The History of Emotions: Past, Present, Future’, *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 62 (2017), 13.

¹⁴ I. Braithwaite, S. Zhang, J.B. Kirkbride, D. Osborn, and J.F. Hayes, ‘Air Pollution (Particulate Matter) Exposure and Associations with Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar, Psychosis and Suicide Risk: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis’, *Environmental health perspectives* 127, 12 (2019).

¹⁵ Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway and Sarah Randles (eds), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford: OUP, 2018); Stefan Hanß, ‘Hair, Emotions and Slavery in the Early Modern Habsburg Mediterranean’, *History Workshop Journal* 87 (2019), 160–187; Sasha [author], ‘Objects, Emotions and an Early Modern Bed-sheet’, *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018), 169-194.

that have begun to write extraordinary and everyday objects (and the materials of which they were composed) into our understanding of the affective and emotional lives of historical actors. At the heart of these endeavours is a consistent emphasis on materiality, on non-human forces, and on objects as more than mere props in the performance of emotion. Rather, they are taken as things with and through which emotion is experienced, and which are as essential in the reproduction of emotional regimes as concepts, norms and values. With this collection, we aim to place emotions within the full constellation of objects and energies, to map how far they reach into the material and environmental. If an object is no longer a prop for an embodied emotion, then an environment should no more be a backdrop. We are thus interested in how concerns with the physicality of things can be extended beyond individual objects into the wider, wilder physical environment.¹⁶

The organisation of the papers mirrors early modern conceptions of the relationship between environments and emotions. We begin with bodies, through which environmental influences were mediated, and which constituted the most immediate environments in and through which early modern people felt. [author] and [author] explore how emotions shaped the production, provision and consumption of food in the early modern Atlantic world. They situate bodies at the heart of an affective relationship between people, communities and environments, to demonstrate the importance early modern people placed on the human, animal and environmental factors in ‘eating well’. Three papers then proceed outwards from the body to the landscape, examining the mutually constitutive relationships between environments and emotions through an emphasis on landscapes and habitats. [author], [author], and [author] approach the landscape as a repository of emotional resonances, and an ecology that emotions helped to transform and sustain. [author] takes us into the woodlands of early modern Korea to

¹⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007); Timothy J. LeCain, *The Matter of History: How Things Create the Past* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

explore the emotional responses Koreans had to their changing sylvan landscapes. [author] explores the ‘emotional ecologies’ of English farmers’ relationship to pigeons, both at home and in colonial North America, and [author] takes an interdisciplinary approach to Italian landscape painting, reading a visual language of emotion in artistic representations of rapidly changing central Italian lowlands. The final two papers extend us beyond terrestrial environments and return us to the body. [author] and [author] examine meteorological and climatological influences on the emotional health of individuals and populations in early modern England and Italy. By returning us to the body through a focus on environments as widely conceived as sunlight and climate, [author] and [author]’s chapters bring the collection full circle, re-emphasising the mutually constitutive relationships between people, environments and emotions.

This collection comes in the wake of calls for interdisciplinary collaboration between historians of environment and emotion, most recently made by the keynote panel at the European Society for Environmental History Conference, 2019. The examples of work in progress offered there were all concentrated in modern history. Our collection makes a claim for both the importance and distinctiveness of an early modern environmental history of emotions. Early modern ways of understanding environments, bodies and practising emotions not only differ from modern and contemporary approaches to the same, they point towards ways of knowing and living with the world which do more than prefigure the domination of nature.