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THEMATIC SECTION

Their Cup of Tea: Emotions and Drinking in Victorian-Era Literature

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ABSTRACT: Victorian society, characterised by industrial expansion, economic growth, and a strong emphasis on imperialism, was equally renowned for its adherence to tradition and a preserved way of life, in which personal and collective emotions were often kept beneath the surface, rather than openly expressed. However, as art always mirrors the *Zeitgeist*, Victorian-era literature has not failed to identify such nuances. The goal of this article was to explore the connection, from a digital humanities perspective, between drinking habits and emotional expression in Victorian literature, focusing on alcoholic beverages but also other drinks like tea, coffee, and lemonade. Our study uncovered patterns that reveal how drinking practices shaped personal and social emotions. The corpus of analysis consists of ten major Victorian novels through distant reading methods and sentiment analysis conducted in R. We observed that emotions related to drinking were largely negative, with alcohol playing a significant role

RESUMO: A sociedade vitoriana caracterizou-se pela expansão industrial, pelo crescimento económico e por uma forte ênfase no imperialismo. Era igualmente conhecida pela sua adesão à tradição e a um modo de vida conservador, em que as emoções pessoais e coletivas eram frequentemente mantidas sob a superfície, em vez de serem expressas abertamente. No entanto, como a arte reflete sempre o *Zeitgeist*, a literatura da era vitoriana não deixou de identificar essas nuances. O objetivo deste artigo foi explorar a ligação, a partir da perspetiva das humanidades digitais, entre os hábitos de consumo de álcool e a expressão emocional na literatura vitoriana, centrando-se em bebidas alcoólicas, mas também noutras bebidas como o chá, o café e a limonada. O estudo revelou padrões que revelam como as práticas de consumo de álcool moldaram as emoções pessoais e sociais. Observámos que as emoções relacionadas com as bebidas eram em grande parte negativas, com o álcool a desempenhar um papel



in how emotions were portrayed. Interestingly, almost half of the passages reflected negative emotions, challenging the common belief that Victorian literature often leans toward more positive expressions. The findings also suggest that drinking was closely tied to both public and private emotional experiences, mirroring larger societal concerns about morality, social status, and gender in the Victorian era. This research offers a deeper insight into how emotions are represented in Victorian literature and points to the need to explore further the links reflected through art, between emotions, drinking behaviours, and gendered social norms during this period, which can have significant comparative relevance to modern-day.

KEYWORDS: Victorian Era, Drinking Habits, Victorian Emotions, Sentiment Analysis

significativo na forma como as emoções eram retratadas. Curiosamente, quase metade das passagens refletia emoções negativas, desafiando a crença comum de que a literatura vitoriana se inclina frequentemente para expressões mais positivas. Os resultados também sugerem que o consumo de álcool estava intimamente ligado a experiências emocionais públicas e privadas, refletindo preocupações sociais mais amplas sobre moralidade, estatuto social e gênero na era vitoriana. Esta investigação oferece uma visão mais profunda da forma como as emoções são representadas na literatura vitoriana e aponta para a necessidade de uma maior exploração das ligações refletidas através da arte, entre emoções, comportamentos de consumo de álcool e normas sociais de gênero durante este período, o que pode ter uma relevância comparativa significativa para os dias de hoje.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Era Vitoriana, Consumo de bebidas, Emoções Vitorianas, Análise de Sentimentos

INTRODUCTION

The act of drinking, whether it is a cup of tea or something stronger, connects a person to two distinct spheres of the self: the personal and the social. On an individual level, drinking evokes memories triggered by familiar tastes and smells. Socially, it is shaped by societal expectations, reflecting the moral values of the time. Depending on the culture, the feelings that come with drinking affect the individual and can change them dramatically. In highly traditional societies, like the one of the Victorian era, one element that held significance beyond its superficial value was undoubtedly drinking. To understand these correlations, this paper dives into the emotions tied to drinking in the Victorian Era, performing a distant reading of some of the most popular literature from that time.

Based on our research into the drinking habits of the Victorian Era, we were able to identify the main beverages consumed by the English population of that time. These included alcoholic beverages (such as beer), tea, coffee, and lemonade. Each beverage had a notable connection to the emotions experienced by the characters in various novels. We identified three emotional responses linked to the consumption of these drinks, which were categorised as positive, negative, or neutral.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to these findings, it is possible to see that in Victorian England, one of the most important types of beverages was alcoholic. Their consumption was directly connected to social class, status, gender roles, and the country's historical context, which directly influenced people's emotions at the time and evoked positive, negative, and neutral ones. In the book *Drinking in Victorian and Edwardian Britain Beyond the Spectre of the Drunkard*,¹ we learn that, in Victorian Britain, people drank for many reasons beyond simply seeking intoxication (Hands 2018, 15). According to Thora Hands, there were multiple layers of meaning when it came to drinking that were connected to people's social class and gender. By moving beyond a narrow problem-solving approach, her research raises the significance of the topic, as it offers a comprehensive framework

for analysing contemporary drinking habits and the ongoing challenges of navigating the social, cultural, and commercial factors that shape alcohol consumption – issues that were just as relevant in the Victorian era.

Hands' book offers excellent insight into the reasons for Victorians consuming alcohol. According to her research, alcohol – especially beer – was a regular part of daily life in Victorian society. It was enjoyed at social events, meals, and even during work breaks, especially as a way for the working class to relax after a long day. Traditions like "dinner beer" helped people unwind, and drinking customs were shared across all social classes. Working-class men often gathered in pubs, where beer became tied to masculinity, while upper-class dinners used wine to show off social status.

Beyond leisure, drinking also helped people bond socially, whether at parties, gatherings, or even the workplace. For many, alcohol was an escape from life's stresses, offering relief from anxiety, frustration, or boredom. For women, especially in higher social circles, drinking came with shame and secrecy, as social norms expected them to hide it. While drunkenness was a reality, drinking during this era was not just about getting drunk. It was an internal part of society, reflecting more profound social, cultural, and even medical beliefs, along with complex emotions like pleasure, anxiety, and social pressure. Through Hands' findings, it is possible to see that there were correlations between the alcoholic consumption of Victorian people and their emotions, which was certainly reflected in the popular literature of that time. Alcohol consumption, even though it had great significance, on both personal and social aspects of life, was certainly not the only popular form of beverage connected to the Victorian era.

Besides the alcoholic drinks, common in the Victorian era, our analysis also showed that tea was one of the most mentioned drinks. According to the study conducted by Caitlin Khan in 2018 and published as *Identity in a Teacup: Tea's Influence Over the Lives of British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, there are connections between Victorian-era literature and the act of drinking. In her study, it is possible to see how the ritualistic tea drinking process influenced the lives and status of women of that era (Khan 2020, 3). Initially, tea was a luxury reserved for the wealthy due to its high cost and limited availability, which were impacted by long sea voyages and restrictive trade policies with China. The drink gained popularity in England through Catherine of Braganza, wife of King Charles II, and became especially favoured among upper-middle-class women.

Tea drinking was often a private ritual held in sitting rooms, known as closets, which associated it with intimacy. This practice was also connected to the emotion of freedom, as women typically wore dresses without corsets during these occasions. Additionally, tea gatherings fostered creativity and emotional expression, as women were responsible for organising and decorating the space for the event. Tea also served as a significant status symbol, reflecting one's social standing.

Emotionally, tea was responsible for tying specific groups, such as women, together while also creating a common bond between people of the same social class. Through time, it became more than just a drink; it evolved into a ritual that reflected social status across different classes. For the upper class, the ceremonies and etiquette around teatime quickly replaced the drink itself as a status symbol. As tea became more accessible, the elaborate rituals and presentation became the actual markers of wealth and respectability. With the rising popularity of tea, other drinks, such as coffee, which had a high significance in the past, were overshadowed.

Coffee was another drink consumed in the Victorian Era, but it certainly came with challenges. The drink was particularly popular before the Victorian era, as Coffee houses served as a space for men to gather, engage in social debates, and discuss some of the most significant political matters (Cowan 2007, 193). By then, the British East India Company prioritised the tea trade over coffee, as international competition for coffee had intensified with the rise of coffeehouses across Europe. This led to the decline of coffee houses despite their rise in the 18th century. Moreover, Andrew Smith (2024) states that the Beer Act of 1830 boosted beer production, but coffee consumption declined for other reasons, including rising coffee prices due to the emancipation of enslaved people in the British West Indies. Consequently, in the Victorian era, coffee became overshadowed by tea, as its consumption grew, prices remained stable, making it more appealing than coffee during this time.

Moreover, our study found that lemonade also held great significance in the Victorian era, much like other beverages, as it was deeply embedded in the social life of specific groups. While tea is famously associated with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the whimsical tea parties also featured a variety of sweet treats. In his study *Sweetness and Femininity: Fashioning Gendered Appetite in the Victorian Age*, Michael Krondl (2022) emphasises the link between femininity and sweet indulgences, such as lemonade,

which was key in shaping gendered social rituals.

In Victorian society, sweetness was linked to femininity, with women expected to embody it both in behaviour and what they consumed. Sweet foods and drinks became a way for women to express "sweet" and "dainty" emotions, shaping their social image. Sweet foods and beverages, like lemonade, were central to how women performed traditional femininity. Simple daily details, such as drinking lemonade, further reinforced societal expectations of women, pressuring them to conform (Kronl 2022, 67). Nevertheless, lemonade transcended its influence over a single group, gaining broader social significance. Lemonade evolved into a popular beverage enjoyed by all classes. It was sold at markets, theatres, and street stalls, symbolising leisure and shared social experiences (Emmins 1991, 7). Lemonade became a drink tied to emotional comfort in different communities, appearing in the literature of the time as a representation of pleasures across society.

As with all beverages, they often carried social significance, closely tied to the emotions of those sharing them within a specific group. In each society, the expression of these emotions has varied and continues to do so. Our research shows that although the Victorian Era is a well-known period and its literature is extensively studied, there is a significant gap in research on exploring emotions during this period. The most prominent name on this topic is Rachel Ablow, whose chapter in the book *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (2012) is a primary source for this research.

When mentioning emotions in the Victorian era, it is likely to make us think about the sentimentality of the period. The emotional expression of Victorian society was often intertwined with idealised virtuous behaviours, moral integrity, and ethical duty (Ablow 2008, 194). However, research conducted at the University of Warwick in 2017 has demonstrated, after analysing 8 million books from 1776 to 2009, that Victorians used a happier vocabulary in their books than modern society (Sgroi *et al.* 2017, 46). To reach this conclusion they used computational linguistics to signify the emotion implicit in billions of words. Although the novels of this period constantly presented sentimentality and even a cheerful state, historians agree that the nineteenth century was marked by "the decline of emotions" as a central element of civil society (Ablow 2008, 193). Victorian's emotions were usually gendered split. As men could easily navigate public and private spaces, they had emotions that could shift between these spheres, while women,

mostly confined to the home, had emotions bound to this specific place. Hence, it can be implied that feelings in the Victorian era were significantly associated with the differentiation between public and private, female and male.

In the nineteenth century, reading novels was a way of training emotions. It was assumed that reading made it possible to develop a sentimental education that was valuable in other stages of life. Spackman and Parrott concluded, after evaluating 3 different literary periods, that Victorian novelists are the least intense, which “may indicate that authors from this period held that emotions can and ought to be controlled” (Spackman and Parrott 2001, 570). Grace Moore states that much of our current understanding of emotions derives from the self-examination prevalent in the Victorian Era, as Victorians explored the nature and origin of their feelings. Despite being a common practice, some writers questioned emotions’ obviousness and were more interested in creating moments when the characters were incapable of describing their feelings or identifying their sources (Moore 2018, 602-603).

Drinking is one of the most significant aspects that can trigger, evoke, or create new emotions. Even though societal and environmental factors are influential, this process is inevitable because of how the memories are created and stored. When consuming the beverage, its smell and taste become imprinted in the individual's mind and can later be triggered by exposure to the same stimulus. Moreover, the study by Smith explored the effects of different drink aromas (lemon, beer, whisky, gin, and water-control) on mood, attention, and cognition, showing that certain aromas have specific effects on one’s mood (2004). Therefore, the senses, memories and, consequently, emotions are directly connected, and even in such an emotionally preserved era as the Victorian one, literature is a true mirror of these types of formations and connections. Therefore, exploring these emotions is a complex and delicate task, necessitating a specialised approach that can be effectively facilitated through digital humanities methodologies.

When analysing emotions evoked by drinking within the literature, one of the most used techniques is self-reporting questionnaires because of their easy application and understanding (Dorado *et al.* 2016, 38). Nevertheless, this kind of approach has some limitations since emotions are difficult to describe and they vary in different cultural contexts. Therefore, it seems relevant to integrate Digital Humanities tools to promote

broader methods of emotion classification, although it is important to highlight that these might not be as accurate as those expressed by humans. These digital methods are instrumental to analyse a significant amount of data that would be impossible to classify by close reading. “Previously neglected”, Sentiment Analysis (SA) has been more discussed recently (Rebora 2023, 17). It emerges as an option to extract emotions by converting them into a machine-readable language, allowing the creation of visualisations as graphs and plots to analyse the content. They are divided into two kinds: Polarity-based, which determines whether the passage expresses a positive, negative, or neutral sentiment. The other technique is the Valence-based sentiment analysis, which attributes a degree to the emotions instead of just assigning a positive or a negative value. Since it is a developing field, SA has experienced some inconsistencies in relation to its methods and theories. In the study *Emotions of London* (2016), Heuser, Moretti, and Steine used sentiment analysis and crowdsourcing to identify which emotions were associated with each part of London. The study proved that machines and humans diverge significantly when categorising more subjective emotions like fear (Heuser Ryan et al. 2016, 6). The machine under-identifies more implicit feelings, especially those related to personal or cultural understanding. While humans classified 12% of the passages as frightening, computers only considered 1%. In their study, the authors identify that both humans and computers agree that most passages are neutral and that 21% are related to happy emotions.

METHODS

Data

We selected ten books and novels comprehended from the period known as the Victorian Era, which is typically defined from 1837 to 1901. The selected books are *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Dracula*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Woman in White*, and *Wuthering Heights*. They were extracted from curated website lists that catalogue the most prominent books of the Victorian Era. These books were chosen explicitly so this study could include works from different literary genres and years, as well as texts written by female and male authors. Additionally, the

selected books reflect the historical and societal background of the Victorian Era. Due to the vast amount of literature produced during that period, it was necessary to exclude some books and authors that were undoubtedly relevant to Victorian literature. Another limitation of this study is that it only considers canonical works, excluding many books and novels that are not part of the canon.

Procedure

Once the books were selected, we created a dictionary which included different kinds of beverages consumed in the Victorian Era, utensils, and verbs which could be used as synonyms for *drink*. After that, we imported it to an R environment and utilised the library *Quanteda* to create a corpus of each book and tokenise them. Using a function called *Kwic*, we were able to locate the selected words and separate them into excerpts with an offset of 30 tokens (30 tokens before the one word selected and 30 tokens after). We filtered the data generated and created a subset with all relevant passages related to beverages in these books. After filtering using the dictionary, we created a subsetting of the relevant ones. A total of 567 passages were gathered. Finally, we applied a Polarity-based Sentiment Analysis, using the *Quanteda.sentiment* package extension, to analyse the selected passages. We utilised *Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary* (2015), available in the library, which defines a comprehensive list of words, verbs and expressions already catalogued in *positive*, *negative*, *pos_negative*, and *neg_positive*. Then, a function called *textstat_polarity* was used, which returns the polarity of each excerpt in the corpus. This polarity is a numeric value that varies between negative and positive numbers. We then classified those excerpts based on this value in positive (polarity over 0), negative (polarity under 0), and neutral (polarity equal to 0).

RESULTS

For reference to the results, in Figure 1, the graph provides a sentiment analysis of each passage in *Dracula* (1897), one of the analysed books. The passages are in chronological order, which makes it possible to visualise the distribution of emotions throughout the book.

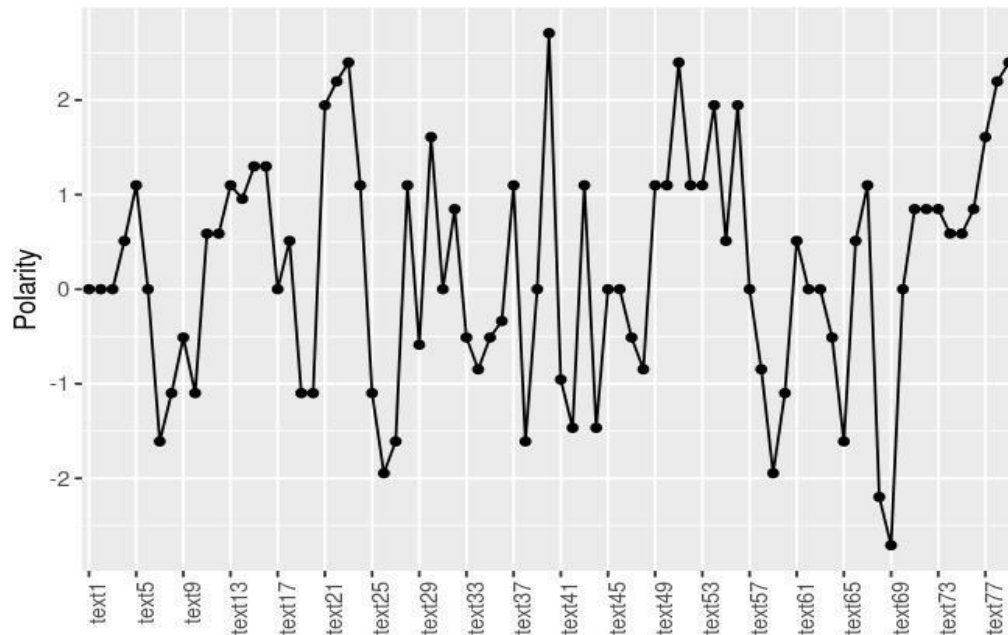


Figure1- Sentiment Distribution of Passages in Dracula

The Sentiment analysis allowed us to observe distinct patterns of positive, negative, and neutral emotions across the passages. The percentage of these emotions in each book individually is represented in Table 1.

Book Title	Total of Passages	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)
<i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>	29	48.28	37.93	13.79
<i>Dracula</i>	79	49.37	34.18	16.46
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	84	36.9	42.86	20.24
<i>The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>	15	33.33	40	26.67
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	107	37.38	42.06	20.56
<i>A Study in Scarlet</i>	17	20.41	47.06	23.53
<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	41	26.83	48.78	24.39
<i>The Tenant of Wildfell Hall</i>	107	28.97	52.34	18.69
<i>The Woman in White</i>	16	43.75	43.75	12.75
<i>Wuthering Heights</i>	72	25	48.61	26.39

Table 1- Percentages of emotions in each book

Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) are the books with more beverages-related passages. *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) has fewer passages, but it is necessary to take into consideration that it is a novel with fewer pages than a regular romance. The sentiment analysis revealed that, despite its Gothic nature, *Dracula*, when analysed individually, is the book with more positive emotions (49.37 %), followed by (48.28 %) found in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1864).

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (52.34%) is the book with the highest proportion of negative emotions, followed by (48.78%) found in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The books with the highest proportions of neutrality are *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (26.67%) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) (26.39 %).

When considering all the Victorian books selected, Sentiment Analysis reveals that within the 567 passages, 35.45% of them are related to positive emotions, 44.27% to negative, and only 20.28% of passages are neutral. This highlights a general tendency towards pessimistic emotions since almost half of the analysed passages are negative. In Figure 2, the graph represents the average polarity by book, and it is based on the strength of the sentiments in the passages. At the same time, the percentages illustrated in Table 1 show the distribution of these emotions per book. That is why the average in Figure 2 does not match the percentages directly. The passages are not equal in strength. Many mildly positive passages would bring the average closer to neutral, while fewer but very strongly positive would pull the average score up. In this case, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is the book with the strongest positive emotions.

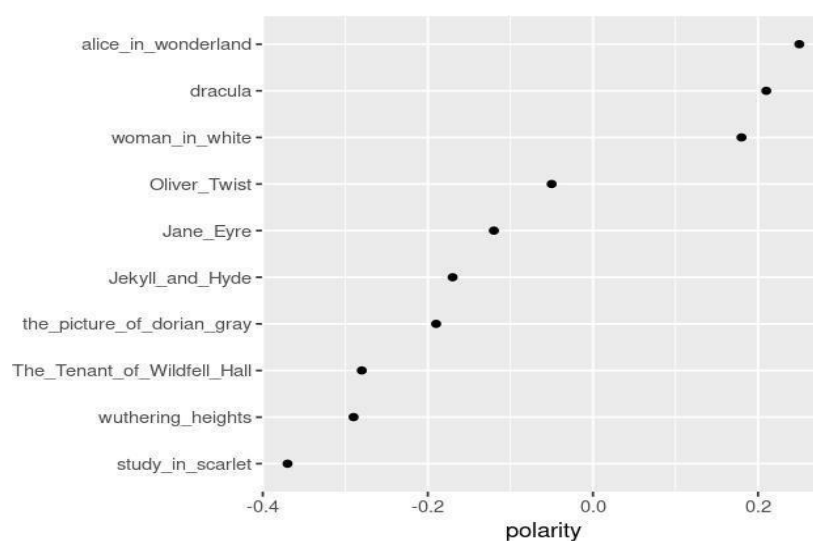


Figure 2-Average polarity by book

DISCUSSION

The Sentiment Analysis of the selected texts demonstrates some findings that differ from the existing literature. While the study conducted by Sgroi *et al.* (2017) proved that the Victorians used happier vocabulary, our research demonstrated that almost half of the passages we selected (44.27%) relate to negative feelings. It must be emphasised that we only analysed passages related to beverages. In contrast, the authors mentioned above considered the books as a whole and compared them with other literary periods, which was not done in our study. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that our sample is considerably less extensive and comprehensive compared to the one used in other studies. Heuser, Moretti, and Steiner's (2016) study also suggests a prevalence of positive emotions over negative, although, in their analysis, neutral emotions had a higher proportion. These outcomes implied that when relating to beverages and drinking habits, Victorians tended to associate them with more negative emotions. Our study also differs from the work of Heuser, Moretti, and Steiner in other aspects, as their results indicate an absence of emotions, while neutrality only represents 20.28% of our total sample.

One surprising result from our analysis is that *Dracula* contains the highest percentage of passages that associate positive emotions with drinking. This likely happens because many scenes where characters share food and drinks with Count Dracula occur before they realise that he is a vampire, thus those moments do not immediately trigger negative feelings. As the polarity graph shows in Figure 1, the emotions in the early part of the book are mostly neutral or even slightly positive, which makes sense since characters like Jonathan Harker have not yet discovered Dracula's true nature. However, as the story progresses and Dracula's influence grows stronger, the emotional tone turns darker, especially around events like Lucy's death. This shift reflects the increasing tension and despair as the characters begin to understand the full extent of the danger. By the end of the novel, though, the tone shifts back to a more positive note – reaching a score of over 2 on the graph – indicating the characters' triumph over Dracula and the resolution of the conflict.

When looking at the other polarity, although not considered the most Gothic work of Brontë's sisters, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has more passages associated with negative feelings about drinking. This might happen because the novel addresses issues related to alcoholism. The author depicts Arthur Huntingdon's character as an abuser due

to his alcohol addiction. Indeed, further investigations into the plot and sentiment alignment should be conducted. However, our analysis implies that there might be some relevant connections between these two aspects.

CONCLUSION

So, what was their cup of tea? This is precisely what this paper seeks to examine: the relationship between drinking habits and emotional responses in the Victorian era, as reflected in the literature of that time by using digital humanities tools. Our primary goal was to investigate how different beverages – such as alcoholic drinks, tea, coffee, and lemonade – were depicted in Victorian novels and how their consumption influenced the characters' emotions. Through a distant reading of ten major Victorian novels, we applied polarity-based sentiment analysis to classify emotions into positive, negative, and neutral categories. Using digital tools such as Quanteda made it possible to efficiently process a large volume of text and identify emotional trends across multiple works, revealing that almost half of the beverage-related passages were linked to negative emotions.

Using digital tools proved crucial for uncovering the nuanced emotional landscapes tied to Victorian drinking habits, although it did have limitations. Automated sentiment analysis tools can overlook context and subtle emotions, which are often deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of literature. Expanding the analysis to a larger sample of texts or integrating human interpretation, such as crowdsourcing, could yield even richer insights.

However, there is room for further research. For instance, exploring the emotional dynamics of public versus private drinking in Victorian society could give more insight into the era's moral expectations. Additionally, examining how emotions connected to drinking varied across gender lines remains relevant. Overall, this study underscores the importance of combining traditional literary analysis with digital humanities tools to uncover new dimensions of Victorian literature, particularly regarding how emotions are expressed and shaped by societal customs such as drinking. This research is especially significant because external factors, including differing societal values and lifestyles, continue to influence human emotions. As long as sensory experiences, like the consumption of beverages, evoke distinct emotions tied to cultural practices, the

relevance of these customs will persist. Examining the past not only helps us understand what “their cup of tea” was but also provides valuable insights into what could shape ours today.

END NOTES

1 The following two paragraphs refer to the work written by Hands in her book *Drinking in Victorian and Edwardian Britain Beyond the Spectre of the Drunkard* (2018).

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