



Introduction: Victorian Fiction and the Material Imagination

<http://www.firstlight.cn> 2008-12-31

How should we deal with the 'stuff' in books? This is the question addressed in the lead articles of the Spring 2008 issue of 19, all of which focus on some aspect of the material in relation to Victorian fiction. Gas, rocks, jewellery, automata and the entire contents of houses are examined in essays that explore the material imagination of Dickens, Hardy, George Eliot and Thackeray, among others. Moving forward from the previous edition, which different types of collected object, here contributors examine how the material is brought into collision with literature. The phrase 'material imagination' can be traced to the work of Gaston Bachelard who identifies two types of imagination, the formal and the material. Whereas the former focuses on surfaces and the visual perception of images, the latter consists of '...this amazing need for penetration which, going beyond the attractions of the imagination of forms, thinks matter, dreams in it, lives in it, or, in other words, materializes the imaginary'. As Bachelard suggests, the material imagination involves more than just a focus on the representation of objects and the contributions to this edition explore such wide ranging subjects as the gender politics of ownership, dispossession, the body as object, the politics of collecting and display and the dichotomy between the material and immaterial. In addition, this edition features a forum on digitisation and materiality. We are particularly pleased to be able to make use of 19's digital publishing format to further debates about digital media. In the forum, five contributors respond to a series of questions about the nature of the virtual object. All five have worked or are working on nineteenth-century digitisation projects so they are uniquely placed to consider issues surrounding representation and the nature of digital space.

[存档文本](#)