The Pre-history of Stress
Stress is a peculiarly modern emotion. Or is it?

Scholars have been working with the assumption that technologies like the steam train and the telephone are to blame for ‘compressing time’; and that it was the new socio-economic configurations of the nineteenth century which introduced a sense that time is a costly asset that should be spent well. The result, according to Aldous Huxley in 1936: ‘Time is our tyrant.’

This paper investigates the ways Europeans living between 1815 and 1914, so before and during this alleged process of temporal modernisation, used their time. Importantly, it compares this to how they wanted to use their time. This will demonstrate that the ideal of efficiency had in fact been playing a huge role for a long time already, by the time Huxley was writing. The ‘acceleration of life’ had already begun (or perhaps it had always been there).

But was everyone in the nineteenth century equally affected by feelings of haste and even inadequacy? What sources did these emotions stem from? Can they be related to industrialisation? To gender, to work? And what strategies (bodily strategies, mental strategies, habitual or incidental) were used to alleviate them? In this contribution, I hope to add a piece to the puzzle of how universal across time and place our emotions are.