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Victorian Dogs, Victorian Men: Affect and Animals in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture

Keridiana W. Chez

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Victorian Dogs, Victorian Men: Affect and Animals in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture by Keridiana W. Chez is the first monograph located at the intersection of animal and affect studies to examine how gender is produced via the regulation of interspecies relationships. Looking specifically at the development of the human-dog relationship, Chez argues that the bourgeoisie fostered connections with canine companions in order to mediate and regulate gender dynamics in the family. As Chez shows, the aim of these new practices was not to use animals as surrogates to fill emotional vacancies but rather to incorporate them as “emotional prostheses.”
Chez traces the evolution of the human-dog relationship as it developed parallel to an increasingly imperialist national discourse. The dog began as the affective mediator of the family, then addressed the emotional needs of its individual members, and finally evolved into both “man’s best friend” and worst enemy. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the porous human-animal boundary served to produce the “humane” man: a liberal subject enabled to engage in aggressive imperial projects. Reading the work of Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Margaret Marshall Saunders, Bram Stoker, and Jack London, *Victorian Dogs, Victorian Men* charts the mobilization of affect through transatlantic narratives, demonstrating the deep interconnections between animals, affect, and gender.

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