

Ingeborg Jandl, Susanne Knaller,  
Sabine Schönfellner, Gudrun Tockner (eds.)

# WRITING EMOTIONS

Theoretical Concepts and Selected  
Case Studies in Literature

[transcript] Lettre

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Sabine Schönfellner, Gudrun Tockner (eds.)  
Writing Emotions

## **Lettre**



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SABINE SCHÖNFELLNER, GUDRUN TOCKNER (EDS.)

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## Preface

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After a long period of neglect, emotions have become an important topic in literary studies, although literature is not the only field of interest when dealing with the question of emotion. Within the humanities, disciplines such as film studies, history, anthropology and philosophy have made influential contributions, while in the realm of the natural and social sciences the topic of emotions has been widely discussed in neurology, biology, sociology and psychology. This considerable involvement of such a great variety of disciplines led to the assumption of an “emotional turn” (Anz 2006). But one could also pose the challenging question of whether it is appropriate to speak rather of an “affective (re)turn” (Keen 2011), given the fact that emotions have been a topic in philosophy and the arts since antiquity. Emotions were, for example, also broadly treated in the discourses on affect and passion in the 16th and 17th century, in the 18th century’s aesthetic of sentiment or, with the concept of empathy (*Einfühlung*), in the 19th and early 20th century.

These observations provided the starting point for this volume and the international conference preceding it. The symposium “Writing Emotions. Literature as Practice (19th to 21st Century)” was held at the University of Graz from 18 to 20 May 2016. It was organized by the Center for Cultural Studies and the doctoral programme “Culture – Text – Act(ion)” at the University of Graz in cooperation with the European PhDnet “Literary and Cultural Studies”. International PhD students, postdoc researchers and senior researchers from various disciplines, such as English and American Studies, German Studies, Slavic Studies and Comparative Literature, came together to present and discuss their newest findings and theoretical models concerning emotions and literature, with a special focus on the practice of writing. In their papers, they drew on theoretical concepts and studies from fields such as philosophy and cognitive studies and transferred these to cultural and literary analyses. The conference opened up an interdisciplinary dialogue to pose questions and formulate theoretical models from which the various disciplines could then profit in turn.

The central questions addressed at the conference as well as in the contributions in this volume are the following:

- Which roles do emotions play within writing as an aesthetic process?
- Where and how do emotional moments of the practice of writing leave traces within the text?
- How do authors play with this emotional impact?
- Where and how do authors explicitly deal with emotion and writing or with writing as an emotional practice within the texts?
- What kind of role do intermedial strategies play?
- Where does intertextuality come in?
- How is the topic and context of media devices incorporated (language, writing tools, photography, film, the digital etc.)?
- What theoretical models do we have for analysing forms of emotion in modern literature?
- What are the interfaces and borders between sociocultural and scientific concepts of emotion and aesthetic emotions in the context of writing as agency?
- Which types of emotion and which forms of literary emotions can be found in the context of writing as agency?

The contributions, grouped into four thematic sections, ponder these questions and their implications.

The first section is conceived as a theoretical introduction. In her programmatic proposal, Susanne Knaller presents the interconnections between emotions and the process of writing, summing up the core questions of the volume and establishing a theoretical basis for it. Drawing on recent scholarship on emotions and literature, she particularly highlights the complex role of literature/written texts as both the result of and the trigger for emotional patterns and as potentially enforcing and/or challenging norms. Based on these considerations, she proposes a number of relevant and previously neglected fields and questions for further research on the issue of writing as a process and its relations to the field of emotions. Vera Nünning then addresses emotions encoded in literature and their effect on the reader. Using extensive textual examples from various periods and genres, she gives a wide-ranging overview of strategies of emotional expression in world literature, relating the results of her text-immanent and reception-focused analysis to neuroscientific findings. Gesine Lenore Schiewer chooses an original empiric approach to the topic. In an interview with writer Michael Stavarič, she discusses the core questions of this volume exemplarily, thereby

providing a concrete and illustrative case study. With cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence as her point of departure, she draws on the theoretical and practical knowledge of the possibilities and limitations of technological processes to explore the interface between feeling, artificially generated emotional expression and the question of its authenticity. Finally, Angela Locatelli explores psychoanalytic discourses around religious feelings of ecstasy, thus highlighting another dimension of the spectrum of human emotions, and discusses them in a systematically comparative way. Aspects of depth-psychological views, central for the study of emotions, are thus made fruitful for theoretical deliberations, laying the groundwork for further studies.

The ensuing sections present contributions and analyses on the themes of “Emotions Mediated”, “Emotions on Stage and in Literary Texts” and “Writing Wounds”.

The contributions to “Emotions Mediated” address possible reciprocal effects between emotions and various media. Specific media such as letters (Marie Dürker), diaries (Julia Grillmayr), journalistic and artistic texts (Ingeborg Jandl), internet posts and YouTube videos (Silke Jandl), bodies, and vehicles (Nora Berning), as well as musical and artistic works in a broader sense, are analysed in regard to their potential for emotional expression. Discussions of these examples consider to what extent medial forms mediate or facilitate the expression of emotions, to what extent emotions are altered through these means of expression, and what implications different medial forms can have for emotional self-images and the image of others. Media imply specific discourses, sign systems and practices, and emotional expression necessitates the translation of emotion into these systems. The contributions to this section highlight potential obstacles to this undertaking. These impediments can stem both from a subject’s uncertain emotional state and from the process of textualization and the difficulties inherent in translating feelings into a medium in order to make them accessible to others. Discussions and examples illustrate the complexity of emotions and offer suggestions for dealing with the potentially fraught issue of mediated emotions. The essays in this section show that writing, as an ‘external movement’, initiates and triggers internal as well as further external movements and consequently accompanies the construction of identities and personalities.

The essays in the section “Emotions on Stage and in Literary Texts” point out techniques of inscribing emotions into written and spoken or performed texts, often with the explicit goal of directly affecting the recipients. The shifts and modifications of the concept of emotions become particularly apparent in the

two essays discussing early modern texts by Gudrun Tockner and Emanuel Stelzer, which highlight the categories of humorism as important tenets of contemporaneous anthropological thought while also discussing other, less well-known emotional categories of the time. Dialogue and stage directions from early modern plays illustrate that emotional frame settings and rhetorical means are carefully chosen in order to anchor spectators' feelings to the emotions depicted on stage. Conventionalized postures and poses, as also developed in 18th and 19th century studies of physiognomy, play an important role in the artistic depiction of emotions not just in a theatrical context but also in the visual arts and, based on this, in literature (Yulia Marfutova). Contemporary literary texts and those of the 19th and 20th century, on the other hand, show a noticeably more individualized preoccupation with feelings, partly inspired by the idea of irrational patterns as an inherent part of the individual psyche (Pirjo Lyytikäinen). The limits of holding on to a singular identity as a human being overlap with the limits of feelings themselves, the limits of understanding feelings, and the limits of being able to experience them (Sabine Schönfellner). Through these reflections upon the subject of human emotion as something potentially elusive, something which cannot be entirely depicted or analysed, the enquiry into emotions gains some deeply ambivalent aspects.

The difficulties emerging in the previous section are at the centre of the section "Writing Wounds", in which contributions focus on internal psychological processes on the part of literary characters and writing subjects. Here, wounds, identifiable as the starting point of writing (Elise Nykänen), are the core motif which pervades the texts under discussion in various guises (Riikka Rossi). Thematically, mental injuries, personal insecurities and inner conflicts initiate a desperate and often illusionary quest for change and development. The depth of some wounds seems to make it impossible to find adequate means of expression for them, as in the essay focusing on writing about the Shoah (Tom Vanassche), while other authors and characters recognize and utilize writing as the last anchoring point in reality for desperate individuals experiencing psychosis (Anna Ovaska, Laura Oulanne). Despite rarely recovering in the long term, writing helps these individuals to continue a process of reflection and supports them in preserving a continuous sense of identity. The states of astonishment and insecurity of literary subjects ultimately prove to be both productive on a literary level and demanded by audiences. Authors use psychotic states as artistically productive means, while the history of reception of the *Twilight* saga particularly highlights how readers experience the long-awaited liberation from uncertainty as ultimately dissatisfying (Heta Pyrhönen).

In this volume, contributions centring on theory and those with an analytic focus mesh and complement each other. Emotions seem to be immanent in any kind of writing, since they are missed if absent. Writing is consequently emphasized as a process in which emotions are always visible in some manner, and this conceptualisation in turn opens up diverse possibilities to produce, construct, modify, delete, experience or analyse emotions both in the practice of writing and in textual analysis.

Ingeborg Jandl  
Susanne Knaller  
Sabine Schönfellner  
Gudrun Tockner



# Writing Emotions/Reading Emotions



# Emotions and the Process of Writing

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SUSANNE KNALLER

## 1.

In recent years, the topic of emotion has been widely discussed in literary and cultural studies as well as in art theory.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of more and more diverse and complex research in neuro- and cognitive science, psychology, biology, linguistics and philosophy, literary criticism has become increasingly interested in a subject which literature itself has, in fact, ever since been concerned with: emotions and feelings. On the level of text the actions of literary characters have always been motivated by emotions such as guilt, hatred, love, jealousy and fear. To identify these fictional emotions, which are informed by the lifeworld and its practices, is an important aspect of literary understanding. It proves difficult to decipher such emotions when they appear in the form of rhetorical images or topoi. In these instances, emotions such as jealousy or guilt serve as allegories, metaphors or symbols for concepts or values such as good and evil, mind and body, beautiful and ugly, or true and false. This is the case in texts of the pre-modern period (e.g. in medieval love motifs) as well as in 20th-century literature (e.g. in Kafka's motifs of fear and guilt). While in analysing fictional characters or concrete motifs and rhetorical techniques, one can at least draw on given empirical conditions (the text units) and on hermeneutical arguments (the correlation between knowledge, context and poetics), on the level of reception or

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1 Cf. Knaller/Rieger 2016. A selection of pivotal examples from the numerous publications includes: Nünning 2014; Palmier 2014; Schiewer 2014, 2009; Schneider 2013; Anz 2012, 2007; Frevert, et al. 2011; Hogan 2011; Keen 2011; Robinson 2010; Koppenfels 2007; Mellmann 2006; Meyer-Sickendieck 2005; Kappelhoff 2004; Voss 2004; Winko 2003; Menninghaus 1999.

reader-response, feelings pose a much greater challenge for literary studies. As of late, this has been increasingly discussed in empirically-oriented studies which draw on approaches developed by experimental psychology and the neurosciences as well as on models inspired by biology; the latter proceed from a stimulus-reaction scheme and take up evolutionary arguments, necessities of everyday life and psychophysical conditions.<sup>2</sup> This interdisciplinary expansion into the natural sciences has kept the issue of emotional response in a field of tension between the artefact (i.e. textual triggers informed by the medium, rhetoric and motifs) on the one hand and real-life emotional actions and communication processes on the other.

From these complex constellations follows the important question as to how different levels of emotion that are effective in literary texts interrelate. This includes the text levels on which emotions are explicitly or implicitly expressed and where text strategies are applied to trigger emotional responses. The aesthetic context of (literary) texts, moreover, encompasses production-related emotions which can be attributed to the author, but in part also relate to text strategies. Finally, literary texts also generate actual, empirically and experimentally verifiable emotions.

As shown above, emotions and feelings are never isolated phenomena, but multistratified and variously interrelated complexes. Hence, as a first definition, emotions are always bound to knowledge as well as to practical actions and conditions in the lifeworld. They are based in the conceptual and the abstract, yet also take practical effect. Moreover, it can be assumed that emotions portrayed in literature have strong inherent potential for steering emotional response. Therefore, the respective functions of emotions in the context of their potential reception and the related reciprocal relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic determinants are of particular interest. Aesthetic emotions build on non-aesthetic emotional codes, formulas and patterns; in turn, they also contribute to generating these very codes, while counteracting them at the same time. This warrants a renegotiation of emotions. From this perspective, emotions can, therefore, be defined as behavioural patterns closely linked to the acquisition of communicative and practical competencies within a social group. The expression of emotions is determined by social frameworks and the specific medium-related conditions.<sup>3</sup> For literary studies, this demands an understanding

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- 2 In this context cf. Mellmann 2006. Furthermore, the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics in Frankfurt am Main should be mentioned in this context (Winfried Menninghaus).
- 3 This definition is highly compatible with the approach of practical theories. For Andreas Reckwitz emotions are not considered as psychological or mental processes,

of the psychophysical, epistemological, practical and formal conditions of emotions and how these are treated in the literary context.

In recent years, a distinction between emotion and feeling has proved helpful for this purpose.<sup>4</sup> While emotion refers to a neurologically, biologically, psychologically, cognitively, culturally and medium-specifically (pre-)determined complex, feelings are defined as reactions, i.e. as reflected states and as events of emotions. Emotions are linked to psychophysical conditions, such as knowledge, assessments and judgment, and to practical actions and determinants in the life-world. In the context of literary texts, we are concerned with aesthetically reflected verbalizations of models and paradigms of emotion. What comes up for discussion via literature are the triggering, experiencing, naming, describing, understanding, regulating and codifying of models of emotion and feeling along with their respective practices. Since the 17th century, it has been agreed within western philosophy and science that emotions and feelings are a necessary foundation for our self-understanding and for understanding others. Emotions and feelings determine the relationship between body, mind and actions; they influence our modern self-understanding and our understanding of others, our approach to self-representation and to the representation of others. Emotions determine decisions and judgments as well as the values and relevance we ascribe to others. Already Descartes described emotion as a state which is experienced in terms of a certain quality. This state represents an external object through its effect on the mind and evaluates the object, thus establishing a representation pattern that can be applied to other objects, as Dominique Perler specifies.<sup>5</sup> For Descartes, as later for Hume and in the concepts of moral sense (which are important for 18th-century aesthetic theories), emotions also contain a highly reflexive element deriving from the subject. Emotions can, therefore, become the basis for moral/ethical consequences. Thus, emotion is also a part of reason. However, there is little agreement on how big this part is, nor on the exact nature of the relationship between neurological dispositions, psychophysical perception, phenomenological feeling, reflection and moral insight, emotional experience and ethically correct actions. Likewise, there is still little consensus about

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but they “constitute an integral part of the practical activities within which human bodies relate to other objects and subjects. [...] Affects/emotions are neither an inner possession of individuals nor are they mere outward signs, ‘expressive’ gestures made public. They are bodily reactions and they are enabled/restricted by interpretative schemes at the same time. This is to say, they are part of social practices [...]” Reckwitz 2012, 251.

4 Cf. Damasio 2011.

5 Cf. Perler 2012: 282-283.

whether emotion is a universal, historical, physical, cognitive, psychological, neurological, independent, referential, intentional, constructive or passive phenomenon. This list could be continued.

This pluralism of perspectives notwithstanding, regarding the relation between emotions and literary studies there are basically four potential areas of interest: a) the (historical, systematic and/or analytical) investigation of emotional concepts in aesthetic theories and in poetics; b) the (historical, systematic and/or immanent) analysis of emotion-related concepts and strategies in literary texts; c) the dimensions of emotional response and effect in reception; d) the (anthropologically, culturally, neurologically, phenomenologically, biologically and/or psychologically motivated) assumption of the presence of emotions in the production of artistic/literary works. Emotions on the level of production are among those least explored. They fall into two categories: specific emotions specifically generated and experienced during the writing process and generalizable emotions. The former can be identified through direct empirical experiments, documents, and via potentially very speculative conclusions based on generally valid social patterns, biographical circumstances, poetological features etc. The latter depend on the respective aesthetic models and epistemological presuppositions applied and entail distilling a “poetics of emotion”.<sup>6</sup> However, regarding production-related emotions, it is essential to always keep in mind and methodologically clarify which notion of emotion is expressed in the respective artefacts and how this notion relates to the poetics pursued by the respective author. In the following, some suggestions will be made as to how patterns of emotion can be described.

## 2.

The questions raised above illustrate the close relationship between aesthetic levels of reality and levels of reality in the lifeworld. Artistic objects also require the presupposition of conditions which make the emotional reactions of a novel’s protagonist comprehensible and/or trigger emotional reader response. These conditions resemble those of the empirical, everyday world: there must be paradigms for generating fear, love, hatred, envy, guilt etc. and/or to make these recognisable. In philosophy, the distinction between concrete and formal objects has become prevalent in this context. Concrete objects designate the (empirical or abstract, material or intentional) triggers, while formal objects provide the (at

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6 Andringa 2011: 152.

least for the emotional process) non-contingent evaluation and description of concrete objects. Ronald De Sousa defines formal objects as follows: “For each emotion, there is a second-order property that must be implicitly ascribed to the [emotion’s object] if the emotion is to be intelligible. This essential element in the structure of each emotion is its *formal object*.<sup>7</sup>” Thus ‘truth’ is the formal object of ‘conviction’, ‘desire’ that of ‘wishing’. However, so-called “paradigm scenarios”<sup>8</sup> are necessary to become acquainted with the vocabulary required to attribute emotion. They enable us to understand how emotions are classified and assessed and how they function; i.e., they essentially allow us to comprehend emotions as such, to put them into practice and to reproduce them. Regarding their experience, understanding and assessment, emotions are, thus, determined by their motivation, focus, causality and goal-orientedness.<sup>9</sup>

The arts are instances of observing paradigm scenarios, while they, in turn, also depend on the conditions of their own observation. In this respect, we are not only concerned with emotions from real-life and cultural paradigm scenarios, but also with aesthetic paradigms. Furthermore, the arts are not merely concerned with emotions as physical or cognitive experiences and assessments, or with self- and other-referential reactions. Aesthetic emotions are also bound to take a specific form, appear in a specific mode, and place themselves in a relationship to existing and possible aesthetic paradigms (of emotion). In methodological terms, this is the most difficult aspect to resolve, since aesthetic emotions – contrary to real-life and cultural emotions – do not primarily answer the purposes of communication, gaining insight into the self and others, or coping with, reacting to and assessing certain situations. They observe scenarios and their vocabulary – i.e. the legitimizing discourses, the cultural, economic, political, powerful, knowledge-governing conditions resulting from this complex, and the way in which those conditions are treated aesthetically. Therefore, the arts epistemologically and poetologically position themselves via the representations of emotions and feelings.

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7 De Sousa 1987: 117.

8 Ibid.: 72.

9 Here, Christiane Voss’s approach (Voss 2004) ought to be mentioned. She defines the parameters for describing the notion of emotion in its full extent as containing intentional (representations), behavioural (actions), physical-perceptual and hedonistic (individually subjective) components. In Voss’s understanding, these components are entwined in the narrative context which establishes their specific semantic, communicative value. (Cf. ibid.: 185) Voss does not assume that emotions are always semantically charged, but perceives them as an interplay between pre-linguistic, physical experiences and an embeddedness in narrative.

### 3.

In the following, the focus will be on the level of production, where paradigms of emotion, paradigm scenarios, and aesthetic patterns of emotion are applied. The respective backdrop of these applications is one of toying with what is recognized as normal/familiar, based on an affirmative or a dismissive attitude towards the norms. Aesthetically generated feelings in the arts and in literature are therefore never simple reflections or representations of lifeworld emotions. The specific quality of aesthetic emotions much rather lies in the juxtaposition of both the affirmative and dismissive attitude. This is to say that the arts affirm or reject and convey the perpetuation or a renegotiation of the discourses which relate to the notions of emotion and the related vocabulary. In moderate cases, this should entail purification, sensitization and clarification processes; in extreme cases of dissolving the boundaries between the lifeworld and the arts it can result in direct interventions. Poetics of the former strand aim at intensification; those of the latter, on occasion, seek to vehemently disrupt common lifeworld and aesthetic standard scenarios. This often generates effects of immediacy or materially physical experiences which remain formally and narratively unsemantized and unrelated, and which can be referred to as emotional *events*. Especially physical, phenomenal feelings often produce an effect of (artistic) provocation by transgressing taboos and disrupting expectations. In this context, Thomas Anz rightly observes that in the case of artefacts both actions and reactions can be triggered.<sup>10</sup>

To adequately deal with these relationships between aesthetic and lifeworld levels of reality, the focus should be on that (very) aspect related to productive emotions: i.e. on writing, or more specifically, the process of writing. This approach allows literary production to be perceived as a process and therefore as a practice beyond the construction of a text, and moreover, allows production-related emotions to be understood as an interface between cultural fields of action, between the medium-determined elements of writing, of the body and of knowledge, and between psychophysical and social life.

One can say that writing processes are inherently linked to emotions. As a psychophysical process, writing relates to emotions as a prerequisite for self- and other-experiences, judgments, evaluations, understanding and perception; as a cultural practice, it is tied to respective media, techniques and societal norms; as an aesthetic practice, it is determined by poetological models and its own aesthetic impulses; finally, as a lifeworld practice, writing ultimately depends on

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10 Cf. Anz 2006.

environmental and economic conditions as well as on communication models. Writing is therefore to be perceived not only as a concrete process linked to verbal and textual media; it is also a process that can transcend text and language boundaries, as the avant-gardes have continuously proved. Here, emotions related to the aesthetics of production play a decisive role and contribute to shaping works of art and texts which demonstrate a formally and, in terms of media, multi-faceted interplay between production practices, commentaries, or the coupling of text and image. This permits a directness and simultaneity of emotions and feelings (also in the physical sense), i.e. the consistent involvement of the body and its motions in the private as well as the public sphere. Hence, 'writing' can also make apparent a modified, critical, or dismissive approach towards traditional concepts of author and work. This has recently been considered in the study of writing processes for which the notion of 'work' encompasses the process of working on a text as well as everything that is produced during this process. The theory of writing<sup>11</sup> is concerned with the entire writing process and thus evidences that literariness cannot be reduced to traces in the text but is also attained through and remains inseparable from productive (real-life) actions and practices. This includes, for instance, intertextuality, processes of authors reading and commenting on their own texts, and the concept of writing as reading.<sup>12</sup> Even though it stands to reason to synthesize writing, the writing processes and emotion, this nexus has rarely been systematically investigated. The following will provide a brief outline of potential research and methodological suggestions.

## 4.

The first premise should be that emotions are equally relevant to the productive writing process as reception-sided strategies of generating emotion are to the

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11 Besides Barthes's *écriture*, Kittler's 'Aufschreibesysteme' (Kittler 1985) can be quoted as a precursor; regarding the notion of 'process', the *critique généalogique* (Grésillon 1999, 1997; Hay 1984) has brought forth some findings. The researchers involved in Martin Stingelin's project "Zur Genealogie des Schreibens" ('On the Genealogy of Writing'), however, put an even stronger focus on the nexus between writing and life (or writing as life) than the other models. Besides the text itself, this processual element also incorporates the (biographical, institutional, technical/material and poetological) conditions under which a text is produced. Cf. Stingelin 2012, 2004; Zanetti 2012.

12 Cf. Giuriato/Stingelin/Zanetti 2004.

respective artefacts/texts. In the context of emotion and writing, Roland Barthes is a useful point of reference in theoretical terms, as he strongly emphasizes the emotional aspect of text production, i.e. the act of obtaining pathos and affect, as he terms it.<sup>13</sup> He thereby also addresses the physical, corporeal elements of writing and of using writing utensils, thus setting himself apart from a purely metaphorical notion of writing (in the sense of style or a particular kind of form and work). Particularly Barthes's concept of "*écriture*" has become prevalent in the study of writing processes.<sup>14</sup> It allows one to discern and define the following aspects: 1) The explicitness of writing (as traces in the text, an element of content or as program) brings into play an aesthetic element which moves towards the boundaries of genres and texts, such that these boundaries are almost dissolved. 2) Writing refers to and evinces life as it surrounds the writing process. 3) Writing determines the recording of what is present (language, the act). 4) The outcome of writing is, therefore, not the finished text (or several versions of it); rather, it encompasses the entire process and reveals the aesthetic potential of the entire complex. 5) Writing also leads to relinquishing the production of literature in favour of new texts concerned with writing (notebooks, diaries, essays etc.). 6) Writing causes important notions such as those of author, work or text to be renegotiated. 7) Writing creates innovative aesthetic possibilities. 8) Writing exposes the writer in the act of writing (intransitive, as a medium).<sup>15</sup>

Rüdiger Campe's "*Schreibszene*" model (1991), which he developed for literary studies, builds on the notion of Barthes's *écriture*. '*Szene*' ('scene') denotes a movement between the body and tools/instruments/the medium, between literary genres, between text and commentary/critique, and describes the differential scope of the text (which is not a set product of the author).<sup>16</sup> In his project concerned with investigating writing processes, Martin Stingelin takes up this notion and differentiates between "*Schreibszene*" and "*Schreib-Szene*". The latter thematizes and problemizes, within the text, the ensemble of the '*Schreibszene*' in its heterogeneity and non-stability.<sup>17</sup> This entails that the writ-

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13 Cf. Barthes 1984b.

14 Cf., e.g., Stingelin 2004: 13; Campe 1991: 759; also Brink/Sollte-Gresser 2004: 18-

19. Campe recognizes the following aspects of modernism in Barthes's notion of *écriture*: that the boundaries of literary genres have been dissolved in that writing as a process and a practice has also penetrated into non-artistic areas; as a trace of a practice, and thus as a renegotiation of the author; as a differentiated game of the text itself. Barthes uses the term again and again, e.g. in Barthes 1984a, 1984b.

15 Cf. Barthes 1984b: 344-345.

16 Cf. Campe 1991: 759.

17 Cf. Stingelin 2004: 15.

ing process is explicitly staged within itself. As constitutive elements of a text, which can be examined (in terms of distribution of roles, institutions involved, media, traces of the body or of media etc.), ‘Schreib-Szenen’ can be historized, analyzed and typologized. Thus, the relationship between an unconditionally necessary ‘Schreibszene’ and the respectively possible ‘Schreib-Szenen’ in their particular constellations becomes apparent. As per Stingelin, the ensemble of the ‘Schreib-Szene’ consists of: language (semantics of writing), instrumentality (technology of writing), gesture (physical dimension), the frame, the distribution of roles and directing. Gesture/physical dimension, the distribution of roles, and directing can be linked to emotion paradigms, i.e. those discursive and psycho-physical traces left at the very moment of productive and receptive activity.

From this perspective of the inevitable coupling of writing and emotion, the following questions and areas for potential analysis are of interest for further methodological considerations: To what extent can both ‘Schreibszenen’ and ‘Schreib-Szenen’ be provocative? How do they relate to one another? How does a ‘Schreibszene’/‘Schreib-Szene’ trigger emotional patterns? What are the reactive consequences? When do certain ‘Schreibszenen’/‘Schreib-Szenen’ invalidate emotional paradigm scenarios (and thus the traditional relationship between concrete and formal object) and vice versa? Where and due to which procedures do ‘Schreibszenen’ and scenarios of emotion form an interface of epistemological and discursive observations? What are the contexts to which the individual scenarios refer? What are the traces of writing in the text?

## 5.

In concluding, let us return to the concept of formal and concrete objects in the context of paradigms of emotion. Per the thesis pursued here, literary texts can be understood as concrete objects which are preceded by actions and reactions of different natures and trigger active as well as reactive actions. All concrete objects can be traced back to formal objects, and both their production and reception are only possible within the framework of generalized paradigms of emotion. Literature is therefore based on general patterns of emotions and also acts as a singular trigger for those patterns. The specific trait of artistic texts is hence that they not only reproduce or repeat their underlying criteria or make them repeatable, but also shape, contradict and/or change them. In terms of aesthetic and lifeworld-related paradigms of emotion, artistic texts are thus both concrete and formal objects in an entangled process that cannot be disentangled. This is termed ‘writing as a process’, where writing scenarios and scenarios of emotion

intersect. Artistic texts are based on, and at the same time trigger, psychophysical as well as epistemologically and poetologically motivated reactions and practices. The texts do so via emotions and feelings, i.e. via assessments, judgments, recognitions, and the activation as well as interpretation of physical and cognitive states. They are thus situated in a varyingly intense field of tension between the norm and its disruption, between breaking from and staying in character.

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# The Affective Value of Fiction

## Presenting and Evoking Emotions

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VERA NÜNNING

The study of emotions<sup>1</sup> is a fascinating topic not just for literary scholars<sup>2</sup> but also for philosophers, biologists, psychologists, and neuroscientists, who approach emotions from different angles.<sup>3</sup> This diversity testifies to the interest in and the importance of emotions in various fields; however, the plethora of modes defining and analysing emotions renders the choice of an approach which fits the requirements for exploring the connection between emotion and literature anything but straightforward. In the following, I will employ many insights from a cognitive approach to emotions – which is spelt out in more detail in the essay by Gesine Schiewer – and combine these with categories and observations from narrative studies. Moreover, instead of focusing on the author, I start from a premise that was of crucial importance to Virginia Woolf, and posit that “writing

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- 1 This article draws on my book *Reading Fictions, Changing Minds* (2014), particularly chapter three. It is, however, adapted to the topic of the volume, revised, and supplemented by literary examples and insights from recent studies on emotions.
- 2 See, for instance, Knaller/Rieger 2016: 7-24; Anz 2006; Breger/Breithaupt 2010; Hillebrandt 2011. For cognitive narratological studies, cf., in particular, Keen 2006, 2007, 2011 and Schneider 2013.
- 3 For a good overview of different approaches to the emotions see, for instance, Hogan 2011: 42-54 (see also 30-41) and Palmier 2014, 49-66. Some well-known scientists distinguish emotions from feelings, with the former being characterised by physiological processes and their observable expressions, while the latter are characterised by the conscious awareness of feeling an emotion; cf., for instance, Damasio 1999: 42. In the following, I will use the terms interchangeably.

is a method of communication".<sup>4</sup> This process of communication is based on knowledge, conventions and experiences shared by writers and readers. In order to communicate emotion, authors have to inspire the imagination of readers, who have to become the author's "fellow-worker and accomplice"<sup>5</sup> and take an active part in the process of literary communication. According to Woolf, readers have to become co-creators, willing and able to apply their knowledge and their imagination in order to become immersed in the fictional world.<sup>6</sup> Woolf's notion of literature is thus based on an understanding of the reading process closely resembling the bi-active reading model, which presupposes an interplay between textual cues and the reader's attribution of meaning.<sup>7</sup>

According to this premise of the importance of readers, the study of 'writing emotions' should not be pursued in isolation and focus solely on the author and the act of writing, but also needs to take into account the nexus between the text and the reader, between the presenting, thematising or alluding to emotions in the text on the one hand, and the evoking of the reader's emotions on the other. To adopt such an approach to the topic has two advantages. First, it is possible to integrate the findings of emotion theorists, such as the psychologist Keith Oatley, who has focussed on the relation between the reading of literary texts and the evocation of emotions. In addition, it is possible to combine the results of empirical studies on the emotions raised by reading literary texts with narratological categories in order to gain a deeper insight into the nexus between emotions and literature.

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4 Woolf 1984: 262.

5 Ibid.: 259.

6 In recent studies on Woolf's essays, her notion of readers is explicated in terms of 'reader-response' criticism and with reference to Wolfgang Iser's concept of the 'implied reader' and the process of filling of gaps or blanks in the text. See, for instance, Koutsantoni 2009: 58-59, 64-65, 69 et passim.

7 Bottom-up processes are stimulated by textual characteristics, while top-down processes involve the application of cognitive and generic schemata as well as the readers' knowledge and earlier emotional experiences. For this model, see, for instance, Holland 2009: 173-177 and Schreier 2009: 317: "It is one of the most robust results in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology that the meaning that a reader assigns to a text is a function both of textual and of reader characteristics".

## 1. INTRODUCTION: INTERFACES BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND EMOTION

Since the term ‘emotion’ is understood in many different ways, it seems sensible to offer a working definition. The philosopher Jenefer Robinson provides a good starting point, since her definition is based on an analysis of common features of emotion definitions in biology and psychology. For Robinson, an

emotion is a process at the core of which is a set of bodily responses activated by an affective appraisal that is “instinctive” and automatic. This automatic appraisal gives way to cognitive monitoring of the situation, which reflects back on the instinctive appraisal and modifies expressive, motor, and autonomic activity accordingly, as well as actions and action tendencies.<sup>8</sup>

According to Robinson, the process of experiencing an emotion starts with an automatic appraisal of a stimulus that is held to be important, and which involves, for instance, sweating or an accelerated heartbeat. This automatic response can be followed and changed by a cognitive reflection on the stimulus and one’s own reaction, which can modify the automatic response and initiate verbal or non-verbal actions.

Even though the last stage of the process can involve verbal expressions, this definition is seemingly remote not only from works of literature but also from language or stories. However, both words and stories become important when one tries to understand what one feels. In order to identify an emotion, one cannot rely on the interpretation of physiological states of arousal alone: “No degree of bodily feeling can alone reveal to you what your emotion is about; [...] if you do not know what your thoughts and feelings are directed towards, you cannot find out merely through introspection of your bodily feelings.”<sup>9</sup> According to psychologists, this knowledge is important for making sense of one’s emotions and for expressing them.<sup>10</sup> We need words and narratives when we try to understand our emotions.

In order to comprehend the relation between narrative and emotions, it is important to remember that one’s emotions are shaped by the way the ‘eliciting situation’ is construed. What we feel depends not only on the stimulus but also on the situation in which we perceive this stimulus and on the causes which prompted the action or state evoking our emotions. As Patrick Hogan puts it,

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8 Robinson 2010: 73.

9 Goldie 2000: 58.

10 Cf. Greenberg 2004: 4, 7.

referring to research in psychology, linguistics, and the neurosciences, “our affective response to a situation, real or fictional, is not a response to an isolated moment, but to the entire sequence of events in which that moment is located, whether explicitly or implicitly”.<sup>11</sup> In an isolated moment, just seeing the expression of a sad face, one can automatically begin to share those feelings of sadness, but whether one continues to do so or not depends on the context and on the narrative of the preceding events. If the sadness and the tears of the other are caused by some anti-social impulse, such as a failed attempt to harm someone else, we might well react with anger rather than empathy. It is the construal and interpretation of the story preceding the situation that decides whether empathic feelings will be aroused and intensified or blocked and substituted by different responses.<sup>12</sup> Our emotions are regulated by the story we attach to the stimulus which provoked them. Research by Keith Oatley shows that a particularly arousing stimulus can involve extreme swings of emotions which may last for days and which depend on the retrospective interpretation of the stimulus.<sup>13</sup>

Since emotions are part of a sequence and dependent on interpretations, many thinkers share the view “that emotions are embedded in stories”.<sup>14</sup> Due to their narrative structure, emotions are often embedded in and remembered as ‘emotion scripts’.<sup>15</sup> Stimuli and emotions are not assessed and evaluated separately, but as part of narrative patterns, in which different slots can be filled by different types of agents and places. Such scripts resemble series of scenes following preordained plotlines. Anger, for instance, is closely related to specific kinds of narratives; what is interpreted as an insult or retribution depends on a particular constellation, in which the status of those who are involved in the action – including their knowledge about the possible offensiveness of their

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11 Hogan 2003: 5.

12 This link between empathy and narrative is at least implicitly confirmed by a number of studies analysing empathic reactions under laboratory conditions, which emphasise the importance of ‘contextual appraisal’ and the personality – or history – of the object of empathy. Cf. Singer/Seymour/O’Doherty et al. 2006: 467 and Decety 2011: 101. By now the importance of the particular situation for the emergence (or blocking) of empathic sharing is well established.

13 Cf. Oatley 2010: 29-35.

14 Cf. Hogan 2003: 83: “the view shared by Oatley, Johnson-Laird, and the Sanskritists that emotions are embedded in stories”.

15 Emotion scripts are defined as an “emotionally based sequence that guides actions” Angus/Greenberg 2011: 5; see also Greenberg 2006. For ‘emotion scripts’ see, for instance, Ekman 2003: 41.

behaviour – plays an important role.<sup>16</sup> Apparently, human beings need such narratives in order to make sense of their emotions and their lives.

This finding by Angus and Greenberg already suggests that literary narratives may help readers to become acquainted with unfamiliar and complex emotions (and ‘emotion scripts’) and to understand them. Before elaborating on the affective value of fiction, however, I would like to briefly sketch some major ways of presenting and evoking emotions in and by narrative texts. Though the terms may suggest that there is a clear dividing line between representation and evocation, I want to conceptualise these two as poles on a sliding scale, with some overlap in between, since emotions presented in texts may at the same time evoke readers’ emotions. In addition, we should be aware of the fact that readers’ inferences are necessary in order to imbue a given description with meaning.

## 2. PRESENTING EMOTIONS IN FICTION

The presentation of emotions in fictional texts seems to be a simple matter: an explicit description and/or thematisation of emotions should be easy enough to identify. However, if one acknowledges that biological processes and automatic responses are at the core of an emotion, then a description would, in a narrow sense, involve the description of these physiological processes – and this is probably not what most readers expect when they are reading an emotional narrative like a love story.

A straightforward representation of such physiological processes can be illustrated by a scene in Ian McEwan’s novel *Saturday* (2005). In this novel, the main focalizer, Henry Perowne, is a neuroscientist whose approach to the world is shaped by his scientific beliefs; he sees the world through the lens of the neurosciences. This perspective also guides his understanding of the emotions of other characters, which he sees in terms of physiological processes. The following quote shows how he perceives the aggression of a thug, Baxter, who is about to beat him. Perowne thinks that this man suffers from an incurable illness, Korea-Huntingdon-Syndrome, which is accompanied by extreme swings of emotions, and he hopes to escape a fight by offering medical help to the criminal. However, it turns out differently:

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16 Cf. Sarbin 1990: 49-65. Just as there are some narrative texts which have a higher degree of narrativity than others, some emotions are more intricately tied to narrative than others.

Even as he turns back towards Baxter in surprise, and even as he sees, or senses, what's coming towards him at such speed, there remains in a portion of his thoughts a droning, pedestrian diagnostician who notes poor self-control, emotional lability, explosive temper, suggestive of reduced levels of GABA among the appropriate binding sites on striatal neurons. This in turn is bound to imply the diminished presence of two enzymes in the striatum and lateral pallidum – glutamic acid decarboxylase and choline acetyl-transferase.<sup>17</sup>

On the one hand, this is a very adequate and precise description of an emotion. On the other hand, readers have to be very attentive or to have some background knowledge in order to make the correct inferences and recognise that this is the description of an emotion.

Interestingly, this focus on the physical symptoms at the core of an emotion was already present in eighteenth century novels. At the time, handbooks of medicine spread the beliefs that finer emotions were due to finer nerves, that a humane and tender personality was connected to a particular physical constitution.<sup>18</sup> It thus became fashionable to stress one's "nervous" disposition, which seemed to be a proof of one's finer feelings and virtue. In this vein, Yorick, the narrator of Laurence Sterne's novel *Sentimental Journey*, emphasises right at the beginning of the novel that he is disposed to give alms and expresses his tender disposition by remarking that he is in a state of mind in which a man "pulls out his purse, and holding it airily and uncompressed, looks round him, as if he sought for an object to share it with – In doing this, I felt every vessel in my frame dilate – the arteries beat all clearly together".<sup>19</sup> Rather than naming the emotion, Yorick describes his physiological symptoms.

Whereas McEwan and Sterne in these examples concentrate on the automatic physical response to a stimulus, other authors focus on the expression of emotions by means of behaviour or action. My next example is informed by a scientific understanding of emotion, but it also nods towards the importance of an awareness of and cognitive reflection on an emotion. In a dystopia by the renowned neuroscientist Susan Greenfield, one of the characters, who belongs to a class of people who act purely on account of conscious deliberations and logic, at one point finds himself in a situation where he experiences something unusual:

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17 McEwan 2005: 91.

18 Cf. Mullan 1988; Rousseau 1976.

19 Sterne 1967: 28. This is the second page of the text.

[T]here was usually never anything to trouble my thought processes. But today was different. Today my palms were wet, my breathing difficult and shallow, my heartbeat banging through my ribcage. I had to admit that this unpleasant though obvious sensation could only be called anxiety.<sup>20</sup>

In the first part of this quote we find a common-sense description of some physiological symptoms of the emotion; instead of a precise representation in terms of scientific vocabulary there is a depiction of symptoms that are within the reach of human awareness, such as wet palms or a shallow respiration. In addition, there is a precise naming (a description)<sup>21</sup> of that “unpleasant” “sensation”, which is called “anxiety”.

Providing a name for an emotion is the most obvious and more usual way of presenting feelings in fiction. I do not think, however, that this is the most common or interesting mode of presenting emotions. Even if one looks at British eighteenth century sentimental novels, which focus on feelings and which are meant to evoke the feelings of readers, it seems that such explicit naming of emotions is less frequent than one might assume, and soon gives way to a description of the physical expressions of emotions, particularly with regard to body language.

The description of seemingly involuntary facial expressions and body language is a mode of representation that became very popular in the second half of the eighteenth century, in the British novel of sensibility. Such novels often refer to emotions by presenting the expression of these emotions, particularly in two modes: They describe the body language of the characters, their blushes, their tears, and their falling down on their knees on the one hand, and their verbal exclamations of surprise or joy on the other. The following examples, excerpts from one of the letters of the young servant girl Pamela to her parents, serve to illustrate the focus on the (allegedly) involuntary expression of emotions:

I screamed, ran to the bed, and Mrs. Jervis screamed too [...].

I found his hand in my bosom, and when my fright let me know it, I was ready to die; I sighed, screamed and fainted away. And still he had his arms about my neck; [...] I knew nothing more of the matter, one fit followed another, till about three hours after, I found myself in bed, and Mrs. Jervis sitting up on one side [...].<sup>22</sup>

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20 Greenfield 2013: 68-69.

21 For the difference between words describing emotions and words expressing them (i.e. words denoting the expressions of emotions such as body language or exclamations), see Schwarz-Friesel 2007, chapter five.

22 Richardson 1980: 49-50.

There is a mention of her “fright”, but the expressions of her physical expressions of emotions (screamed, sighed, fainted, fit) are more predominant. Such implicit descriptions of emotions become more intricate in later novels.

In Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771), or in Sterne’s novels, the focus is often on the description of the stimulus, such as a beautiful woman or a strange face, and on the effects this stimulus has on the character in question. This can be exemplified by the way Yorick, the narrator of Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey* (1768) and a typical and capricious man of feeling, reacts to an imagined blush of a woman:

I thought she blushed – the idea of it made me blush myself – we were quite alone; and that super-induced a second blush, before the first could get off. [...] There is a sort of a pleasing half-guilty blush, where the blood is more in fault than the man – ‘tis sent impetuous from the heart, and virtue flies after it – not to call it back, but to make the sensation of it more delicious to the nerves – ‘tis associated. –<sup>23</sup>

The body language and the physical processes are in the foreground of this quote, while there is no cognitive evaluation or interpretation of these processes. The sensitive “nerves”, which were held to be the precondition of refined and tender feelings, and the blood that causes the blush seem to be more interesting to the narrator than any description or analysis of his emotions. This shying away from analysis is more pronounced in a second quote from this novel: “The poor monk blushed as red as scarlet [...]. I blushed in my turn; but from what movements, I leave to the few who feel to analyse”.<sup>24</sup> Which emotion gives rise to the blushes is deliberately left open; identifying and analysing the emotions is left to the reader.

A preliminary word count of the three exemplary novels mentioned above seems to indicate that in later novels, such as *The Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling*, there is a surprising rise in the use of the word “emotion” or “feeling”, the exact meaning of which has to be gauged by the reader:<sup>25</sup>

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23 Sterne 1967: 116.

24 Ibid.: 43.

25 The word count was conducted by Bernard Woodley and Marlene Günther: I want to thank both of them for this invaluable help. The numbers for the key words include all derivations (such as sad, sadly, sadness).

Key Word	<i>Pamela</i> (vol. I) (1740) occurrence per 10.000 words	<i>Sentimental Journey</i> (1768) occurrence per 10.000 words	<i>Man of Feeling</i> (1771) occurrence per 10.000 words
Emotion	0,11	0,73	1,91
Feeling	0,32	10,73	9,81
Tear	4,84	0,49	3,82
Blush	0,63	3,17	1,64
Tremble	2,63	0,98	0,55
Anger	5,16	0,24	0,55
Sadness	8,32	1,22	1,91
Joy	2,42	2,2	2,18

There is no overall tendency with regard to the number of occurrences describing bodily expressions of emotions – that there are more blushes than tears in *The Sentimental Journey*, in contrast to the situation in *Pamela*, might well be due to the particularities of the story in the latter: the incarcerated Pamela, who is in danger of being raped by Mr. B., has more reason to tremble and weep than the characters of *The Sentimental Journey* and *The Man of Feeling*.<sup>26</sup> In spite of this, the word count seems to indicate two tendencies: comparing the earlier with the latter novels, there is a decline in the number of times emotions are explicitly named (as the numbers concerning the derivations of the terms ‘Anger’ and ‘Sadness’ indicate). In contrast, there is a significant rise in frequency of the terms ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’, which do not refer to a particular state; instead, they are open to readers’ inferences. A rather typical example of such a use of the term ‘emotion’ can be found when Yorick commiserates with the weeping Maria:

I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe [her tears] away as they fell, with my handkerchief. – I then steep’d it in my own, – and then in hers, – and then in mine, – and

26 These are, however, just preliminary observations, which would have to be checked and analysed more thoroughly.

then I wip'd hers again; – and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion.<sup>27</sup>

Arguably, the description of body language and gestures or the use of words like feeling or emotion allude to rather than describe particular emotions. The novels of sensibility also employ many other indirect modes of presenting emotions in fiction, such as interjections, exclamations, or the use of emotively valent words, images or symbols. There are, moreover, intertextual references to emotions of fictional characters or narrators; indeed, the name ‘Yorick’ is, as the narrator stresses, taken from *Hamlet* and the “grave-diggers scene”.<sup>28</sup> Such indirect presentations of emotions leave a lot to the readers, who have to infer which feeling or emotion is alluded to. Even tears can, after all, be tears of joy as well as of misery.

### 3. EVOKING EMOTIONS

The importance of readers’ emotions in the reading process has by now been amply recognised. Even before psychological empirical studies were conducted, authors such as Virginia Woolf asserted that, when dealing with novels, “‘the book itself’ is not form which you see, but emotion which you feel”.<sup>29</sup> This importance of the emotions in the reading process can be understood quite literally: When readers engage with stories, be they factual or fictional, the body reacts.<sup>30</sup> Keith Oatley stresses, for instance, that “when people read words that indicate emotional expressions such as ‘smile,’ ‘cry,’ and ‘frown,’ they activate in themselves the facial muscles for making the corresponding expressions”.<sup>31</sup> The same

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27 Ibid.: 138. This example also shows that a mere word count can only provide a very tentative impression of the expression of emotions. The “tears” are referred to six times, but the word ‘tears’ is not explicitly mentioned in this quote. Since the novel encompasses roughly 40.000 words, the counting of these six times would raise the word count from 2,2 to 3,7. A similar use of emotion can be found in Sterne 1967: 83.

28 Sterne 1967: 109. For possible ways of implicitly referring to emotions see Winko 2003 and the overview of several typologies (including that of Winko) in Hillebrand 2011: 36-81.

29 Woolf 1947: 130.

30 Cf. Mar 2011.

31 Oatley 2011: 113; cf. also ibid.: 20 and Altmann et al. 2012.

results have been established with regard to sentences and even stories.<sup>32</sup> Readers' responses are often emotional and physiological, and the more emotional stories are, the more they are read in a state of immersion.<sup>33</sup>

Readers' emotions and feelings of empathy with the characters are closely connected to the degree of immersion. The degree of empathy is also a salient feature of perspective taking, which is crucial for fostering affective abilities, since it enables readers not only to learn about the emotions of others but also to share them, too. In the following I will try to point out a few aspects on the affective potential of literature, the functions of perceived realism, and its relation to empathy, perspective taking and persuasion.<sup>34</sup>

Gauging and responding to the characters' emotions is important for understanding the plots of novels, which are often driven by the conflicting desires of the characters. Readers' emotions are also evoked by reading works in which there is no explicit depiction of the characters' emotions. Empirical studies have demonstrated that readers supply the emotions implied in a story, irrespective of whether these are thematised or not.<sup>35</sup> This has, again, been recognised by authors and critics before it was empirically tested. Some of the short stories of Ernest Hemingway famously do not make any reference to the characters' emotions, but nonetheless succeed in evoking an atmosphere of danger and threat by focussing on the setting and the action. Hemingway himself apparently was aware of this: "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them."<sup>36</sup>

There are a number of different typologies of the emotions involved in the reading process.<sup>37</sup> One group is closely related to readers' responses to the char-

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32 See also Jacobs 2013: 146 who stresses that the emotions raised by reading are based on the same neurological mechanisms as those activated in real life; those raised by reading may even be stronger.

33 Cf. Altmann et al. 2012: 2, 8. That emotional stories lead to "increased processing activity in emotion related structures" has already been shown by Gallagher/Hutto 2008: 32 and by other researchers.

34 Cf. Nünning 2014. In the following, I will draw closely on several passages of this book, particularly chapters 5 and 3.

35 Cf. Habermas/Diehl 2010.

36 Hemingway 1954: 183.

37 This rough typology draws on Keith Oatley and Raymond Mar, who created a typology of five different kinds of emotions activated when reading fiction (cf. Mar et al. 2011) and on Miall/Kuiken 2002. For a different classification, stressing 'sympathy'

acters and the story, such as empathy, sympathy and pity. These emotions can be regarded as narrative since they are intimately connected to the features of narrative, such as plot, conflict, the characters' attitudes and their experiences. Narrative emotions can also be new emotions which readers did not feel in that way before. Another group of emotions which can be evoked by fiction is characterised by readers' reliving of former (biographical) emotions, a process which can be therapeutically important and improve subsequent coping with these emotions. A third group consists of aesthetic emotions, i.e. affective responses to aesthetic features such as the style or rhythm of the language.

These aesthetic feelings are unique to the reading of literature and include "fascination, interest, or intrigue [as a response] to the formal components of literary texts (narrative, stylistic, or generic)".<sup>38</sup> Readers' emotions are not stimulated merely by the thoughts, emotions and actions of characters or narrators on the levels of plot and discourse, but also by the relationships of contrast and correspondence between different characters. In addition, readers' emotions can be stimulated by linguistic and narrative devices on the surface structure of literary texts, by formal features and the choice of words. Moreover, nonconventional metaphors and innovations of generic conventions can evoke aesthetic feelings. Such metaphors require an increased cognitive effort from readers, which is evaluated positively by readers, who feel "emotional-aesthetic pleasure" which is "the intended satisfactory result of the interpretation process".<sup>39</sup> Such aesthetic emotions often imply a loss of the sense of immediacy and immersion in the story and a higher degree of defamiliarisation or surprise.

The study of empathy and the means of inducing readers to feel empathy for – or even identify with – a protagonist is at the foreground of many literary studies.

Narratological studies focussing on techniques likely to evoke empathy usually concentrate on two aspects: The first mode of inducing readers to feel empathy includes narrative strategies which prompt readers to take the characters' perspective, for instance by presenting their thoughts, impressions, beliefs, feelings and opinions by means of techniques like free indirect discourse, interior monologue or psycho-narration, or the use of homodiegetic narrators.<sup>40</sup> The

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in two groups, see Habermas/Diehl 2010, 313. For Ekman's initial conceptualisation of six 'universal' emotions, cf. Ekman/Friesen 1971, 124-129.

38 Miall/Kuiken 2002: 221.

39 Christmann/Wimmer/Groeben 2011: 206 (both quotes).

40 In earlier works, the empathic engagement of readers was often called 'identification', which is now recognised to be a particular feeling; for definitions of identification cf. Cohen 2001. For narrative empathy see, for instance, Keen 2006 and 2007. However,

second main mode of encouraging readers to see the events from the point of view of characters consists in various kinds of explicit comments by the (often ‘omniscient’) narrator, who addresses the reader, comments on and evaluates the events, and appeals to the sympathy and pity of readers. Cognitive literary studies also stress the importance of “situational empathy”, which “involves an openness to putting oneself in the place of the other person”.<sup>41</sup> This mode of writing reinforces the interest of readers in the fate of the characters by creating a situation of potential harm. Characters have to be in situations which allow for multiple endings, since the resulting uncertainty is believed to engage not only the cognitive, but also the affective responses of readers. As Richard Gerrig concludes: “To a large extent, a theory of suspense must include within it a theory of empathy: Under what circumstances do we care sufficiently about other people to engage in active thought about their fates?”<sup>42</sup>

In the following, I want to suggest some additional aspects which may serve to encourage readers’ feelings of empathy, beginning with two examples taken from eighteenth century novels. One means of evoking readers’ empathy and pity involves the presentation of stimuli that are believed to raise these emotions. Some of these responses to particular images and narratives may be universal, such as automatic reactions to seeing sad or happy faces. In the eighteenth century, tender feelings and pity – and their results, virtuous actions such as giving alms – were held to be very important, and sentimental novels not only present (the physiological expressions of) such emotions, they also show a host of stimuli for the feeling of those highly appreciated emotions. Both in *Sentimental Journey* and in Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling*, there are long descriptions of, for instance, the outward appearance of people who are to be pitied and who deserve charity and help, such as beggars or virtuous persons asking for contributions to worthy causes. On the third page of the *Sentimental Journey*, a poor monk enters the scene, only a few sentences after Yorick has claimed that his “arteries” and “frame” are disposed to give alms:

The monk [had a] break in his tonsure, a few scattered white hairs upon his temples [...]. It was one of those heads, which Guido has often painted – mild, pale – penetrating, free

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one should not forget other narrative emotions, such as suspense or surprise, anger at the behaviour of villains or dumbness of the protagonists, and satisfaction if desired results seem within reach or villains are punished.

41 Hogan 2003: 140 (first quote), 81 (second quote).

42 Gerrig 1993: 80. The phrase “engage in active thought about their fates” indicates that Gerrig works with a broad definition of empathy, which encompasses analytical cognitive processes.

from all commonplace ideas of fat contented ignorance looking downwards upon the earth – it looked forwards; but looked as if it looked at something beyond this world [...]. The rest of his outline may be given in a few strokes [...]: it was a thin, spare form, [...] it was the attitude of Entreaty; and as it now stands presented to my imagination, it gained more than it lost by it [...].<sup>43</sup>

Such a dignified and at the same time thin and pitiful being should evoke feelings of benevolence, of respect and pity, not only in Yorick but also in eighteenth century readers; especially when the monk then talks of the poverty of his order and, at least implicitly, asks for support. Passages such as these can encourage readers to feel the tender and refined emotions that were held in high esteem at the time.

A similar, but more moving description of a stimulus for encouraging readers' emotions can be found in *The Man of Feeling*, in which Harley incidentally meets an

old man, who from his dress seemed to have been a soldier [...]. He was one of those figures which Salvator would have drawn [...]. His face had the marks of manly comeliness impaired by time; his forehead was not altogether bald, but its hairs might have been numbered; while a few white locks behind crossed the brown of his neck [...].<sup>44</sup>

Again, there is an appeal to the reader to visually imagine the scene, by likening the face to the portraits of famous painters. Signs of age and poverty, attributed to respectable, dignified people, are present in both quotes and should, according to feeling rules of the late eighteenth century, evoke empathy and pity. In the latter quote, as in many others, readers are even shown how they should react to the description of such a figure. Harley, the protagonist, serves as a model recipient of the stimulus; he appraises the situation of the man correctly and in an exemplary way: “‘Thou art old’, said [Harley] to himself, ‘but age has not brought thee rest for its infirmities; I fear those silver hairs have not found shelter from thy country, though that neck has been bronzed in its service’”.<sup>45</sup>

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43 Sterne 1967: 29-30.

44 Mackenzie 1970: 85.

45 Ibid. Later on the old man turns out to be an honest and upright victim of many villainous machinations and an object worthy of pity. Although Yorick himself does not always react in a model fashion, *The Sentimental Journey* contains many examples of such reactions, for instance with regard to “Santo’s lamentation” for the death of his ass (cf. Sterne: 1967: 62-64).

Since cognitive narratological studies have demonstrated the importance of a mode of representation that relies on implicitness and suggestiveness, such descriptions of stimuli for or reactions to emotions may be more effective for raising readers' empathy than straightforward presentations or thematisations. Moreover, modes of evoking emotions can strengthen readers' feelings that the story corresponds to their own experiences and rings true. If a reader is invited to make his or her own inferences and to supply his or her own emotions and experiences, he or she gets the feeling that the story is convincing and lifelike. Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon have shown that readers identify with a character when they are able to make their own inferences about him or her. Bortolussi and Dixon stress that readers tend to relate to characters which leave enough room for readers to "use their own knowledge and experience".<sup>46</sup> This process depends on some blank spaces and ambivalence, which allow readers to project some of their own attitudes and behaviours onto the characters. This in turn makes them feel that they comprehend the characters on a more than just superficial basis.

Such a feeling of really understanding the characters, which can heighten empathic sharing of their emotions, is accompanied by a reduction of distance between reader and characters. It can also include feelings of what has been called 'sympathonia', which is an equivalent of the Spanish, Italian or German 'simpatía' or 'Sympathie', denoting a positive feeling for others, which leads to rejoicing in their good luck. This feeling is rather rare in real life; it is "more partial, selective, and, consequently, less wide ranging than sympathy proper [i.e. pity]" and "inherently biased toward those whom people especially care about".<sup>47</sup> In everyday situations, it is restricted to an interest in the good fortune of a few people who are close to us. By presenting likeable and attractive characters, fiction often provides stimuli for feeling this positive counterpart to pity. Fictional works thus serve to generate a feeling which is arguably ethically valuable and may make it easier for readers to generate it in everyday situations.

Although recent studies often highlight situations or narrative conventions which can initiate the reader's empathic feeling with the characters<sup>48</sup> and stress the positive aspects of empathy, the sharing of characters' thoughts and feelings involves rather complex and ambivalent processes. In contrast to scholars like Keith Oatley, I think that there is a dual process involved in the sharing of char-

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46 Bortolussi/Dixon 2003: 94; for the relation to identification see *ibid.*: 91-94.

47 Rozman/Rozin 2006: 83 (first quote), 91 (second quote).

48 See Breithaupt 2009 and Keen 2007, 2011. However, Keen as well as Hale 2007 and Nussbaum 1998 are wary of a kind of empathy that involves projections of one's own attitudes and does not appreciate the alterity of others.

acters' thoughts and feelings, which consists in an oscillation between two quite different cognitive activities on the part of readers: first, there is the process of "feeling like" the character in question.<sup>49</sup> Depending on the particular context, this process shifts between a more emotional and a more cognitive simulation of the character's thoughts and feelings; the latter would prevail, for instance, while following the thoughts of anti-heroes or villains. Second, empathic sharing is linked to the readers' own appraisal of the situation in question. This is influenced by their knowledge about the whole of the text they have read so far and can include information about events that is not available to the focalizer. It is also based on readers' general knowledge and their wishes for the further development of the story. This discrepant awareness can lead to a heightening of suspense, if readers see the hero unwittingly running into danger. The second process is intricately connected with an overall assessment of the situation, which involves questions of ethics. As James Phelan has pointed out with regard to the ethical positioning of readers, "[o]ur emotions and desires about both fictional and nonfictional characters are intimately tied to our judgments of them",<sup>50</sup> and according to recent psychological studies, inducing readers' moral reasoning is one of the aspects that heighten their fascination with a given text.<sup>51</sup>

Over and above this difference between an engaging and a detached mode of following the thoughts and feelings of characters, readers' empathy is linked to their own appraisal of the situation in question. This evaluation of lifelike characters is influenced by readers' attitudes, values and wishes for preferred outcomes. It is also informed by readers' superior knowledge or their own interpretations of the event, which can differ widely from that of the character whose perceptions and thoughts they follow. The affective value of fiction thus goes beyond the empathic sharing of characters' feelings.

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49 For the raising of emotions of empathy and identification cf. Mar et al. 2011: 823-824.

According to most theories (for an overview see Cohen 2001), identification "requires that we forget ourselves and become the other – that we assume for ourselves the identity of the target of our identification" (*Ibid.*: 247).

50 Phelan 2005: 160.

51 Cf. Raney 2002.

## 4. FICTION AS A TOOL FOR FEELING

The affective value of fiction is based on the assumption that what we do, think and feel has repercussions on our minds and our brains. The plasticity of the human brain makes it possible for the emotions evoked by reading to leave their trace and modify and refine emotional skills:

The emotions evoked by literary fiction also have an influence on our cognitive processing after the reading experience has ended. Novels can act as a powerful emotional prime, and once an emotional state has been induced we would expect to see differences in cognitive processing associated with this new emotional state. Effects on cognition, perception, and action would be expected [...].<sup>52</sup>

If the brain is a cultural, embedded organ shaped by the cognitive processes activated in the niches in which a human being lives, then the emotions raised by reading fiction can leave traces and shape readers' affective responses in their daily life.

There are several reasons for the potential of fictional stories to shed light on emotions and to serve as a privileged tool for feeling. The first is based on the specificity of the reading process. In a state of immersion and transportation, readers tend to temporarily forget their immediate surroundings and their own real-life concerns, goals and aims. Since the vicarious experiences offered by fiction do not pose any immediate threat to their goals or self-images, readers can come to know feelings, thoughts and experiences that they would be inclined to block off in real-life encounters.<sup>53</sup> They are more open to new experiences while reading fiction, which cannot pose any threat or entail possible negative consequences.

Secondly, reading a novel in a state of immersion fulfils conditions which, according to neurophysiologist Gerald Hüther, are ideal for establishing new synapses and for learning. Readers feel safe, they pay attention, spend time and cognitive effort, feel interest and even enthusiasm for what they encounter and discover in a work of fiction.<sup>54</sup> The willing, affective engagement with the expe-

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52 Mar et al. 2011: 829. See also Robinson 2010: 74. As Tooby/Cosmides 2000: 24 claim, fictionally triggered emotion can induce us to "reweight" our "motivational system".

53 This 'safety argument' is recognised by many scholars. The first to use it were, to my knowledge, Batson et al. 1997.

54 Cf. Hüther 2006: 71, 80.

riences of characters offers the chance to learn and to change one's attitudes and dispositions. As Thomas Fuchs stresses, dispositions "are only accessible to change by new and repeated subjective experiences, i.e. emotional, verbal and interpersonal processes of learning that stabilize new attractors of perception and behaviour in the brain".<sup>55</sup> A great part of the affective value of fiction resides in the fact that it opens up such new and repeated subjective experiences in a de-contextualised space.

Thirdly, the affective value of fiction is enhanced by the fact that the feelings evoked by fictional narratives are relatively intense and pure. Several scholars have hypothesised that fiction can evoke a higher intensity of emotions than real-life situations, because the emotional experiences generated by reading fiction take place in safety. Readers do not have to worry about the potential impact of their emotions either with regard to themselves – for instance by feeling obliged to help victims in distress – or with regard to potentially negative consequences for others. While there seems to be no final answer concerning the differences in intensity between emotions evoked by fiction or by facts, Thalia Goldstein demonstrated that personal memories recalling very sad, or even traumatic events "were no greater than the levels felt when watching [fictional film] clips" depicting sad events.<sup>56</sup> Her findings suggest that the emotions raised by fiction are "unadulterated" by anxiety, or, indeed, any other emotions which do not pertain to the feelings experienced during the immersion in the story, and that they may therefore be cathartic.

Fourth, fiction can enable readers to make experiences which are beyond their reach in ordinary life. A life span is too short to make all the experiences that can broaden the mental horizon of readers – even disregarding the fact that many readers might not survive some of the more dangerous situations.<sup>57</sup> Especially for adults who are caught in their daily routines and have little incentive to spend the cognitive effort and time to engage with unfamiliar people in strange situations, fiction can extend the scope of available experiences and enrich their knowledge about the way (unfamiliar) human minds work. In addition, fictional stories can allow readers to become aware of, observe, and share nuances of the feelings of narrators and characters. This exceeds the observation of body lan-

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55 Fuchs 2009: 231.

56 Goldstein 2009: 237. See also *ibid.*: 233: "we are more likely to allow ourselves to feel powerfully in response to fiction than in everyday life", where Goldstein refers to other studies supporting this hypothesis. For the phrase "unadulterated by anxiety", see *ibid.*: 237.

57 Tooby/Cosmides 2000: 21-22, 24 claim that art calibrates and improves individual mental organisation.

guage or exclamations, which can be observed in daily encounters. As the novelist Ian McEwan stressed in an interview, the “resilience [of the novel] has precisely to do with the fact that we have not yet invented another art form that allows us such access to the minds of others and to the nature of consciousness”.<sup>58</sup> With access to the consciousness of characters, readers can also become aware of the simultaneity of different feelings within the same characters that are frequently torn between discrepant and even contradictory feelings. More often than not, readers get the chance to recognise feelings the respective characters are not even aware of. Fictional stories can shed light on feelings which, in daily life, remain obscure.

Fifth, reading fiction encourages perspective taking, which is similar to what the psychologist Daniel Batson calls “‘sensitive’ understanding”,<sup>59</sup> i.e. an understanding that involves not only knowledge about the thoughts and feelings of others, but also an affective sharing of their emotions. Particularly valuable is the ‘imagine-other’ perspective, i.e. imagining how someone else thinks and feels at the moment. This kind of perspective taking has been linked to pro-social action. The imagine-other perspective has been shown to “reduce stereotyping and prejudice” and to enable readers “to know the other’s thoughts, desires, and intentions” and “even to understand and evaluate – even to create – the self”.<sup>60</sup> Arguably, this kind of perspective taking, i.e. imagining how the character or narrator feels at a given moment, is evoked by reading fictional stories. Reading fiction is valuable because it requires “spontaneous perspective taking”.<sup>61</sup>

To set this process in motion is especially desirable because it is, unfortunately, comparatively rare in real life. In daily situations, the necessity, the impetus or even the time for taking the perspectives of others is often conspicuous by its absence. In many cases, we do not need it in order to act. In other cases, we might need it, but we do not know enough about the other in order to be able to accomplish it. And even if we could accomplish it, if we did know just how bad or hopeless the other feels at the moment, it might put us in an uncomfortable position: we might think that we should try to do something about it – and that is difficult and often impossible. There are many reasons why it is often easier not to invest too much cognitive effort in taking the perspectives of others.

In fiction, the situation is different: The pleasure of reading, the interest in stories, and the necessity to take the perspectives of characters in order to understand their actions provide incentives for readers to make this cognitive effort.

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58 McEwan 2013: s.p.

59 Batson 2009: 267.

60 Ibid.: 267, 276-277.

61 Johnson et al. 2013: 593.

As a rule, some kind of suspense is raised, which keeps readers interested in engaging with the characters. This is important, since interest and attention are among the conditions which are of crucial importance for learning, for building new synapses and neural pathways. Moreover, there is no danger involved in immersing oneself in the minds and views of fictional characters; readers can try out new roles without having to fear negative consequences. In addition, fictional stories usually provide the knowledge that is needed to understand the major characters; even though the information may remain sketchy, salient facts are given – or at least expected to be given by readers. Possible barriers against perspective taking – particularly the lack of interest and the lack of knowledge – are therefore removed. Fictional stories which present unfamiliar, complex or extreme characters can thus serve to broaden readers' mental horizon, to refine their implicit knowledge about how the human mind works, and to practice perspective taking in a particular, safe situation.

Sixth, since fictional stories frequently stage the interconnections and conflicts between the respective emotions of several characters, they require a balanced and complex emotional response. In many novels, the 'stimulus' evoking emotions is not the state of mind of an isolated individual; rather, it consists of the personal interactions between several characters. The shift between focalizers often implies a shift between empathically following the characters' thoughts and actions on the one hand, and a critical distance to the character on the other. Especially in multiperspective novels which show the events from the point of view of several characters, readers are induced to alternately take several – often contradictory – perspectives on the same situation. Reading fiction practices the ability to recognise affiliations and contrasts between different perspectives and to relate them to each other. To make sense of mutually exclusive perspectives on the same situation often requires the modulation and modification of empathy. If a narrator compares and weighs the perspectives of others, ethically positions him- or herself towards others, and comes up with his or her own interpretation, readers can simulate these cognitive processes. If they do not get such guidance, they are encouraged to arrive at their own conclusions. Readers have to position themselves to the heterogeneous characters and to decide which traits, opinions, and attitudes they like best and which ones correspond to the requirements of the particular situation.

Seventh, complex fictional stories often highlight what Jerome Bruner calls breaches of the canonical expectations,<sup>62</sup> and such breaches with regard to culturally condoned ways of dealing with emotions may be helpful in a variety of ways. Since norms become more explicit when the consequences of their violations are

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62 Bruner 1991: 15.

shown, fictional stories can disseminate cultural norms concerning the emotions – for instance with regard to how much emotion a child, girl, boy, man, woman is allowed to display in private or in public. What may be even more important is that they can also highlight the characters' struggles during such breaches of the canonical, delineating the problems of individuals who find themselves unable to conform to the rules and have to face the gap between what they should feel and want to feel on the one hand, and those annoying or frightening feelings they actually experience on the other hand.

Eighth, in stories, readers are not given propositional knowledge which can be learned in an abstract way; instead, they experience the characters' emotions, their origins, and the way they are regulated. This kind of learning can be of crucial importance as far as the understanding of emotions is concerned. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, claims that “emotions, unlike many of our beliefs, are not taught to us directly through propositional claims about the world, either abstract or concrete. They are taught, above all, through stories”.<sup>63</sup> The same argument can be made with regard to ways of dealing with emotions, which readers are also taught through stories. By presenting a wide range of emotions and possible stories in which these can be embedded, fiction can enlarge readers' knowledge of ways of narrativising and coping with emotions. Fictional stories provide patterns of how to deal with ‘unstoried emotions’ and can then help readers to create stories that provide meaning to such feelings. They can enable readers to identify the emotion they feel and to integrate such feelings in a meaningful narrative.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Fictional stories can thus broaden our emotional horizon and expand the range of emotions which we can identify and understand. They can enable readers to empathically share feelings they have not experienced in their own lives and would not be able to identify in interactive encounters. By enlarging their feeling repertoire, fiction can also enhance readers' understanding of their own emotions and of possible means to regulate their emotions. As Marcel Proust explained, his readers would be “the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a

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63 Nussbaum 1998: 226. For the link between emotion and narrative see Goldie who stresses that, while trying to understand an emotion, “we seek to locate the person's episodes of thought and feeling, which go to form part of his emotional experience, in the overall narrative which makes best sense of this part of his life”; Goldie 2000: 69; see also *ibid.*: 13, 102.

sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician at Combray used to offer his customers – [...] I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves.”<sup>64</sup> Being confronted with intense scenes and with characters’ expressions of emotions that appear alien and strange at first can lead to moments of insight into one’s own feelings.

At the basis of these opportunities that reading fictions may offer is a process which one could call a ‘meta-affective’ value of fiction. If we need to have words which allow us to identify and narrativise an emotion in order to be able to deal with it, an important part of the value of fiction lies in providing a nuanced language for understanding emotions and the complex scenarios in which they are embedded. Though many questions concerning the relation between emotions and the reading of particular literary genres and texts still remain open, there is overwhelming evidence that reading fiction can be a tool for feeling and important to our lives.

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64 Proust 1996: 432. See also Felski 2008: 24, 30.

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# The Author – “Specialize[d] in Having Fun”?

Cognitive Theories of Emotion and Literary Studies  
in the Context of Two Interviews with Michael Stavarič

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Why is the classic song by The Doors quoted in a paper that deals with theories of emotion and literature? One short answer may be that, as the main focus of this volume lies on the relationship between human emotions and the writing process, the position of the author deserves our special attention. Whether the writing process is “fun”, and how deep this connection to having fun is, is not covered in this article.

What is, in sum, the objective of this paper? As the ten central questions raised as a basis for this volume are of great general interest and deserve to be studied intensively, and because a number of these questions closely touch on the process of literary writing, it seems reasonable to discuss them with an author.

Michael Stavarič is a Viennese writer who has authored numerous books, amongst which are *Brenntage* (2011) (“Burning Days”) and *Königreich der Schatten* (2013) (“The Kingdom of Shadows”), as well as several children’s books such as *Die kleine Sensenfrau* (2010) (“The Little Reaper”). The Chamisso award winner and lecturer on poetry at the International Research Center of Chamisso-Literature of the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich considers the role of emotions in his lectures and agreed to be interviewed on these questions. I have therefore conducted two detailed interviews with him on the subject of “writing emotions”. In the interviews, we managed to cover some selected aspects of the ten questions mentioned. In the second part of this paper, I shall provide an overview of some contemporary theories of emotion.

## 1. THE INTERVIEWS WITH MICHAEL STAVARIČ

In the following part, I [GLS] am going to summarize my interviews with Michael Stavarič [MS] step by step.

### **Which roles do emotions play within writing as an aesthetic process?**

MS: As an author one has an emotional connection to the work as something which has been created. An author has no emotional connection to a commissioned task (such as reviews etc.), which he or she would not do without the need to do it. The decisive aspect is how much of autobiography is involved. Autobiographical aspects are often linked to emotionality and this may be stronger than in the case of pure fiction, also within the writing process.

For example, personal childhood memories play an important role in the novel *Brenntage*. The reason is that personal autobiography is emotionally experienced. This is different from the situation when, for example, a poem has been successfully created. Therefore, it is necessary to look for the autobiographical connections within literary works.

GLS: An author's first work, especially, is often very autobiographical. Is there a decline of emotional involvement in later works?

MS: Yes, but renewed emotional involvement may occur through the catalyst of new formal possibilities which engender a kind of extended personal speech. Literary writing is often born when attempting to process emotions, and the first creative steps often take the form of therapeutic writing (as with a diary). Emotions which are processed in literature often cause the birth of literary writing. Later, this impact is reduced. Self-development takes place during the process of growing up and getting older, for example at the age of twenty years, forty years, and later. The degree of emotional involvement also differs when one is writing autobiographically. Emotion as an aesthetic process is important, especially when one is just becoming an author.

For example, Jaroslav Seifert becomes once again especially emotional in his later works (like a “life summary”). The question of which sort of language I can preserve becomes a highly emotional matter in old age.

GLS: Autobiography comprises various things, for example, What have I been through? What do I know? Which principles do I have? – Is there any

strong emotionality when important things like principles and attitudes are concerned?

MS: Yes, there is; for example, in the case of my new novel, which talks about faith. Where relevant social issues are concerned, one should take a clear position, show an attitude. Vital topics, which are important in the world, are also linked with emotional attitudes, although they must not necessarily have autobiographical involvement.

Also, literary composition is emotional (for example, how the dialogues of the characters are structurally integrated in the scene). As an author, I am not an indifferent observer who designs characters like puppets. Even when the characters are passive (as in Kafka), an author should not behave in an indifferent manner.

GLS: A poetic concept of withdrawal or restraint (incarnated, for example, in the early Döblin's so-called “*Steinerner Stil*”) can be further developed into a concept of involvement. I can imagine that you have various connections to your characters at various working stages?

MS: Yes, that is so. When an author has written several books, he or she has different attitudes to the characters. An emotional connection with the character depends on how successful the production of the whole text is.

GLS: Well, there are examples, such as Jean Paul or Uwe Johnson, who resort to their characters several times.

MS: Perhaps there are only few literary characters created by an author that appear again and again in different manners. Certainly, there is an emotional connection to such characters. In such cases, they could be part of an authorial identity.

GLS: Characters can then function as carriers of emotional connection through several texts, even though they bear different names, etc., right?

MS: That is right.

### **Where and how do a writer's emotional moments of writing leave their traces within the text?**

MS: When connected with real emotions, autobiographical features leave their traces. Successful text passages are one hint of such traces. Emotional components can also be recognized by the conceptualization of literary characters (for example, the choice of occupation). Formal language aspects should be studied as well.

GLS: What about the constellation of characters and the emotional potential of this (for example, in your novel *Böse Spiele*)?

MS: In *Böse Spiele*, where men and women have confrontations, the formal features of language are also relevant: how the dialogues are built, where the punctuation marks are placed etc. All of this reflects emotionality. Emotions in the writing process leave traces in this way.

A highly important element of involvement (for example, fear) and an interesting illustration of emotional reactions are observable in literary animal characters. They allow a more powerful depiction of emotions and can be found in all my books. An example is the stallion in *Stillborn*. At the same time, an emotional area of tension can be created that can serve as a steering mechanism for sympathy. An example of this could be a serial killer and an animal torturer. In this case the violation of norms becomes an important instrument.

### **How do authors play with the emotional impact?**

MS: People should be touched. Readers should develop an emotional connection to the book.

GLS: Let us take the example of authorial readings: reading aloud as part of a productive process by continually fabricating new realizations of the text.

MS: The spoken word, the voice, can play a role. The emotionality of the spoken language is like a magic spell, because the attraction of various senses strengthens emotional involvement. The personal presence of the author enhances the emotional components and the reader's relationship with the text.

### **What kind of role do intermedial strategies play?**

GLS: In books for both adults and children, pictures and illustrations play a vital role.

MS: Yes, because technical options (programs, apps, music etc., i.e. everything which can be applied in the context of a book) can enhance the emotional connection.

GLS: These are aspects of emotionalizing on the reader's part. Are cross-medial forms also connected with a writer's emotions?

MS: As an author, I partake in a visual depiction and, in this respect, I am emotionally involved, even though I do not create these depictions myself.

## Where does intertextuality come in?

MS: All authors have their own artistic context and pieces of art that they know. It is a part of their autobiography. There are topics, artistic topics and motives which are memorable for an author and which have become a part of his personal memories and identity.

GLS: Arno Schmidt must have been, for example, of interest to you, because you referred to Schmidt's *Seelandschaft mit Pocahontas* (1953) with your *Déjà-vu mit Pocahontas* (2010). Is intertextuality relevant for the emotional components of writing?

MS: Yes, Schmidt created rather rude or aggressive metaphors. I studied his manner of writing and integrated it into my own style in this text, so that the corresponding emotions are preserved and transmitted. All in all, it is my way of showing appreciation for his work.

## Which kinds and types of emotion and which forms of literary emotions can be found in the context of writing as agency?

GLS: Is it possible that an author has an influence on the emotionality of the readership?

MS: In terms of authors such as, for example, Umberto Eco, who see themselves as a moral institution? The author-as-authority? Yes, there is indeed a wish to have influence. For example, the hope is not unknown to me that the government will notice us literary authors and recognize us as authorities.

GLS: What do you think of the idea that, for example, Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* can be seen as a model for a new and different attitude towards marriage and the corresponding emotions? Can you imagine being able to transmit such emotional models by means of your texts?

MS: Very often the relationships between men and women as well as between individuals and society are important.

GLS: A moment ago, when we were talking about animals as literary “characters”, that the author is able to steer the reader's sympathies with animal characters, you also mentioned the violation of norms. I would like to discuss this issue in more detail. To which extent can the violation of norms influence the readers' emotionality?

MS: The cliché as a simple form of understanding norms serves here as a starting point. The cliché in literature or as a literary motive is useful because it serves as a trigger (man–woman, good–evil, hero–antihero

etc.). In a literary text, the dialectic of clichés is reduced to an absurdity. This is the main point and this creates precisely the situations in which the violation of norms is required. The *Persiflage* as a genre is an example.

GLS: Can this be specifically connected to playing with language?

MS: Take, for example, my children's book, *Die kleine Sensenfrau*. The transformation from the *Sensenmann* ("reaper man") to *Sensenfrau* ("reaper woman") is introduced by the grammatical gender of 'death' in the Czech language ('smrt'), which is feminine. Generally, an emotional individualization can be achieved through the violations of norms.

GLS: Nonetheless, in literature emotions are often perceived as private.

MS: This notwithstanding, an author has a sort of "moral leadership". For example, in totalitarian systems literature is perceived ideologically. It is especially in restrictive countries that literature often serves not only to tell a well-written story but also to negate ideology. Prohibitions on writing as well as on non-conforming texts can suddenly be regarded as a political statement, whether explicitly or implicitly. In this new context literature can become a sort of stage.

GLS: Usually, in totalitarian countries the subversive potential of literature is acutely perceived.

MS: Yes. For example, *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie is meaningful in this context. Emotionality can partly be transmitted to literary works from the outside.

GLS: Is this important for you? Could the reader find a statement concerning totalitarian countries in your novels, for example, which forms a part of your own biography?

MS: No, but of course I would like my works to be noticed. Sometimes such attention is easier to achieve in tense environments. Publishing houses also prefer books with strong emotional meanings (books about prisoners etc.).

## 2. THEORIES OF EMOTION AND LITERARY STUDIES

In the following part of my contribution, some theoretical principles of emotion are presented, which may be appropriate aides in our attempts to describe the phenomenona surrounding the subject of "Literary works and emotions". In this endeavour, I shall concentrate on the autobiographical aspect, which has been given special emphasis by Michael Stavarič. This aspect is linked to the emo-

tional ontogeny of individuals. That ontogeny in turn implies a person's emotion management as a lifelong development, a development which conditions personal preferences and subjective evaluations.

I would like to begin the discussion by referring to a theoretical concept, a concept which in my opinion is important for understanding the subject. This is the concept of the cognitive theories of emotion. Here it may be necessary to provide some explanations, since the development of these theories within the academic disciplines was caused mainly by the rise of information technology and artificial intelligence within the academic disciplines.<sup>1</sup>

Since Rosalind W. Picard published her studies on “Affective Computing” in 1997, theories of emotion have held great importance in the fields of artificial intelligence, information technology and robotics. Cognitive theories of emotion are not only useful in this context, but they were themselves created by these technical disciplines.

In my essay, the reasons for adopting cognitive theories of emotion in the context of literary analysis will be weighed. Furthermore, I shall make reference to the fact that only cognitively-based emotions result in *individual, variable* and *relative* emotionally-steered actions, whereas non-cognitive emotions result in inescapable consequences. This is because cognitive emotions can be defined as radically individual emotions, which permit deliberate choices. Therefore, the dimension of cognitive emotions is of special interest for the study of literature. After all, literary texts prefer to focus on the implications of actions which are deliberate, even though the ultimate consequences are often unforeseen.

## **2.1 Emotional Agents and Theories of Emotion**

In information technology and robotics, ‘agent’ is a general term applied to intelligent programs. Normally, these are programs which work with a certain autonomy in the accomplishment of their tasks, carrying out an order in a manner similar to a human agent. Hence artificial intelligence is concerned with ‘agents’.

Some agents feature a so-called BDI-architecture (belief, desire, intention). In this case, human actions, including decision-making processes, acquire special importance as they serve as a template for the artificial intelligence which seeks to emulate them. This means that decision-making is no longer a sequence of computations along fixed algorithms; rather, it introduces a program which perpetually adapts to changing circumstances. In short, whereas the agent is not

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1 Cf. Schiewer 2009; Schiewer 2014.

required to re-check its aims under static circumstances, it frequently does so under dynamic circumstances.

The importance of emotions in decision-making processes has been recognized increasingly in the humanities, in cognitive sciences and in artificial intelligence. “Emotional agents” produce emotional behaviour. This means that emotions are implemented in agent-architectures as a component of decision-making processes. The object of their inclusion is the improvement of man-machine interactions on the one hand, and the steering of behaviours on the other.

At present, important efforts are being made to develop “affective computing”, which was the subject of a fundamental study by Rosalind W. Picard in 1997. Affective computing means computers which “understand” emotions (analysis) as well as computers which “express” emotions (synthesis) and even “have” emotions, which means that they are steered by so-called artificial emotions. In this context, theories of emotion and computer emulations are closely intertwined.

First, emotions comprise many different aspects, including physiological emanations, individual and subjective feelings, cognitive processes, verbal and physical expressions, social and cultural aspects and so on. Dieter Ulich, the German psychologist specializing in the research of emotions, stressed as early as the eighties that the decision for or against a specific model of emotions depends on what we are aiming at. Ulich is convinced that nobody is able to study emotions generally and that the model we choose depends on the purposes for which the model is to be used.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, no authoritative definition and no exclusive notion of emotions exist, but a great number of models have been produced.

In the field of affective computing, the predominant theories of emotions under discussion are so-called cognitive and appraisal theories. The production of emotions is understood as a consequence of specific cognitions. In this framework, cognitive appraisal is considered to be central to emotions. Hence, the core components of research based on these theories are the analysis of cognitive triggers of emotions and their consequences in expression, planning and acting.

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2 Ulich 1989: 125. This is the corresponding passage in the German-language original: “Die Entscheidung für oder gegen ein bestimmtes Denkmodell hängt davon ab, was wir selbst wollen. Niemand kann Emotionen ‘überhaupt’ untersuchen; immer ist eine Präzisierung des Aspektes nötig, unter dem man sich für Emotionen interessiert. Um solche Entscheidungen treffen zu können, ist es darüber hinaus nötig, daß man sich begründet für ein bestimmtes Denkmodell entscheidet bzw. einen bestimmten Weg einschlägt”.

There are many different approaches of this kind; attention should be paid, for example, to those of Andrew Ortony, Gerald L. Clore and Allan Collins, Ira J. Roseman, Klaus R. Scherer, Nico H. Frijda, Keith Oatley and P.N. Johnson-Laird amongst others. Let us look at some of these approaches.

Cognitive theories of emotion began (according to contemporary interpretations) with Aristotle's remarks about emotions in his *Rhetoric*, accompanied by some remarks in his *De Anima* and *Nicomachean Ethics*. There is an array of other philosophical classics whose analytical treatments may serve as sources for modern cognitive theories of emotion.<sup>3</sup>

The cognitive turn in linguistics, anthropology and psychology, which dates back to the 1960s, was applied to the theory of emotions via an analysis of how appraisals of everyday situations conditioned emotional reactions.

According to the latest variants of appraisal theory, human beings use a fixed number of dimensions or criteria when evaluating situations:

1. *Intrinsic characteristics* of objects or events, such as novelty or agreeableness.
2. The significance of the event for *the individual's needs or goals*.
3. The individual's *ability to influence or cope with the consequences of the event*, including the evaluation of 'agency'.
4. The *compatibility of the event with social or personal standards, norms, or values*.

The concept 'appraisal' was first used in Magda Arnold's (1960) *Emotion and Personality*, and has been expanded on in more detail in the work of Richard Lazarus and his colleagues.<sup>4</sup> The latest in cognitive theories of emotion is reca-

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3 These are some of them: René Descartes' *Les passions de l'âme*, Baruch de Spinoza's *Die Ethik und Kurze Abhandlung von Gott, dem Menschen und seinem Glück*, David Hume's *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Immanuel Kant's *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Among early classics in psychology are Wilhelm Wundt's *Grundzüge der Physiologischen Psychologie* and *Völkerpsychologie*, William James's *The Emotions* and Carl Stumpf's *Gefühl und Gefühlempfindung*.

4 Cf. Lazarus, Averill and Opton (1970) *Toward a Cognitive Theory of Emotion*, Lazarus, Averill and Opton (1977) *Ansätze zu einer kognitiven Gefühlstheorie*, Lazarus (1984) *On the Primacy of Cognition*, Smith and Lazarus (1993) *Appraisal Components, Core Relation Themes, and the Emotions*, Lazarus and Lazarus (1994), *Passion and Reason. Making Sense of our Emotions in a Historical Perspective* and Lazarus (1999), *The Cognition-Emotion Debate. A Bit of History*.

pitulated in Reisenzein (2000), Reisenzein, Meyer and Schützwohl (2003), and in Scherer (1999) from a historical perspective. A state of development concerning all aspects and dimensions connected with cognitive theories of emotion, together with methodological questions and empirical research, is given in the volume edited by Scherer, Schorr and Johnstone (2001). Another proponent of the presently prominent theory of ‘structural’ access to emotions is Ortony, Clore and Collins (1988) “The Cognitive Structure of Emotions” (abbreviated: OCC-theory), with their ‘emotions-as-valenced-reactions’ claim, a claim based on the situational reactions of individuals, referring to how they process events, actors and objects.

The approach taken by Ortony, Clore and Collins is currently considered to be the most elaborate and systematic.<sup>5</sup> It is characterized by the general intention “to lay the foundation for a computationally tractable model of emotion. In other words, we would like an account of emotion that could in principle be used in an Artificial Intelligence (AI) system that would, for example, be able to reason about emotions.”<sup>6</sup> Here we see a process in which the authors attempt to give an account of how cognitive appraisals are made as antecedents of emotional reactions.

This working model views emotions as “valenced reactions to events, agents, or objects, with their particular nature being determined by the way in which the eliciting situation is construed”.<sup>7</sup> The most general issue concerns the question of emotional differentiation, that is, the question of what distinguishes one emotion from another. A basic distinction between reactions to events, agents and objects gives rise to three general classes of emotions:

- being pleased vs. displeased (reactions to events),
- approving vs. disapproving (reactions to agents), and
- liking vs. disliking (reactions to objects).

The authors make clear that these three basic classes of emotions can in turn be differentiated into a number of distinct typological groups.

Reactions to events can be divided into three groups: the first, the Fortunes-of-others group, focuses on how events affecting other people will have consequences for oneself, whereas the other two, the Prospect-based and Well-being groups, focus only on the consequences for oneself. Reactions to agents are differentiated into four groups of emotions, one of which is the Attribution

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5 Cf. Reisenzein/Meyer/Schützwohl 2003: 171.

6 Ortony/Clore/Collins 1988: 2.

7 Ibid.: 13.

group. Reactions to objects include the Attraction group of emotions. Beyond these, there is assumed to be a compounded group, the Well-being/Attribution compound, involving reactions to both events and agents simultaneously.<sup>8</sup>

Taking these concepts further requires accounting for the variations of emotional intensity both within and between people. To this end, Ortony, Clore and Collins attempt in their work to address the factors which determine intensity. Their general view is that the intensity of emotions is influenced by a number of variables, all of which are present in the construal of the situation which generated the emotions.

Thus, in order to address the question of intensity, they consider the mechanism whereby emotion-inducing stimuli are appraised. Ortony, Clore and Collins state that a person's appraisal of an emotion-inducing situation is based on three central variables:

- desirability,
- praiseworthiness,
- appeal.

These apply to, respectively,

- event-based emotions,
- agent-based emotions,
- object-based emotions.

Desirability is evaluated in terms of complex goal structures, wherein the focal goals govern the interpretation of any event. The desirability of the event is appraised in terms of how it facilitates or interferes with this focal goal and the sub-goals that support it.

Similarly, the praiseworthiness of an agent's actions is evaluated with respect to a hierarchy of standards, and the appeal of an Object is evaluated with respect to a person's attitudes.

Following this approach, goals are distinguished from standards in terms of what one wants vs. what one thinks the outcomes ought to be. Three kinds of goals are distinguished: 1) active-pursuit goals are goals that a person tries to obtain, such as becoming a concert pianist, 2) interest goals are goals that are usually not pursued, because one has little control over their realization, as with preserving one's health or seeing one's friends succeed, and 3) replenishment goals are goals that wax and wane over time, such as hunger and getting gas for

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8 Cf. ibid: 33.

one's car. Whether a goal is partially fulfillable, like making a million dollars, or fulfillable only in all-or-none terms, like winning a Nobel Prize, is a further consideration considered to be orthogonal to these goal types.

Ortony, Clore and Collins are convinced that all these distinctions play a role in determining the intensity with which people experience different emotions.<sup>9</sup> Amongst the factors that affect emotional intensity are global variables, which affect all emotions, and local variables, which affect particular groups of emotions.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond this rather static and structural explanation of emotions, the authors don't exclude the possibility of emotion sequences, which are important contributors to the dynamic flow of emotional processes.

Within such a framework, the ways in which one explains an action based on an actor's internal traits or dispositions may contribute to the mediation of other affective reactions. Because of a pervasive impetus to attach causal attributions to significant events, experiencing an "event-based" emotion will often be the occasion for experiencing one of the "attribution" emotions. From the fact that people tend to seek causes for the significant events and actions that they experience, it may be inferred that there is a tendency within the human emotional experience to move from "event-focused" to "agent-focused", and finally, to "object-focused" emotions.<sup>11</sup> In other words, "there may be a cycle in which emotion-inducing situations lead not only to the emotions themselves, but also to a need to cope with the emotions to which they give rise". The extent to which a person does cope, or thinks he can cope, sometimes forms the source of additional emotions, which in turn present new demands upon his coping mechanisms.<sup>12</sup>

This theoretical framework accentuates the hypothesis that in many cases, the function of emotion is that of a situational coping mechanism. Further attempts are made to explain why and under which conditions human beings are not able to cope with the emotion-inducing situation or the emotion itself. Here, the unexpectedness of an event is considered to be a factor of utmost relevance: "The result may be that there is a great deal of cognitive disorganization. This is true both for positive and negative emotions."<sup>13</sup>

This admittedly convincing explanation, however, does not cover any specific circumstances of the aforementioned disorganization. It was cognitive psy-

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9 Cf. *ibid.*: 58.

10 Cf. *ibid.*: 83.

11 Cf. *ibid.*: 169-170.

12 Cf. *ibid.*: 181.

13 *Ibid.*: 178-179.

chologist Jerome Bruner who raised this question in 1990 in his book *Acts of Meaning*:

This reciprocal relation between perceived states of the world and one's desires, each affecting the other, creates a subtle dramatism about human action which also informs the narrative structure of folk psychology.

When anybody is seen to believe or desire or act in a way that fails to take the state of the world into account, to commit a truly gratuitous act, he is judged to be folk-psychologically insane unless he as an agent can be narratively reconstrued as being in the grip of a mitigating quandary or of crushing circumstances.

It may take a searching judicial trial in real life or a whole novel in fiction (as with André Gide's “Lafcadio's Adventure”) to effect such a reconstrual.<sup>14</sup>

Bruner makes clear that folk psychology focuses upon what is expected and/or ordinary in the human condition. Naturally, this includes the expected and/or ordinary in the affective life. Although a culture must contain a set of norms, according to Bruner, it must also contain a set of interpretative procedures for rendering departures from those norms meaningful within established patterns of belief.

Bruner says that it is narrative and narrative interpretation which achieve this kind of meaning in folk psychology. “Stories achieve their meanings by explicating deviations from the ordinary in a comprehensible form – by providing the ‘impossible logic’ [...]”<sup>15</sup> In Bruner's view, the function of a story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Bruner encourages us to establish a connection between cognitive science, theories of emotion, and narratology. Following this rationale, it is henceforth essential for us to take a look at some current discussions about emotions in literary studies.

## **2.2 On the reception of current emotion theories in literary studies**

Literature based on rhetoric, as well as the art of rhetoric itself, has always been concerned with emotion. Surprisingly enough, modern studies of literature seem to eschew any systematic discussion of the whole complex of affective aspects in

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14 Bruner 1990: 40.

15 Ibid.: 46.

16 Cf. ibid.: 45-46.

literature and of literature. Meanwhile, however, an increasing interest in this topic is perceivable.<sup>17</sup> With respect to literature, Simone Winko points to an essential division within theories of emotion: on the one hand, they concern wider conceptions of cognition that integrate thinking and feeling, and on the other, a narrow conception of cognition exclusively comprising cognition, and therefore excluding emotion as an independent aspect of the human mind. Winko argues for adopting the narrow conception of cognition in literary studies; thus, according to Winko, a broad conception of emotion is not favourable, which regards emotion as a mental phenomenon as well as a physiological, psychological, social and cultural occurrence.

Within her work, she seems to advocate a so-called syndrome theory; however, upon closer inspection, she also raises several objections to such a focus. Winko believes that cognitive conceptions of emotions are not adaptable for literary studies because they do not allow for an account of emotions as they are subjectively perceived. In conclusion, she recommends a concept of emotions where they are regarded as emergent characteristics of the physical system of human beings.

Despite the authority of Winko's argument, a more thorough discussion of the topic is required. Therefore, I shall apply the cognitive model of emotions to the study of literature preferentially, albeit not exclusively, with the reservation that such models are part and parcel of a wider conception of cognition which integrates thinking and feeling. This is all the more necessary due to the fact that, in cognitive narratology, these aspects of emotions have not been touched upon for a long time.<sup>18</sup>

### **2.3 Perspectives of cognitive emotion theories for literary analysis**

As mentioned above, Ortony, Clore and Collins take into account the differentiation between positive and negative consequences of emotions, that is, the condition that emotions may result in a great deal of cognitive disorganization. Furthermore, writers of literature in which the imagined emotions of fictional characters play a central role recognize that emotions can cause dramatic disruptions in judgment and performance.

Ortony, Clore and Collins think that the basic recipe is very simple:

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17 I.e. Alfes 1995; Winko 2003.

18 Cf. for instance Herman 2003.

The writer describes a situation that readers recognize as being *important* to a character in the sense that it has important implications with respect to the goals, standards, or attitudes that the character is known or assumed to have. Then, the character is portrayed as correctly or incorrectly construing the situation as good or bad relative to these goals or standards or attitudes, and typically is described as having, or is assumed to have, a valenced – i.e. a positive or negative – *reaction* to the situation. Finally, the construal together with the reaction usually results in some sort of change in the character’s judgment or *behaviour*.<sup>19</sup>

Further on, the authors express their view that descriptions of situations as they objectively exist are aesthetically undesirable, and that in writing from the point of view of an individual, the situation may be encoded in such a way as to provide readers with an awareness of a character’s affective state. They assume that the situations so described are sufficient to produce individual emotions. If the described situation contains the conditions for eliciting a particular emotion, the experience of that emotion can be inferred. According to Ortony, Clore and Collins, this assumption can be proven by the fact that millions of readers, often over decades or even centuries, all experience similar emotions when exposed to a single description of a particular situation. Thus, they assume that this view must bear general validity.<sup>20</sup>

This rather general but nonetheless convincing perspective on the analysis of how emotions are described in literature, and which effects are produced therefrom, must be elaborated upon.

First, it is clear to me that, contrary to Simone Winko’s position, cognitive theories of emotion are in general, albeit with some exceptions, extremely interesting for literary analysis, considering the fact that only cognitive emotions result in *individual*, *variable* and *relative* emotionally-steered actions, whereas non-cognitive models result in inescapable consequences.

Wolfgang Gessner discussed this problem in his book, *Die kognitive Emergenz von Emotionen*, in which he propounds a ‘radical cognitive emotion theory’. Gessner argues that because cognitive emotions can be defined as radically individual, they offer deliberate choices. In contrast, non-cognitive emotions, such as disgust, are not individual but constitutive for human beings. Therefore, the use of cognitive models of emotion is of special interest for the study of literature. As mentioned earlier, literature holds a preference for implications created by deliberate actions, even where the consequences are not foreseen.

Secondly, Gessner provides the tools for analysing the inner perspective of human beings and the way in which they perceive situations via their emotions.

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19 Ortony/Clore/Collins 1988: 3.

20 Cf. ibid.

He analyses individual interpretation mechanisms when confronted with emotion-inducing situations, whereas appraisal theories usually focus on standard situations involving emotional elicitation. Gessner says that a complete theory of emotions must explain the unique dispositions of individuals, whereby an individual's cognitive triggers provide him with a unique interpretation of an emotion-inducing situation.<sup>21</sup>

Allowing this basic assumption, it naturally follows that there is a need for a theory that focuses especially on the individual and on the subjective processing of a given situation, including erroneous interpretations of it. Such a theory would carry much promise from the point of view of literary analysis.

Perhaps it is useful to provide a short example from a well-known text: Goethe's *Faust*. This text is one of the most striking examples of a complex discussion of the problem of emotion. It shows not only the failure of individual decisions, but also the layers of emotion in the broader context of social and human realities. Already in the "Prologue in Heaven", the Lord and Mephistopheles talk about human error:

Mephistopheles:

"What will you wager that you do not lose him,  
Supposing always you will not demur  
About my guiding him in paths I choose him?"

The Lord:

"You shall have leave to do as you prefer.  
So long as earth remains his mortal dwelling;  
For man must strive, and striving he must err."<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, Faust errs. Let us take an example from the *Gretchen* episode. Even Mephistopheles tries to restrain him in the beginning:

Faust:

"But, none the less, she must be turned fourteen."

Mephistopheles:

"There speaks the lad who plays the libertine,  
And thinks he has the right to every flower,  
Knowing no grace or honourable name  
Beyond his reach, to pluck it and devour;  
It often can't be done, Sir, all the same. [...]

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21 Cf. Gessner 2004: 127.

22 Goethe 1949: 41.

Pray hear me now, Sir, pleasantry apart,  
 I tell you once for all, that lovely girl  
 Is never to be taken in a whirl.  
 We stand to lose by forcing of the pace,  
 When gentle subterfuge would meet our case.”<sup>23</sup>

Corresponding to the dialogue in the “Prologue in Heaven” quoted above, Goethe writes in a letter on the 15th of September, 1804 to his confidant Eichstätt that what is justly called a wrong striving is an unavoidable detour on the path to the goal.<sup>24</sup> This is because every return from an error forms the human being both in his individuality and his essential humanity. Therefore, it seems clear to him that God rejoices more for the one sinner who repents than for ninety-nine faithful who need not repentance. Faust’s behaviour driven by passion must be judged in this context.

Nonetheless, the whole problem of emotions and the theories of their description have become even more complex than the theories which Ortony, Clore and Collins and Gessner were prepared to take into account.

It concerns not only individual facets of situation appraisal as described by Ortony, Clore and Collins, and in a more complex manner by Gessner. There are dimensions of ontogenesis and self-development as well as social dimensions of “the human being as a whole” which must also be taken into account.

David Herman hinted at this problem and its relevance with respect to cognitive narratology, while Manfred Holodynski presented a complex ontogenetic approach in his study of emotions. Both Herman and Holodynski refer back to the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky.<sup>25</sup>

In light of all this, it becomes evident that a complete theory of emotions as they are treated in literary narratives requires an approach which accounts for individual, social and even normative or ethical dimensions of emotionally-steered actions.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.: 121-122.

24 Cf. Goethe WA 1895: 196-199: “Bey strenger Prüfung meines eignen und fremden Ganges im Leben und Kunst fand ich oft, daß das, was man mit Recht ein falsches Streben nennen kann, für das Individuum ein ganz unentbehrlicher Umweg zum Ziele sey. Jede Rückkehr vom Irrthum bildet mächtig den Menschen im einzelnen und Ganzem aus, so daß man wohl begreifen kann, wie dem Herzensforscher ein reuiger Sünder lieber seyn kann, als neunundneunzig Gerechte. Ja, man strebt oft mit Bewußtseyn zu einem scheinbar falschen Ziel, wie der Fährmann gegen den Fluß arbeitet, da ihm doch nur darum zu thun ist gerade auf dem entgegengesetzten Ufer anzulanden”.

25 Cf. Herman 2003: 163-192; Holodynski 2006: 122.

Here I return to the autobiography and its impact upon emotional involvement on the part of the author, as highlighted by Michael Stavarič. Again: as Stavarič says, traces of authorial emotions may be particularly pronounced in his animal characters. Animal characters not only enhance emotional intensity, they are also used for breaking norms and clichés, which Stavarič identifies as one of his central objectives. Thus, a starting point for influencing common patterns of social thinking may, under certain circumstances, be produced.

This outline of a theoretical approach offers, in my opinion, important viewpoints on autobiography, particularly on the genesis of the author's emotions with its individual preferences and subjective evaluations. At the same time, this approach explains why inappropriate forms of behaviour, actions and emotionality play such important roles in literary texts.

Although the approach of Manfred Holodynski would not alone be sufficient as a theoretical basis, integrating cognitive theories of emotions with the investigation of emotional ontogenesis provides novel theoretical possibilities which invite for further analysis.

### **3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

In spite of the far-reaching results already achieved by research into the theory of emotion (particularly in general and cognitive theories of emotion), no serious attempts have been made to integrate the multitudinous theories describing the manifold aspects of emotions as they contribute to human behaviour as a whole, with the limited exceptions, perhaps, of the work done by the *Centre Interfacultaire en Science Affectives* (Swiss Center for Affective Sciences), and by Klaus R. Scherer, father of the Component Process Model of emotion (CPM).

Emotions are not solely based on anatomy, biology, psychology or culture. Thus, the study of emotions cannot be confined to individual disciplines, whether psychology, philosophy, ethnology, sociology or linguistics. Emotions in human interaction must be appraised with respect to the particular situation, or to the content of what is being communicated. Equally, their appraisal ought not to minimize the complex and isolating individual aspects inherent in emotions, as analysed from such angles as psychology.<sup>26</sup>

Only via interdisciplinary approaches can researchers hope to arrive at really innovative results which can comprehensively cover the broadest idea of emotions. In such a project, the need to construct efficient communication tools and

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26 Cf. Weigand 2004.

action devices is especially pronounced. Therefore, a broad scientific horizon encompassing psychology, linguistics, information science, image and signal processing, philosophy and, last but not least, literary studies, must be channelled to create an integrated approach, in order to avoid the reproach of psychologism.<sup>27</sup>

Further, there are not only systematic approaches to be taken into account, but historical ones, too. For example, Karl Bühler supplies an outstanding methodological principle in the subtitle of his book on *Ausdruckstheorie* from 1933: a system must be presented by writing the history of the thoughts concerned. It is even Bühler's assumption that a systematic concept must be highlighted and completed by an account of its historical development. He gives several reasons for this scientific principle, one of which is very simple but nonetheless fundamental: familiar knowledge is in danger of being forgotten by reliance on a systematic approach. In fact, structures, incidents and continuities have to be correlated in a constructive manner. Bühler's propositions make an interesting reappearance in his last writings, featured in *Das Gestaltprinzip im Leben des Menschen und der Tiere* (1960). Here, Bühler deals with cybernetics. He makes a comparison between the steering of computers or machines on the one hand and human thinking on the other. At that time, computer storage systems had to be wiped clean completely before the memory could be reused. Human creativity in operation is entirely different: human thinking is inventive or “*gestaltistisch*” only when it is based on pre-existing knowledge, even if this knowledge is not systematized. Therefore, human thinking must be regarded as systematic and historical at the same time and not just as systematic.

With this in mind, there exists great research potential in applying theories of emotion in general, and cognitive theories of emotion in particular, to the field of literary studies.

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27 Cf. Metzger 62001; Scherer/Schorr/Johnstone 2001.

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# Emotions and/in Religion

Reading Sigmund Freud, Rudolph Otto, and William James

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ANGELA LOCATELLI

## 1. A BRIEF THEORETICAL PREMISE ON AESTHETIC AND RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS

The idea that emotions are harmful to reason, detrimental to both judgment and moral conduct, has been widely held for centuries in the Western mainstream philosophical tradition (particularly by Platonists, the Stoics, Descartes and their followers), and it has also been promoted by Christian theologians of different persuasions. Several contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists (Robert C. Solomon, Antonio Damasio, Martha Nussbaum, Jenefer Robinson and others)<sup>1</sup> have challenged, and even reversed the traditionally negative view of emotions, and have made the topic culturally respectable and relevant. However, religious emotion has been largely neglected in their work (as opposed, for example, to aesthetic emotion), so that the time seems to have come to explore this aspect in depth. One may start to do so by connecting recent theories on emotions in general to those of three authors whose works have been crucial in the field of the Comparative Study of Religions since the early decades of the twentieth century: i.e. Sigmund Freud, Rudolph Otto and William James. In fact, the issue of emotions in religion plays a prominent part in their research, which is articulated according to obviously different disciplinary methodologies and protocols, but which is similarly cognizant of the central role of emotions in religion. The role of literature, and specifically of its unique contribution in terms of “writing emotions”, has certainly been relevant for both Freud and James, and it must be mentioned here as a premise to the discussion of their

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1 Cf. Solomon 1976; Damasio 1999 and 1994; Nussbaum 2001; Robinson 2005.

theories. Freud's deep interest in and fascination with Greek tragedy and Shakespeare is well known, and can be shown to have been instrumental, and even decisive, to the Freudian elaboration of the "Oedipus complex". Freud even applied the literary knowledge of emotions to the understanding of his own "family romance" and personal vicissitudes, while the multifaceted rendering of emotions in the novels of Henry James must have been more than familiar to his brother William. Freud and James build their psychological theories in relation to the articulation of emotions in literature, but, of course, they transpose and transform the literary writing of emotions into their own disciplines and theoretical concerns. They "write emotion" with an obviously different purpose and style from that of the artistic literature to which they often allude.

The following discussion intends to focus on their writings, and will address these points and questions:

- The personal significance and the cultural role of religious emotions.
- Is there an original "religious feeling"?
- Cognition in/and Religious Emotions.
- (How) Do religious emotions differ from secular emotions? Is there a specificity of religious emotions?

Before addressing these issues directly, a few more brief theoretical remarks are necessary. Contemporary literature on the emotions essentially suggests, despite a great variety of approaches, that emotions are intrinsically cognitive,<sup>2</sup> and that, instead of being blind or capricious forces, they constitute meaningful evaluative strategies. Emotions are increasingly seen as intrinsically cognitive because they are always, *de facto*, acts of appraisal. Moreover, emotions undoubtedly transform our attitude(s) towards the world, towards its meaning and worth, and are also transformative of the self, of our judgments and choices, which means that they are "functionally" intelligent. Martha Nussbaum convincingly argues that emotions enter evaluative thought in relation to the subject's important long-term (as opposed to immediate) goals and projects. She also emphasizes the individual meaning of emotions. One of her main propositions is that emotions are "singular", i.e. highly individualized and "localized": "Emotions contain an ineliminable reference to me, to the fact that it is my scheme of goals and projects. They see the world from my point of view".<sup>3</sup> As I have said, Nussbaum focuses mostly on aesthetic emotions and proposes that they are valuable because they help humans to cope with their finitude and help them in the struggle

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2 Cf. Lyons 1980; de Sousa 1987; Gordon 1987; Greenspan 1988; Green 1992.

3 Nussbaum 2001: 52.

with ambivalence and helplessness. Jenefer Robinson similarly suggests that we are in need of a renewed “sentimental education”, which the arts can fruitfully provide. I have elsewhere suggested that artistic literature, due to its unique form and intrinsic complexity, can increase our capacity to address the plurality of our world, and foster a meta-ethical attitude of respect through the dynamics of interpretation,<sup>4</sup> as well as providing a special knowledge of human emotions.

Given these premises, I now wish to address the specific focus of this communication, i.e. religious emotions, by suggesting that religion, like art, but through different means, can contribute to a “sentimental education” and promote compassion, generosity, gratitude and a sense of responsibility (which is the basis of ethics). Of course, and unfortunately, there is more than a mere risk of ideological indoctrination, intolerance and hate speech in both religion and literature, but dealing with complexity (a common experience in literary interpretation and religious exegesis) remains an excellent means of hearing different voices, acknowledging different perspectives, and, as a consequence, of recognizing the importance of creating a respectful dialogue. In the next section of my paper I will argue that religious emotions are endowed with an empowering force that is, in part, similar to the that provided by aesthetic emotions, and that such emotional force had already been attributed to religion by Sigmund Freud, Rudolph Otto and William James.

## 2. THE PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE AND THE CULTURAL ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS

I have chosen to examine Freud, Otto and James together because in these three authors we find a common interest in the personal and social impact of religion, in which emotion plays a relevant role. Their attention to feelings is not peripheral, but concerns their respective objects and methods of study, and the epistemic import of their theories. Freud, Otto and James write about religion across an overlapping time span, i.e. the first three decades of the twentieth century, and they often display a familiarity with the same texts and with the same cultural issues of their age, to which, of course, each of them contributes in highly original terms. They are all drawn to the relatively new disciplines of ethnology and anthropology, which they appropriate in the interest of their specific concerns (i.e. psychoanalysis, psychology, and the study of religion respectively). They also share a common interest in etymology. This is why it is possible to envisage

4 Cf. Locatelli 2007, 2009, 2015b.

a sort of “dialogue” while reading these authors together, a dialogue which develops precisely around a semantic core that can be called “the religious feeling”.

It is important to remember that William James explicitly declares that his focus is not “the object” of religion (i.e. definitions of the divine, which he leaves to the philosophers and to the theologians), but “the subject of religion”, i.e. the subject having a great “variety of experiences” that may be called “religious”. I would therefore define James’s approach, and the result of his research, as an “experiential phenomenology of religion”.

Attention to the non-rational, or not purely rational, element in religion is also manifest in Rudolph Otto. He takes a less pragmatic, less utilitarian and more theological approach to religious experience than either James or Freud, and indeed he does not limit the study of the religious field to emotions and their social and personal impact. The subtitle of *The Idea of the Holy* is highly indicative: “An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational”. With an important epistemological premise, Otto qualifies his approach as grounded in the twofold aspect of the “supreme Reality” we call “God”: i.e. the “*Ratio aeterna*” and the “*Numen Ineffabile*”. Elements of both the rational (i.e. what is theo-logically predicated of “God”) and the non-rational (i.e. the emotional and experiential element of the divine) are the two complementary halves of Otto’s studies.

Freud consistently views religion as one of the central aspects of civilization, and frequently discusses it in this key, as well as, of course, in relation to the unconscious, human drives, instincts, complexes, neuroses, obsessive behaviour and different pathologies. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913) he writes: “At the bottom, God is nothing more than an exalted father”,<sup>5</sup> a statement which should not be taken in theological terms, of course, but an eloquent and unequivocal proposition on the powerful emotional grip that religion has for humans. Incidentally, we may recall that mothers or goddesses are essentially absent in Freud’s discussion of religion, and our postmodern cultural sensibility obviously holds several ideological reservations about strictly orthodox Freudian theories. But this is not the main point here. The point here is emotion in religion, and to that I will immediately return. In the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), Freud speaks of a “religious instinct” in which the emotional component of religion is firmly rooted. He writes: “Religion is an illusion and it derives its strength from the fact that it falls in with our instinctual desires.” This statement suggests that Freud sees emotional needs as the true spring (in the double sense of “source” and “driving force”) of religion. In the *New Introductory Lectures on*

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5 Freud 1913: 147.

*Psychoanalysis* (1933), he expands this view into three main points, which can be paraphrased as follows:

If one wishes to form a true estimate of the full grandeur of religion, one must keep in mind what it undertakes to do for men.

- It gives them information about the source and origin of the universe.
- It assures them of protection and final happiness amid the changing vicissitudes of life.
- And it guides their thoughts and motions by means of precepts which are backed by the whole force of its authority.

Between 1927 and 1933, Freud often returns to the human “instinctual” need of “consolation” as a crucial factor in adopting religion. Even in his most anti-religious work, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), he lucidly outlines the psychic results of forsaking religion in terms of a great emotional loss for humankind:

They [humans] can no longer be the center of creation [a narcissistic wound!], no longer the object of tender care on the part of a benevolent Providence. They will be in the same position as a child who has left the parental house where he was so warm and comfortable. But surely infantilism is destined to be surmounted. Men cannot remain children forever.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud’s thesis was, in fact, that civilization would progressively evolve through three main stages, from animism to religions to scientific thought. He sees these three stages as inevitable, but his wrong prediction on the evolution of cultures can easily be ascribed to a residual neopositivistic attitude, and the concomitant blind faith in the widespread triumph of scientific thought. Freud had assumed that people would choose a scientific “mythology of rational despair” over the comforts of religion, but he had clearly underestimated his own judgments on the human instinct for happiness. He had also, and perhaps more importantly, ignored the compelling force on others of the religious emotions which he was unable to experience in himself (the famous “oceanic feeling” to which I will soon come), and which would definitely contradict his thesis on the acceptance of religion in a sort of bad faith (i.e. preferring a comfortable “illusion” over the cold and hard truth).

In Freud’s opinion, a second relevant emotional factor in adopting religion is cultural (parental) transmission. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), a seminal text whose many implications on Freud’s understanding of religion and civilization

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<sup>6</sup> Freud 1927: 49.

transcend by far the scope of this text, he suggests that the infant is bound to the parent by powerful ties that make it impossible for him to reject certain prohibitions (on a larger scale this applies to indoctrination and education as such). The force of parental prohibition is made clear in relation to the motiveless veto of the taboo and its irrefutable force. Freud was explicit on this point: desire (to touch) comes up against an external prohibition, which is accepted because of an internal force (the child's gratifying and loving relation to the author of the prohibition). The instinct is then not abolished but repressed. It produces an ambivalent attitude towards the object and the act in connection with that object. The conflict between the instinct and the prohibition is in the subject's mind, and thus they cannot come up against each other. The motives of the prohibition remain unknown. This is always the case with taboos, which concern activities towards which there was an earlier strong inclination. The forbidden impulse leads to the performance of obsessive acts, which are both evidence of remorse and expiation, but also substitutive acts of what has been prohibited. In this sense it is easy to see why Freud would associate obsessive neurosis with religion, and suggest that both result from an introjected veto.

These dynamics come to mind when one considers the blind obedience to the hardest religious prescriptions, and the self-effacing conduct of saints and hermits in different traditions. In order to avoid anachronism or disrespect, let me add that certain behaviours which we tend, after Freud, to consider "pathological", were obviously not deemed such in earlier times, and may still be deemed sane in different regions of the globe. On the contrary, extreme gestures, like self-flagellation, prolonged fasting, walking on burning coals, driving needles through the flesh etc. were/are not only accepted, but receive(d) a full admiring social endorsement in different cultures and times. This demonstrates that religious emotions, just like any others, are time and culture specific.

Moreover, we also need to distinguish the self-torturing behaviour of rigorous saints from the saintly renunciations motivated by compassion and charitable purposes (St. Francis of Assisi comes to mind). While the former are perhaps motivated by a conception of the deity modeled on that of an overpowering and tyrannical father-figure, and by an ensuing desire for submission or expiation, the latter can be seen as grounded in the opposite conception of a benevolent deity or compassionate superior being, inviting a similar attitude of generous self-denial in the believers. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Martha Nussbaum valuably suggests (in a secular, rather than religious context) that "surrendering omnipotence is essential to compassion".<sup>7</sup> In a religious context, Christ's incarna-

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7 Nussbaum 2001: 250.

tion and crucifixion and the Bodhisattva's reincarnation for the sake of humankind are religious expressions of the highest compassion.

An important aspect in Freud's approach to religion is the fact that, in his theory, religious belief seems inextricably bound up with the crucial emotion of happiness (in the various forms of: a sense of security, protection, consolation, gratification). This is also true for William James in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In Lecture II James, like Freud, attributes an intrinsic special power to religion *vis à vis* the human condition of helplessness. He writes:

Religious feeling is thus an absolute addition to the Subject's range of life. It gives him a new sphere of power. When the outer battle is lost, and the outer world disowns him, it redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste.<sup>8</sup>

Given James's strong pragmatism, the emotional significance he attributes to religion can hardly be underestimated, both as a personal and as a sociocultural force. He maintains that assent to a doctrine follows upon an individual positive emotion evoked by it. Such assent is never purely abstract or intellectual: "It is perhaps not surprising that men come to regard the happiness which a religious belief affords as proof of its truth. If a creed makes a man feel happy, he almost inevitably adopts it".<sup>9</sup> James gives a vivid picture of the emotional impact of religious belief:

We shall see how infinitely passionate a thing religion at its highest flights can be. Like love, like wrath, like hope, ambition, jealousy, like every other instinctive eagerness and impulse, it adds to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deducible from anything else. This enchantment, coming as a gift when it does come – a gift of our organism, the physiologists will tell us, a gift of God's grace, the theologians say – is either there or not there for us, and there are persons who can no more be possessed by it than they can fall in love with a given woman by mere word of command.<sup>10</sup>

Having suggested above that emotions in general are means of appraisal, and forms of evaluative thought, we can appreciate how, more than once in his Gifford Lectures, James suggests that religious emotion provides a positive appraisal of the world.<sup>11</sup> He most clearly illustrates this fact in the pages devoted to the experience of conversion or, as in Tolstoy's well known case, of conver-

8 James 2002: 55.

9 Ibid.: 90-91.

10 Ibid.: 54-55.

11 Ibid.: 54-55, 167-168.

sion as involving the overcoming of a state of personal crisis, or anhedonia: “a passive joylessness and dreariness, discouragement, dejection, lack of taste and zest and spring”.<sup>12</sup>

The gamut of religious emotions is indeed far reaching: for James it includes happiness, gratitude, confidence, piety (empathy), tenderness for others, but also humility and severity towards oneself.<sup>13</sup> In a different context, Rudolph Otto also connects several emotions to worship, and in particular he mentions “feelings of gratitude, trust, love, reliance, humble submission, and dedication”, but he also hastens to add that “these do not exhaust the content of religious worship”,<sup>14</sup> something which is for him connoted by complex attitudes, both rational and emotional.

From what has been argued so far, we can confirm the thesis that the impact of the emotions on religion is demonstrably pervasive. Guilt and reparation *versus* compassion and gratitude, oppression and fear *versus* a liberating elation are indeed strong emotions in all religious traditions. I would add that religious emotion is often connected to or tinged with a more or less legalistic sense of personal “desert” and of “merit” (which is both an intellectual and *emotional* act of self-appraisal); in this case happiness is often disturbed or even destroyed by a sense of undeserving, of guilt, and even of despair (all of them very strong negative emotions). Such a sense of undeserving may, on the other hand, promote positive emotions, such as a joyful trust and hope in the boundless benevolence of God (Luther comes immediately to mind in this sense).

Not surprisingly, James’s Lectures XVIII and XIX deal with “The primacy of feeling in religion” and “Aesthetic elements in religion”. In lecture XVIII he writes: “I do believe feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations”.<sup>15</sup> The word “translation” is fascinating in this context. If we agree that “poetry” is “what gets lost in translation” we could say that the original religious feeling is what gets lost in the rational religion of theological formula(tion)s. In other words, whatever is predicated in religion is perhaps, always and already, an (inadequate) approximation of the original “religious feeling”. What is it then, this original feeling? Let us once more interrogate our primary texts.

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12 Ibid.: 163.

13 Ibid.: 286.

14 Otto 1958 [1917]: 8.

15 James 2002: 470.

### 3. FREUD'S "OCEANIC FEELING", JAMES'S "COSMIC EMOTION" AND OTTO'S "NUMINOUS STATE OF MIND"

Freud's opinion on the source of religious sentiments is best expounded in *Civilization and its Discontents*, where he recalls sending the French philosopher and novelist Romain Rolland his recent book *The Future of an Illusion* and receiving the following answer from him. Freud writes:

He was sorry I had not properly appreciated the true source of religious sentiments. This, he says, consists in a peculiar feeling, which he himself is never without, which he finds confirmed by many others, and which he may suppose is present in millions of people. It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of "eternity", a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded – as it were, "oceanic".

This feeling, he adds, is a purely subjective fact, not an article of faith; it brings with it no assurance of personal immortality, but it is the source of the religious energy which is seized upon by the various Churches and religious systems, directed by them into particular channels, and doubtless also exhausted by them. One may, he thinks, rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion. [...] I cannot discover this "oceanic" feeling in myself. It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings.<sup>16</sup>

Freud seems aware of the inevitable epistemological reduction that is implicit in any general scientific explanation *vis à vis* the particularity and variety of "feelings" and "forms of life",<sup>17</sup> and yet what he does in order "to deal scientifically with feelings" is to provide a "translation", in rigorous psychoanalytic terms, of the poetical terminology of Rolland's concept of "oceanic feeling". He proceeds to trace the source of "the oceanic feeling" in the depths of the psychic life. He finds it in the infant condition of primary narcissism, when the infant's boundaries of the ego are not yet defined, a condition that repeats itself in certain pathologies, and in the climax of erotic passion, when the boundaries between self and other are blurred and suspended.<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, several other aspects of religion are reinterpreted by Freud in strictly psychoanalytical terms, including his view of religion itself as a sort of distorted obsessional neurosis, and in the reverse view of obsessional neurosis in terms of a "taboo sickness". Let me

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16 Freud 1999: 10-11.

17 Cf. Locatelli 2015a.

18 Freud 1999: 12-13.

briefly digress from the discussion of the “oceanic feeling”, to further develop this point. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud writes:

Anyone approaching the problem of taboo from the angle of psycho-analysis, that is to say, of the investigation of the unconscious portion of the individual mind, will recognize, after a moment's reflection, that these phenomena are far from unfamiliar to him. He has come across people who have created for themselves individual taboo prohibitions of this very kind and who obey them just as strictly as savages obey the communal taboos of their tribe or society. If he were not already accustomed to describing such people as 'obsessional' patients, he would find 'taboo sickness' a most appropriate name for their condition.<sup>19</sup>

A passage just above this one in *Totem and Taboo* proposes a connection between the apparently divergent emotions of fear and veneration:

According to Wundt, this original characteristic of taboo – the belief in a ‘demonic’ power which lies hidden in an object and which, if the object is touched or used unlawfully, takes its vengeance by casting a spell over the wrong-doer – is still wholly and solely ‘objectified fear’. That fear has not yet split up into the two forms into which it later develops: veneration and horror.

But how did this split take place? Through the transplanting, so Wundt tells us, of the taboo ordinances from the sphere of demons into the sphere of the belief in gods. The contrast between ‘sacred’ and ‘unclean’ coincides with a succession of two stages of mythology.<sup>20</sup>

Along these lines, an interesting analogy concerning religious awe emerges in Freud and Otto, not surprisingly both of them readers and commentators of Wundt's work on myth and religion. On this ground, one can make sense of the ambivalent experience of the “*mysterium tremendum*”, a cardinal point in Rudolph Otto's discussion of “the holy”:

Let us consider the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion. Faith unto salvation, trust, love – all these are there. But over and above these is an element which may also on occasion, quite apart from them profoundly affect us and occupy the mind with a wellnigh bewildering strength. [...] The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. [...] It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depth of the soul with

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19 Ibid.: 26.

20 Ibid.: 25.

spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering.<sup>21</sup>

The “panic” in its sense of the terrifying, ecstatic or orgiastic emotions usually connected to the rituals of the Greek god Pan, may be seen as the equivalent of the psychoanalytical “uncanny”, with the unsettling return of the repressed: “Conceptually *mysterium* denotes merely that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar.”<sup>22</sup>

Otto discusses the implications of *tremendum* in several languages (Latin, Hebrew, German and English) and finds in them the common “feeling of a peculiar dread”, i.e. of religious awe.

This once more confirms the deep and strong link between veneration and horror, between religion and powerful emotions. One is then tempted to speculate on the pervasive fascination with horror in the most secularized societies, but this is clearly beyond the scope of my discussion.

Let me then return to the above mentioned distinction between the institutional, doctrinal, rational, ideological aspects of religion *versus* the purely subjective experience of the holy in the sense of a “mystical state”. It is a distinction which, perhaps not surprisingly, is relevant for Freud, for Rudolph Otto and for William James. In this respect, James does not entirely ignore the institutional aspect of religion, but rather explores how the “cosmic emotion” is inflected in different traditions. He explicitly refers to “Christian mysticism, transcendental idealism, vedantism, and the modern psychology of the subliminal self” and proposes that a mystical state either happens or it doesn’t, but if it does, it may become the cornerstone of religion, in various subsequent institutionalized forms. In order to describe the mystical experience, and its jubilant mood, James quotes from R.W. Trine (*In Tune with the Infinite*, 1899), a passage that closely recalls the Freudian observations on the oceanic feeling:

The great central fact of human life is the coming into a conscious vital realization of our oneness with this Infinite Life, and the opening of ourselves fully to this divine inflow. [...] We actualize in ourselves the qualities and powers of the Infinite Life, we make ourselves the channels through which the Infinite Intelligence and Power can work.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Otto 1958 [1917]: 12-13.

22 Ibid.: 13.

23 James 2002: 115.

In this quotation “divine inflow” seems the literal etymological equivalent of “enthusiasm”, a state which is often, in different religious traditions, associated with a sense of inspiration, uplifting, elation, liberation from oppressive moods, limits, and constraints, and above all of participation in, or merging with the divine. With reference to the “Religion of Healthy-mindedness” James writes that cosmic emotion “inevitably takes in them the form of enthusiasm and freedom”.<sup>24</sup>

For James, a “mystical state of consciousness” has four distinctive features:

- Ineffability: “it defies expression.”<sup>25</sup>
- Noetic Quality: “Mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge.”<sup>26</sup>
- Transiency: “Mystical states cannot be sustained for long.”<sup>27</sup>
- Passivity: “the mystic feels as if he [...] were grasped and held by a superior power.”<sup>28</sup>

Borrowing Shakespeare’s phrase concerning Cleopatra’s beauty, one could say that “ineffability” means that a mystical state “beggars all description”. “Noetic quality” I understand as the experience of insight, illumination, revelation. This is highly significant, and even compelling, for the subject experiencing it, but this knowledge often remains something inarticulate and incomunicable. “Transiency” means that mystical states do not last forever; but they return, may be recurrent, and, most importantly, they can be recollected through memory (albeit only imperfectly). The “passivity” of the mystical states has clear affinities with the notion of “enthusiasm” discussed above.

James’s “cosmic emotion” is clearly an experience, not an article of faith. A consciously emotional hue tinges the experience, and makes it unique, so much so that it cannot be enforced on those who have not experienced it. James, as we have seen, draws an interesting parallel between this situation and the ineffectual order to fall in love with a specific woman.

Otto suggests that “feeling a Presence” is the *sine qua non* and the very premise of any religious experience, and of all subsequent religious emotions: “the ‘numen’ must be experienced as present, a *numen praesens*, as in the case

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24 Ibid.: 91.

25 Ibid.: 414.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.: 415.

28 Ibid.

of Abraham".<sup>29</sup> One is here reminded of a reference in Genesis xviii.27, where Abraham pleads for the people of Sodom and says: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes". Not only does Rudolph Otto build his seminal concept of "creature-feeling" on this reference, but, in this context, he suggests (in a footnote that is relevant for our purposes) that

the feeling of a "numinous" object objectively given, must be posited as a primary immediate datum of consciousness, and the "feeling of dependence" is then a consequence, following very closely upon it, viz. a depreciation of the subject in his own eyes. The latter presupposes the former.<sup>30</sup>

Rudolph Otto's concept of the "numinous", with its closeness to both "the ineffable" and "a sense of presence" clearly recalls aspects of both Rolland's "oceanic feeling" and James's "cosmic emotion". When Otto points out that in Semitic religions "the holy" (Hebrew *Qādōsh*, the Greek ἅγιος, the Latin *sanc-tus/sacer*) is "pre-eminently a living force",<sup>31</sup> we may again surmise that what he means resembles James's "vital realization of the Infinite Life".

#### 4. COGNITION IN/AND RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS

Are religious emotions cognitive? In a first and basic sense they are, being acts of appraisal, like any and all emotions as such (*sensu* Damasio, De Sousa, Greenspan, Gordon, Lyons, Nussbaum, Robinson, et al.). But I wish to add that the original religious feeling related to mystical states is 'cognitive' in a special sense. I will do so by recalling Bertrand Russell's important epistemological distinction (in Chapter V of *The Problems of Philosophy* 1912)<sup>32</sup> between "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description". I propose that some religious emotions, particularly those related to mystical states, constitute a particular case of "knowledge by acquaintance", in the sense that they imply "a direct awareness [...] without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths".<sup>33</sup> In this they have a somehow paradoxical affinity

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29 Otto 1958 [1917]: 11.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.: 6.

32 Cf. Russell 1996: 243-294.

33 Ibid.: 256.

with sense-data, which, in Russell's words, "make up the appearance" of objects. The mystics' "conscious vital realization" seems a near synonym of "direct awareness" of "the Infinite Life". Other religious emotions, i.e. the ones generated by cultural transmission, can be seen, instead, as forms of 'knowledge by description'.

Russell's distinction can be effectively illustrated in a quotation (cited by W. James) from the eleventh century Persian philosopher and theologian Al-Ghazzali:

I understood all that can be *learned by study and hearsay* [that is clearly 'knowledge by description']. Then I recognized that what pertains most exclusively to their method [the Sufis] is just *what no study can grasp, but only transport, ecstasy, and the transformation of the soul*. How great, for example is the difference between knowing the definitions of health, of satiety, with their causes and conditions and being really healthy or filled.<sup>34</sup>

Al-Ghazzali provides another example of knowledge by acquaintance: the condition of being drunk as distinct from the medical diagnosis of drunkenness, and he indicates two important forms of religious knowledge by acquaintance "ecstasy and leading a pious life". Freud's "oceanic feeling", but even more clearly "the numinous" in Rudolph Otto and James's "direct awareness" qualify ecstatic emotions as a form of knowledge that is proper and peculiar to the religious realm, something totally irrefutable for the one experiencing the emotional state, and yet radically subjective, verging on solipsism, since the content of the emotional experience remains mostly inarticulate, and no verifiable propositional content can be provided about it. The non-religious (one, like Freud, who has never experienced the "oceanic feeling") would simply dispute this knowledge of the ineffable, and dismiss it as *flatus vocis*, "thin air". S/he might acknowledge the reality of the experience (while still ignoring its cognitive content) purely out of trust towards the person claiming it (as Freud seems to do towards Romain Rolland). A non-believer may certainly be tempted to call the mystic's "vital realization" a case of "mistaken emotion" in Nussbaum's terminology. The American philosopher speaks of "mistaken emotions" mostly with reference to a wrong belief or assumption, and to a false propositional content (for example, experiencing grief for a disgrace that one eventually discovers never to have happened). A mistaken emotion, let me point out, does not make the emotion any less "real" for the subject experiencing it. But, let us notice that it is difficult to conclude that there are mistaken emotions in mystical states, given the paradox of their compelling evidence and unverifiability; in fact, the

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34 Ibid.: 439, italics A.L.

emotional experience is real and its content true for the subject experiencing it. The non-religious has to remain in a sceptical position and suspend judgment on the “truth” of the mystical experience, since the propositional content cannot be (fully or adequately) articulated, let alone verified, and cannot therefore be declared either “false” or “true” with certainty.

Nussbaum also acknowledges the possibility of “fraudulent” or “feigned” emotions, but this is not the case if we assume the honesty and good faith of the subject experiencing the religious emotion and articulating it, however imperfectly. It goes without saying that religious charlatans, no less than the mundane, can, of course, be the histrionic purveyors of what Nussbaum calls ‘fraudulent emotions’.

Before I conclude this section let me point out that both the “truth” of religion and the “reality” of the emotions enhanced by it are not exclusively a matter of intellectual apprehension, but of an existential sense of (willing or assenting) participation in a higher realm or ‘reality’. The phenomenology of the religious experience is most fruitfully approached through “the subject”, as William James valuably reminds us, and it is not entirely or solely defined in intellectual terms, as Otto convincingly suggests.

## **5. Is THERE A SPECIFICITY OF “RELIGIOUS EMOTION”?**

Philosophers, theologians, poets and ordinary people have answered the question of the singularity of religious emotion along two main lines, and have argued either that there is no essential difference between religious emotion and any other, or they have maintained that there is a qualitative difference, a uniqueness to religious emotion.

While Freud, Otto and James are, as we have seen, all three in agreement on the fundamental emotional component in religion, on its enormous social and individual meaning, and on its impact on civilization, they clearly differ on the issue of the specificity of religious emotion.

When Freud interprets religion in terms of the emotional dynamics of ordinary family life, he clearly denies a specificity of religious emotions; however, he admits a specifically “religious feeling”, i.e. the “oceanic feeling”, even while stating that he has never experienced it. Freud is prepared to acknowledge this special feeling in others (in Rolland, for example).

William James takes a nuanced and apparently contradictory position on the issue of the uniqueness and qualitative difference of religious emotion. On the one hand, he suggests that religious emotion is not different from any other:

We are willing to treat the term “religious sentiment” as a collective name for the many sentiments which religious objects may arouse in alternation, we see it probably contains nothing whatever of a psychologically specific nature. There is religious fear, religious love, religious awe, religious joy, and so forth. But religious love is only man’s natural emotion of love directed to a religious object; religious fear is only the ordinary fear of commerce, so to speak, the common quaking of the human breast, insofar as the notion of divine retribution may arouse it; religious awe is the same organic thrill which we feel in a forest at twilight, only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations [...] but there is no ground for assuming a simple abstract “religious emotion” to exist as a distinct elementary mental affection by itself present in every religious experience without exception.<sup>35</sup>

But James seems to change his mind on this point more than once throughout his Lectures, so that he makes several disclaimers on his own statement that religious emotion is identical to any other ordinary emotion. It is interesting to see that a pragmatist and pluralist like James suggests that a specific religious attitude or receptivity is a human “faculty”, with which some people are endowed and others are not. In this sense, religious emotion would then be grounded in a particular temperament, so that different individuals experience a variety of quintessentially different religious emotions, or none at all: “So the nature which is spiritually barren may admire and envy faith in others, but can never compass the enthusiasm and peace which those who are *temperamentally qualified for faith* enjoy”.<sup>36</sup>

Not surprisingly, James’s Lectures IV and V are devoted respectively to “The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness” and Lectures VI and VII to “The Sick Soul”. But James also speaks of a peculiar and intrinsic “happiness” in religion, “parted off from mere animal happiness” by an element of “solemnity”. All of this seems to suggest a specificity of religious emotion. The same applies to his treatment of the “mystical state of consciousness” and its unique “cosmic emotion”. James seems therefore to take up a middle position between Freud and Otto. In fact, Rudolph Otto strongly defends the thesis that religious emotion is highly specific and qualitatively different from any other. He bases his argument on the notion of “a feeling of the numinous”, discussed above, which is proper to religion alone. Otto also defends the *sui generis* nature of religious emotion on the ground of its “intimate personal knowledge”,<sup>37</sup> the knowledge provided by mystical states. Moreover, recalling Schleiermacher’s well known notion of

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35 James 2002: 32-33.

36 Ibid., 227, italics A.L.

37 Otto 1958 [1917]: 8.

“feeling of dependence” as the basis of a religious attitude and religious devotion, Otto elaborates on it, in order to argue in favour of a quintessentially religious form of dependence, different from other forms, not only in degree (as Schleiermacher himself had already suggested in the distinction between “absolute” and “relative” dependence), but also because of an “intrinsic quality”.<sup>38</sup> This religious dependence is different, Otto argues, from that of father and son, or from that of any mundane relationship. As in the case of Abraham already mentioned, there exists a sense of dependence which is specifically “religious”, and Otto calls it the “Creature-Feeling”.

Even if the issue of the unique and specific quality of religious emotion cannot be said to be resolved once and for all, I believe that the three concepts I have dealt with, i.e. the “oceanic feeling” in Freud, “the feeling of the numinous” in Rudolph Otto and the “cosmic emotion” in William James are crucial contributions to the ongoing debate,<sup>39</sup> necessary elements to better understand the complexity of the “religious” nature of religious emotions.

As I conclude, I need to propose another thesis: religious emotion differs from others in terms of the individual’s conception of the divine, both as ‘object’ and as ‘addressee’. It does not matter greatly if such conception is learned through cultural transmission, or if it stems from a personal experience. The object of the emotion and its addressee are equally important. But I also wish to suggest that, given the highly individual, localized and situated nature of emotions (*sensu* Nussbaum given above), we can posit a singularity of religious emotion related to the ‘subject of the emotion’. The uniqueness of religious emotion is then determined within a triangular relationship, centred in the feeling and sentient subject, and branching out towards the imagined/posited object and towards the addressee of the emotion. Various conceptions of the object and addressee open up the possibility of different emotions within different religious traditions, through the respective ideas of the deity, and according to the different cultural practices and notions of worship. I wish therefore to emphasize that religious emotions are, like all other emotions, historically and culturally specific.

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38 Cf. Schleiermacher 1963.

39 Cf. Lemmens/Van Herck 2008; Roberts 2014.

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# **Emotions Mediated**



# **Autism, Love, and Writing in and around Russian Literature**

On Feeling, Non-Feeling and Writing as a  
Communicative Medium to Express Emotions

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INGEBORG JANDL

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In Russian literature, the discussion on autism<sup>1</sup> appears in the 19th century with the topos of the ‘superfluous man’, which will continue to be a crucial but not exclusive point of reference for further reflections on this topic up to the present day. A fundamental connection to writing is already given in Aleksandr Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (*Evgenii Onegin*, 1823-1830) and Mikhail Lermontov’s *A Hero of Our Time* (*Geroi nashego vremeni*, 1841). In these initial texts, writing is a means of intimate communication and self-reflection, symptomatic of an emergence of feelings of love even in characters with an autistic disposition. Later on, this context will be opened to aesthetics, providing the

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1 The term ‘autism’ was introduced in 1911 to describe the negative symptoms of schizophrenia. Cf. Bleuler 2014: 304-305. In this paper it is used according to the criteria in contemporary diagnostics, where these symptoms are classified as a separate concept. Irrespective of the late introduction of the term and the shifts within its definitions it is equally used for the analysis of characters in novels of the 19th and 20th century. Literary studies on the ‘superfluous man’ usually name the respective characteristics separately, talking e.g. of ‘inability to love’ (cf. Göbler 1999: 84), ‘indifference against society’, ‘cold intellect’, ‘individualism’, ‘repugnance against restrictions’, ‘arrogance and arrogance’, ‘egoism’, ‘unsociable characters’ and ‘dangerous eccentrics’ (cf. Wedel 1961: 357-358).

question of whether literary writing is possible for an autistic author. Gašto Gazdanov, for example, responds in the negative to this question in some of his stories, rejecting the idea that feelings could be invented, whereas in others, as an antithesis, he connects autism to the notion of artistic genius. Vladimir Sorokin will use the same topic in the later Soviet and post-Soviet context for provocation, emphasising that he is an autistic writer.

Theoretically, neither autism nor love is the main focus of this paper. These two categories serve rather the purpose of examining two other structuralistic problems: firstly, the opposition between feeling and non-feeling and, secondly, the connection between the inside and the outside of the individual, assuming that inside is where emotions originate and outside is where they are expressed and shared with others. The impact of autism on this topic consists of the separation of the feelings inside the individual from their connection to an outside object, which autism entails.

This disconnection reflects the symptomatology of autism described in the international diagnostic manuals ICD-10 and DSM-5, which primarily mention personal deficits in social interaction and communication, especially in building and maintaining relationships, recognising feelings expressed by others, an absence of emotional reciprocity and a challenge in dissimulating feelings.<sup>2</sup> The symptom-oriented description of diagnostic manuals reveals little about the inner reasons for autistic behaviour, which, besides the functional priority of symptoms in this context, seems also to be due to the difficulty of ‘seeing inside’ an autistic subject. Given that facial expressions and body language often reveal little about thoughts or possible affects and that emotional situations as well as intimate dialogues are avoided, much of this stays unknown.

Within the psychology of perception, autism is related to a specific focus on details without connecting them to the social situation of their occurrence. This seems to explain how affected persons can have a cognitive and exceedingly detailed overview, while at the same time emotional and social components might remain entirely unconsidered.<sup>3</sup> The origin of a focus of perception excluding emotional information is assumed to lie in a high level of sensitivity, due to the fact that the individual is emotionally affected more easily, as well as more strongly and persistently, within various contexts. This can harm vital resources, particularly in connection with negative emotions, and affected persons might therefore learn to protect themselves.<sup>4</sup> A further observation within psychology and psychoanalysis is that autism is often accompanied by an intense longing for

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2 Cf. ICD-10 2015: 344-345; DSM-5 2015: 34-39.

3 Cf. Goldstein 2015: 146-147.

4 Cf. Behrmann 2006: 258-264.

being loved by others, which seems to constitute one important reason for the correlation with a high motivation for creative achievements.<sup>5</sup>

The contrast between feeling and non-feeling, however, is a more general one than the contrast between love and non-love. These two binary extremes are not meant to be confused in the following. Love has been chosen as point of reference because it is a strong emotion that establishes a persistent connection to another person. A second reason is that, in the literary examples, love often constitutes the main link between feeling and writing. Concerning the literary representation of autistic characters, the possibilities seem to range, maybe among other possibilities, from non-transparent or impulsive characters to others with a very rational world view and a third group with a perception-focus on arbitrary details and deficits in the interpretation of social situations. Literature can go beyond diagnostics by interpreting specific settings and contexts from more than one perspective and by giving insights into an unknown world view. Through mode, style and content, writing reveals characteristics of the emotional pattern of the literary subject, which seems to be the case in personal writing as well as writing in literary or journalistic contexts. The texts within existentialist, aesthetic and ethical discourses in particular are shown in the following to turn to writing in order to reflect emotional dynamics between individuals and society. Reactions of addressees or readers show that with a continual shift according to cultural contexts, feeling and non-feeling remain essential categories in literary and public discourses on self-expression and artistic genius, as well as a political statement.

## **2. THE ‘SUPERFLUOUS MAN’ AND EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT THROUGH WRITING**

Motivated by the success of Molière’s *Misanthrope* (1666) on the Russian stages, the topos of the ‘superfluous man’ was instantly established within Russian literature, where it has remained in use since the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> Emotional reserve, avoiding personal attachment, provocative disrespect of social graces, independence, unforeseen decisions and condescension towards others represent some of the traits typical of these characters that may be linked to autism, too. Writing is not necessarily linked to this discourse, but it plays an important part

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5 Riemann 2013: 61.

6 Cf. Wedel 1961: 355-367.

in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, which will therefore be discussed in the following.

The plot of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* is constructed around two love letters, each of them being answered with rejection. Beyond their specific content, these documents reveal the emotional patterns of the two main characters also through styles of world literature. Tatyana's letter stylistically reflects French sentimental love-literature, whereas Onegin's reproduces characteristics of English seduction-novels. These allusions reflect the readings of each of the characters, and will serve as a basis for their mutual understanding of their later discourse, after having already missed the chance of being together, irreversibly.<sup>7</sup> This paper focuses on the situational components and implications of writing.

Having read Tatyana's naive writing, Onegin rejects her, outlining his inability to love.

“[...] Without romance, or false insistence,  
I'll say: with past ideals in view  
I would have chosen none but you [...].”

#### XIV

But I was simply not intended  
for happiness – that alien role.  
Should your perfections be expended  
in vain on my unworthy soul?  
Believe (as conscience is my warrant),  
wedlock for us would be abhorrent.  
I'd love you, but inside a day,  
with custom, love would fade away;  
your tears would flow – but your emotion,  
your grief would fail to touch my heart,  
they'd just enrage it with their dart.”<sup>8</sup>

Onegin's autistic traits are already depicted earlier in his general dissatisfaction and feeling of boredom, in his contempt of society, in his unsteady and affectionless relationships with women and in his non-committal comradeship with the neighbour. Being aware of his emotional instability and dislike of commitment he rejects the simple, gracious and slightly melancholic Tatyana, even though he would have preferred her to other women.

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7 Cf. Ebbinghaus 2004: 156, 214-222, 413-417.

8 Pushkin 1977: 112-113. Pushkin 1960: 79.

The connection between Tatyana's feelings and Onegin's lack of feelings is here represented by writing. Tatyana writes a letter but the male character does not answer in written form, he explains the reasons for his rejection to her orally. This relation is paralleled in the course of their second meeting, taking place later, when Onegin's desire for the by then well-situated, married Tatyana arises, so that it is his turn to write a love letter to her. The fact that he even writes two more letters when her answer fails to appear shows again the strength of his awakened feelings. But the heroine does not answer at all, abiding with her husband. Her decision not to write illustrates the fact that she is suppressing her persistent feelings for Onegin, which she admits later.

Failing to engage in direct interaction, he falls ill, as Tatyana does after Onegin's rejection of her. Writing is a symptom of lovesickness, which makes even Onegin write, who generally attributes as little sense to writing as to feeling.

[H]is illness lends him courage and  
to the princess, in his weak hand,  
he sends a letter, penned with passion.  
He deemed, in general, letters vain,  
and rightly so, but now his pain  
had gone in no uncertain fashion  
past all endurance.<sup>9</sup>

A similar storm of uncontrollable feelings has already been the reason for Tatyana's writing. Even though she is not, in contrast to her neighbour, emotionally cold in general, writing overcomes her as a wave of previously unknown desire. The narrator subsequently even constructs the scene as a metaphor of Tatyana losing her innocence through writing, by accentuating corporal signs of arousal:

Now Tanya's groaning, now she's sighing;  
the letter trembles in her grip;  
the rosy sealing-wafer's drying  
upon her feverish tongue; the slip  
from off her charming shoulder's drooping.<sup>10</sup>

A second parallel between the two letters is that both of them include a vow. Tatyana writes:

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9 Pushkin 1977: 221. Pushkin 1960: 168.

10 Pushkin 1977: 103. Pushkin 1960: 70.

“[...]

Decreed in highest court for ever...  
heaven's will – for you I'm set apart;  
and my whole life has been directed  
and pledged to you [...].”<sup>11</sup>

Having read the letter, Onegin even insists on this irreversible bond to one's words through writing:

“You wrote to me, and nothing spoken  
can disavow that. [...]”<sup>12</sup>

In his own letter he renews Tatyana's vow of fate and fidelity.

“[...]

But so it is: I'm in no state  
to battle further with my passion;  
I'm yours, in a predestined fashion,  
and I surrender to my fate.”<sup>13</sup>

The letters show that Pushkin's characters believe in a magical love they are obliged to enact, having revealed their feelings in a written form. Given that these feelings will remain in spite of the circumstances prohibiting their coming together, the superstition is fulfilled, proving that writing establishes a binding emotional attachment to the addressee.

Another important aspect of writing is its character of intimate communication. This intimate character stimulates not only confession but also self-reflection, which becomes especially important in Mikhail Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time*. Pechorin, the main character, is the second famous ‘superfluous man’ of Russia's 19th century literature, often compared to Onegin, with whom he shares his autistic traits. In the first chapters, Lermontov's narrator depicts how Pechorin disappoints especially those who feel close to him. The Circassian girl Béla only falls in love with him due to his inconsistency, but when she agrees to follow him, he soon loses interest in her and even her approaching death does not touch him.

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11 Pushkin 1977: 101. Pushkin 1960: 69.

12 Pushkin 1977: 112. Pushkin 1960: 78.

13 Pushkin 1977: 223. Pushkin 1960: 170.

At night she became delirious [...] then she spoke of Pechorin also, called him various fond names [...]. He listened to her in silence, his head sunk in his hands; but yet, during the whole time, I did not notice a single tear-drop on his lashes. I do not know whether he was actually unable to weep or was mastering himself [...].<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the tragic moments around Béla's death, Maksim Maksimych, a travel acquaintance, affectionately remembers Pechorin as a dear friend because of his open honesty. He is the second person to experience a great disappointment, when, during their second encounter, Pechorin shows indifference to their unforeseen reunion and remains reserved. What is hardly apparent from external observation of the eccentric becomes clearer through his diary entries, which lend more human traits to him. Descriptions of key situations in society and in private life disclose his emotional instability, often accompanied by dissatisfaction, ennui and remorse.

To none has my love brought happiness, because I have never sacrificed anything for the sake of those I have loved: for myself alone I have loved for my own pleasure. I have only satisfied the strange craving of my heart, greedily draining their feelings, their tenderness, their joys, their sufferings – and I have never been able to sate myself.<sup>15</sup>

Pechorin's emotional spectrum is not limited to distain, regret, nostalgia and amusement, but contains also feelings like fear and even love for Vera, a bygone liaison. Although she still loves him, she no longer believes in his feelings for her. However, the longer she refuses herself to him, the stronger becomes not only his desire but also his consciousness of tender feelings for her, so that when he finally loses her, he is bowed down with grief.

In Lermontov's novel, writing is clearly limited to mono-directional communication. Writing is Pechorin's way of self-reflection and, as his notes show, writing is also a way of concentrating his sensibility, stimulating him to express feelings. Moreover, this novel also contains a love letter written by Vera, which can be classified as a devoted and emotional piece of text. In the same way as Onegin, Pechorin does not answer, in spite of his feelings for Vera expressed in his diary. The barrier of strong feelings, which stay enclosed within an individual without being shown to the addressee, is also counted among the typical symptoms of autism.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Lermontov 1947: 78. Lermontov 2000: 337.

15 Lermontov 1947: 294-295. Lermontov 2000: 418-419.

16 Cf. Riemann 2013: 59-60.

### 3. EXISTENTIALISM AND ETHICS: THE AUTISTIC SAVANT AND THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF WRITING

Gaïto Gazdanov's poetics include intertextual connections to Pushkin's *Onegin*<sup>17</sup> as well as to Lermontov's *Pechorin*, but autistic characters appear even more multifaceted, e.g. through references to Lev Tolstoi's realist novel *Anna Karenina* (1877-78). In Gazdanov's earlier texts, the plot connected with unrequited love in the context of the 'superfluous man' and the Karenin-text remain the main focus. His later works provide two new dimensions to this topic: firstly, the background of French existentialism and, secondly, the connection of the topic to aesthetics. Gazdanov's common denomination as the 'Russian Camus' seems closely connected to the influence of Camus' *The Outsider* (*L'Étranger*) and *The Myth of Sisyphus* (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*), both of which appeared in 1942, since similarities with both works subsequently appear in Gazdanov's poetics.<sup>18</sup>

In order to illustrate the nuances of autistic characters, it seems important to also mention the main difference between the representatives of the 'superfluous man' and other key-characters. Focussing on the level of writing, this difference lies for Karenin in the intransparency of his feelings, which are not moderated by his written expression. On the contrary, Karenin's writings characterize him as an ambitious workaholic and do-gooder, who sanctimoniously answers to requests<sup>19</sup> and his letter to his wife Anna reveals his purely rational approach even within close relationships. Addressing her formally in French, Karenin forgives her for her infidelity and he even adds some financial support to this letter. As outlined by the character's further reflections, this choice is not motivated by empathy, but by Karenin's wish to force Anna to stay as well as to stress his own generosity and even to humiliate her. "He went through the letter, entirely satisfied, especially because of the fact that he had not forgotten to add the money; and that the letter contained neither a hard-hearted word nor a reproach, but no forbearance, yet. But most important he estimated the golden bridge for her return."<sup>20</sup> While the representatives of the 'superfluous man', in spite of their inapproachability, can be qualified as well respected heroes due to their honesty and their often justified criticism of society, Karenin represents a purely negative

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17 Cf. Göbler 1999: 83-84.

18 For a more detailed outline cf. Yndl' 2014: 168.

19 Cf. Tolstoi 1934: 116.

20 All translations by I.J. unless indicated otherwise. *Ibid.*: 300.

character. He does not overcome his disposition of non-feeling towards others and, through his writing, egoistically and aggressively acts against them.

In a different way to Karenin, the stoic, distant and apathetic characters typical of existentialism, together with their very general feelings of alienation, present an autistic world view, too. Already in Camus' *Outsider*, these emotional experiences are reflected in situations connected to writing. "Today my mother has died. It might have been yesterday as well, I don't know. I have received a telegram from the retirement home: 'Mother died. Funeral tomorrow. Deepest sympathy.' That means nothing."<sup>21</sup> Just as Karenin's uncomfortably formal writing of commonplaces unconnected to his feelings reveals his autistic disposition in Tolstoi's novel, Camus' character Meursault is not emotionally affected by this telegram about his mother's death; thus, the discourse around his lack of emotionality that finally will entail his execution is introduced right at the beginning. Furthermore, the novel reveals the arbitrariness of feelings for Meursault's own writing, which is interpreted as symptomatic for his indifference towards others. Consenting to compose a letter of revenge for his neighbour Raymond, he does not care about the exact content, nor about Raymond's cordial feelings. Indeed, he makes this decision in pure indifference and guided by the wish to stay alone.

I have written the letter. I have written it a bit by chance, but I have made an effort to satisfy Raymond, because I had no reason not to satisfy him. [...] Only when he declared: "Now, you are a real friend," it scandalised me. He has repeated his phrase and I have said "Yes." I did not care about being his friend and he really seemed to want it.<sup>22</sup>

Meursault's difficulty in coping with emotions becomes obvious in his feeling "scandalised" by Raymond's enthusiastic declaration of friendship. At the same time, the existentialist context does not concentrate on an autistic individual – which would mean condemning Meursault with the judgement of not being emotionally affected by his mother's death – but on careless non-feeling within society. Describing the trial as "a quick reading of the indictment, in which I

21 "Aujourd'hui, maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas. J'ai reçu un télégramme de l'asile: 'Mère décédée. Enterrement demain. Sentiments distingués.' Cela ne veut rien dire." Camus 2013b: 179.

22 "J'ai fait la lettre. Je l'ai écrite un peu au hasard, mais je me suis appliqué à contenter Raymond parce que je n'avais pas de raison de ne pas le contenter. [...] C'est seulement quand il m'a déclaré: 'Maintenant, tu es un vrai copain', que cela m'a frappé. Il a répété sa phrase et j'ai dit: 'Oui.' Cela m'était égal d'être son copain et il avait vraiment l'air d'en avoir envie." Ibid.: 194-195.

[Meursault] recognized some names of places and persons”,<sup>23</sup> outlines the lack of respect towards a single life. Non-feeling is exemplified at this level through writing, too: firstly, in terms of the indictment, which is no more than a formality connected to the judge’s career-making, and secondly, in terms of the journalists waiting for the process as an exciting spectacle.

The journalists already held their pens in their hands. They had all the same indifferent and slightly sneering expression. However, one of them, a lot younger, vested in grey flannel with a blue tie, had kept his pen lying in front of him and watched me. In his slightly asymmetric face I saw nothing but his two eyes, attentively regarding me, with an indefinable expression.<sup>24</sup>

In both cases writing is directly connected to judging, and in the given contexts the mode is a clearly non-empathic one. ‘Writing non-feeling’ therefore marks a social deficit that is, in contrast to personal non-feeling, neither condemned nor reflected upon.

Narrating from Meursault’s perspective, Camus gives a close insight into autistic perception. Meursault is not able to empathize with those who will decide his fate and therefore is not able to adapt the categories of their discourse in order to defend himself. Less specifically, his autistic perception within the whole book becomes apparent in fragmentized perceptions, which he is not able to interpret emotionally, like the “two eyes [of the younger journalist], attentively regarding me [him], with an indefinable expression”. As mentioned initially, autism is an important topic within Gazdanov’s poetics already before Camus’ *Outsider*. Characteristic of his early main characters is their discomfort or nonunderstanding within emotional situations and, vice versa, frequent individualistic reactions hardly understood by other characters. Gazdanov’s characters furthermore share with Meursault the focus on the perception of arbitrary details, and constantly describe a highly emotional reaction to music and the visual arts, i.e. in non-social contexts.<sup>25</sup>

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23 “une lecture rapide de l’acte d’accusation, où je reconnaissais des noms de lieux et de personnes” Ibid.: 220.

24 “Les journalistes tenaient déjà leur stylo en main. Ils avaient tous le même air indifférent et un peu narquois. Pourtant, l’un d’entre eux, beaucoup plus jeune, habillé en flanelle grise avec une cravate bleue, avait laissé son stylo devant lui et me regardait. Dans son visage un peu asymétrique, je ne voyais que ses deux yeux, très clairs, qui m’examinaient attentivement, sans rien exprimer qui fût définissable.” Ibid.

25 These specifics also touch the plot-level, which might be perceived as not sufficiently motivated, as has been portrayed in negative critiques. Cf. e.g. Khodasevich 1938: 9.

*The Outsider* especially influences Gazdanov's works, and, e.g. in the novel *Evelyn and Her Friends* (Èvelina i ee druz'ya, 1968), the character of the novelist engages with the obviously erroneous writings of judges and journalists, trying to defend the defendant. Considering the diachronic development, Gazdanov's texts increasingly reflect autism also from an external perspective, which is accompanied by the perception of emotional indifference as a deficit. While the texts focussing on the Onegin plot are concerned with the internal longing for a distant and unspecific female ideal, those referring to Karenin judge the respective character for his lack of empathy from the outside perspective. With the influence of existentialism these two conflicts are subsequently brought together.

Since Gazdanov's earliest works, the topic of writing is continually represented in his texts, but not initially linked to autism. It first serves as a satiric device for the imitation of fatuitous or mawkish journalists and untalented novelists. A connection between writing and autism becomes crucial in his late poetics where Gazdanov poses the question of whether literary writing is possible for an autistic author. Rejecting the idea that feelings could be invented, he answers in the negative for example in the story "The Homeless" ("Nishchiï", 1962), where a well-situated man with educational achievement leaves his family, to live, poor and homeless, in the streets of Paris. The reason for this decision is his identification with the psychological state of homelessness, which will persist during his whole life.

Afterwards he had a couple of lovers, compliantly undressing when he visited them in the evenings. He knew that none of them really loved him and this was understandable, because neither did he ever feel an irresistible attraction to a woman himself nor these feelings of love he had so much read about in books. He felt instead something like a physical craving, discomforting, exhausting and setting his nerves on edge; and when this craving was satisfied, all this left only a sour taste, and nothing more. Later he understood that he was too poor emotionally to perceive real feelings [...].<sup>26</sup>

The character realizes his lack of emotional commitment by comparing his own feelings to those of the heroes in literary texts. Reading here becomes the link between feeling and writing, because it provides an insight into the emotions of others. At this point Gazdanov's link between emotions and artistry also begins.

He [...] had a lot of interests – music, painting, literature, philosophy. [...] He wanted to become a writer; it seemed to him that just this was his calling, and he kept searching for a

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26 Gazdanov 2009b: 575.

story for his first novel – only later, considerably later, he understood that under no circumstances would he become a writer, – exactly because he was looking for a story.<sup>27</sup>

His searching for a story demonstrates to Gazdanov's hero a lack of his own affections and emotional states, which would serve him as the material for artistic creation.

Not all of Gazdanov's characters end up as desperate. The poet George in the novel *Evelyn and Her Friends* is an example of an autistic savant.

This miserable and unruly insipid man obviously had a poetic talent, and more than anything in the world, he loved poetry, in which he was innately versed. [...] More than any of us, George in every poem could feel the motion of vowels, the rearrangement of accentuations and all shades of meaning. Everything that he wrote himself always seemed to me wonderful. I remembered his dark eyes becoming ardent at once and the verses he read to us in his soundless voice. Nobody who had heard him could ever forget it.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, Gazdanov does not content himself with an autistic savant for his concept of the artist. Motivated by references to the Bakhtinian ethics, where the novelist is regarded as a dialogic partner of his characters and as being responsible for them,<sup>29</sup> this novel is to be interpreted rather as an attempt to overcome autism. George is killed, and the novelist rewrites his story, developing deep feelings of empathy for this character.

Beyond this, he becomes his advocate, not only, as mentioned above, by mistrusting the legislative when his character is accused of murder, but also in conversations with the other characters, who unanimously distrust and reject George. Their antipathy is well motivated by his obvious social deficits of egocentrism, meanness, ignorance and disrespect towards others. The novelist discusses ethical questions around George and the justification for condemnation especially regarding his brother Andrej, who has directly suffered from his autistic traits, and therefore rejects him the most.

– You know, Andrej, I believe that nature has given to each of us a limited amount of feelings, outside of which we react to what happens in a considerably weaker way than one might expect. Not because we are good or bad, but because we have not enough inner fortitudes that do not suffice. [...] [W]hat does George mean to you, although he was your brother? – Yes, it is indeed strange, the whole thing has moved you more deeply than me.

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27 Ibid.: 574.

28 Gazdanov 2009a: 183.

29 Cf. e.g. Bakhtin 2002: 74-75.

– Maybe because of my sometimes disastrous strong leaning towards dark thoughts and generalisations. [...] It would be better to move away from all that as far as possible, for example to Sicily. In this respect you are right. I am going to visit you there somehow. All right?<sup>30</sup>

The novelist resolves the ambivalences around autism for his characters and for himself. Stating that emotional patterns in any case are individually different allows him to plead for tolerance towards other emotional dispositions and thus for autism, too. At the same time he experiences that empathy can be emotionally exhausting, and deduces the necessity to distance oneself at the right moment from negative emotions. In some way, keeping emotional distance means the conscious decision for non-feeling, i.e. the rapprochement towards an autistic state of non-affectedness. As a high sensibility for negative emotions, which the novelist attributes to himself, often correlates with an autistic disposition, this second part of the statement is as important for resolving the ambivalences around non-feeling as the proclamation of tolerance towards other emotional patterns. Only the ability to distance oneself allows finding the right balance between high sensibility and a disturbing emotional overload.

*Evelyn and Her Friends* is Gazdanov's last novel, in which he reconciles his ambivalent thoughts on the dependency between literature and feelings, admitting that the artist can even surpass the problem of his enclosed feelings by writing.

#### 4. THE AESTHETICS OF AUTISM AS A POLITICAL STATEMENT

Autism remains an important topic also in contemporary literature, where it is often linked to political activism. Vladimir Sorokin for example uses it for provocation, declaring himself an autistic writer. Speaking of his “innate immodesty”, he links this self-characterising statement to his personality as well as to his literary ambitions.<sup>31</sup> His artistic self-concept closely combines the notions of the author as ‘individual’, ‘innovative’, ‘intellectual’, ‘provocative’ and ‘political’. The last two of these components are obvious in his open political statements and in the undisguised political allusions in his novels. The former are more complex and subtle, considering that Sorokin’s artistic vision in the title quote of

30 Gazdanov 2009a: 349.

31 Sorokin 2013a: 360.

the interview – “I wanted to fill Russian literature with shit”<sup>32</sup> – implies not only a provocative reference to his literary ancestors in Russian literature, but – via Rabelais<sup>33</sup> – also his clear positioning as an author of world literature.

Within Sorokin’s literary oeuvre, connections to autism can be drawn on several levels. The approach to political topics in his dystopias stays distanced and rational, deducing and rejecting possible developments without pleading for one ethical point of view. Nadezhda Grigoryeva states that his *Ice Trilogy* (2002–2005), “marks the end of cardiocentric culture”. Connecting the “speaking of the heart” to eugenics by referring to the physical source of a metaphoric concept, the original mystical notions of “thought, memory, mind, soul and spirit” are destroyed in a twofold way: firstly, literally as a linguistic picture and, secondly, on the plot level as an ethical concept.<sup>34</sup> On the level of language, Sorokin’s skilful pastiche of different styles from the classics of Russian literature and postmodern self-constructed languages furthermore encourages a loss of authenticity when it comes to personal interaction, because intimate speech is thereby connected to imitation, too. This becomes especially true within emotional contexts, like the love-letters in *Blue Lard* (*Goluboe salo*, 1999) and *Telluria* (*Telluriya*, 2013), where exceedingly emotional phrases contrast with profane, sexualized content and post-human neologisms that further reinforce the impression of artificiality.<sup>35</sup>

Genre and style always imply a specific emotional perspective. For the post-human dystopia, such an emotional perspective characteristically seems to approach an autistic world view. Vera Nünning quotes a contemporary dystopia, where characters “act purely on account of conscious deliberations and logic”, i.e. according to the categories of autistic thinking. Michel Houellebecq’s oeuvre, closely connected to Sorokin’s, constitutes a further example of a post-human approach to emotions involving a distanced and analytical view by introducing intermediate layers – that is to say, clones – to original feelings in order to reflect upon them.<sup>36</sup> Sorokin and Houellebecq use both the imitation of written genres and explicit reflexion on emotions as a barely known subject as devices that effect an estrangement of feelings. Given that, usually, most corporal arousals,

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32 Sorokin 2002.

33 In this interview Sorokin’s point of reference is Antonin Artaud. Rabelais too, however, plays a major role for Sorokin’s poetics, for example in the novel *Roman* (1989). Cf. *ibid.*

34 Grigoryeva 2013: 109.

35 Sorokin 2012a: 669–693; Sorokin 2013b: 12–19.

36 Cf. Vera Nünning’s contribution in this volume.

37 Cf. Sabine Schönfellner’s contribution in this volume.

individually interpreted as feelings, remain unconscious, the examples reveal how a too detailed, rational description of corporal signs, leading to the deductive consciousness of an emotion, counteracts the perception of situative emotionality, even if the symptoms can be qualified as appropriate.

Already before Sorokin turns towards the post-human dystopia as his currently preferred genre, autism is prominently reflected in his works. Comparable to his later poetics, his early texts already reveal the author's genius for very detailed observation and its cognitive description, typical of autistic perception. In *Marina's Thirtieth Love Affair* (*Tridtsataya lyubov' Mariny*, 1984) he focuses this ability especially on social constellations. Non-feeling becomes a key category on the structural level of this novel and is therefore approached explicitly as well as more seriously than in the later contexts. Valentin, one of Marina's lovers, is a genius pianist, who elicits tremendous emotions in her not through their sexual relations but through his music.<sup>38</sup> Throughout this novel, autism constitutes the major philosophical problem that Sorokin introduces right at the beginning, where Valentin complains about his lack of feelings.

– My whole life, I have dreamt of loving somebody, [...] to be head over heels in love. Such as to agonize, to sob with passion, to turn grey out of jealousy. [...] Only one thing I cannot understand: Either it is because of our Soviet conditions that we cannot develop this feeling, or I simply haven't met the right person yet. – Maybe you have just dissipated your energies and that's the end of it? – I'm not sure about that. Here deep inside myself, – he tenderly touched his breast with his fingertips, – there is something locked up. No one has ever affected it.<sup>39</sup>

Valentin describes the typical state of non-shared feelings enclosed inside him. Still, music provides, like writing in the previous examples, a way of self-expression and of touching someone through the arts.

In this novel, Sorokin connects autism to private relationships and to the arts, but also to the political circumstances, which he blames for the coldness of individuals born into an authoritarian system. Valentin appears only in the initial scene but this opening seems to shed light on a crucial point of the plot, constructed around the non-autistic main character Marina and her meanders through various sexual relationships within the dissident milieu. Only her 'thirtieth love affair' provokes her first orgasm in a heterosexual constellation and this happens with a secretary of the communist party, while the Soviet anthem is playing on the radio.

38 Cf. Sorokin 2012b: 392-394.

39 Ibid.: 387.

– Just hurry up... I want to sleep... [...] [H]e lay down on her – heavily, hotly, kissed and immediately penetrated her – roughly and uncomfortably. [...] And the unbearable, sweet, maddening. Oh... my God... The orgasm, and what an orgasm, – in an unprecedented force and continuation. [...]

UNITED FOREVER IN FRIENDSHIP AND LABOUR

OUR MIGHTY REPUBLICS WILL EVER ENDURE.

Marina wept, her heart burst with the new, unexplainable feeling, and the words, the words... exhilarating, bright, solemn and joyous, – they are more comprehensible than ever, and directly reach her heart [...]. Marina feels that joy that for her whole life was not bestowed on her. [...] In her body sounded still the words of the marvellous song, her lips kept trembling, while the tears on her cheeks were drying. [...] Never had she felt as delighted and calm as now.<sup>40</sup>

Marina's orgasm is depicted throughout a dozen pages, portraying her tremendous emotions as a combination of bodily reactions, feelings and associations evoked by the Soviet anthem. This episode parallels the initial encounter with Valentin, where sexual actions are emphasized in order to stay disconnected from Marina's orgasmic soaring that she owes to his playing Chopin. Marina's orgasm with the secretary of the communist party brings together these two separated levels of feeling and sexual abandon. Illustrating her first acceptance of losing control, Marina's orgasm is metonymically extended to a figurative level and represents her loss of her political consciousness, i.e. an assimilation of the dissident to a patriot. Marina's enthusiasm is henceforward focused on the idea of communism, including all her feelings, needs, ideas, expectations and her whole personality.

That feelings play a major part in the liaison with the secretary of the communist party is outlined already in the scene in which he tries to seduce her, which includes not only critical remarks on her alternative lifestyle but also his claiming of her 'love' for the nation: "The skirt she loves! With dissidents she messes around! [...] You live apart from the nation, you see? This is what causes all these turbulences. You'd better be together with the nation, together. This would be easier for you and better for the nation. One has to love one's own nation, Marina. To love!"<sup>41</sup> Consequently, after her orgasm, Marina enacts this 'love' for the nation. Her feeling "delighted and calm" indicates that in this new state nothing stirs her up personally. Revolutionary activism, the reading of forbidden books, hidden in the drawer, and homosexual love represent the affec-

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40 Ibid.: 557-562.

41 Ibid.: 553.

tive content of her life so far, which she, on the spur of the moment, decides to leave behind.

Marina quietly looked at this man, who knew nothing whatsoever of WHAT he had revealed to her during the previous night. [...] [O]nly now, she felt that something was disturbing her pleasure. [...] [I]ncreasing with every movement of freedom, [Marina] withdrew the drawer from the commode. [...] The Bible, Chukovskaya, GULAG, – all this stirred up with photographs and cuttings. Marina smiled: – So it is... I have to burn... the useless past. [...] The books burst into flames. The photograph contracted, the triangular face twinkled with a repulsive grimace and disappeared forever. [...] Vika... Natasha... Nina... [...] – That's it... – whispered Marina, feeling on her face the heat of the flames.<sup>42</sup>

The personal and political passions shaping Marina's previous character are closely linked to written artefacts and pictures, preserving her feelings as a differentiated spectrum. Personal writings and photographs give proof of her attachment to friends and lovers, while books reflect her respect for cultural values – disregarded in the Soviet Union – like religion, underground literature and non-conformist political thinking. Burning these objects is reminiscent of the historical book burnings during the Inquisition and in the Third Reich, so that the act by which Marina irreversibly eliminates her passionate critical thinking and personal attachments is designated as a cruel act against cultural and social values.

As predicted by her first politically conformist orgasm, Marina's new identity is emotionally shaped by the feelings of calm and delight. "Marina delightedly cleaned the work bench, brushing away the grey swarf."<sup>43</sup> Through this and similar sentences, the final third of the novel illustrates Marina's digression. In addition to her conformist behaviour and feelings, the insights into her personal thinking gradually disappear until she, as an individual, becomes fully absorbed by the collective identity of the 'nation'. The narrator even stops calling her Marina, switching to her last name, Alekseeva.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the novel stylistically devolves into an extensive article of the central communist Russian newspaper *Pravda* and thus performatively writes the end of individual emotions.<sup>45</sup>

In view of Marina's disinterest in personalized affectivity and her untying of former attachments, this new identity shows obvious emotional affinities with

42 Sorokin Ibid.: 565-568.

43 Ibid.: 605.

44 Cf. Ibid.: 611.

45 Sorokin will revisit such a performative writing in later novels, such as to mark in *Roman* the end of language and in *Blue Lard* the end of literary culture.

autism. Still, the systematic is more complex than this, because Marina is a patriot, which proves that she *does* love and moreover has an unspecific but even very strong social attachment to the collective, i.e. to others. While the enthusiastic Marina wholly renounces her own position, the autistic Valentin, at the beginning of the novel, neither loves nor sacrifices anything of himself for others.

– And do you understand the dilemma? I am not able to love, as much as I try. And I really want to. [...] I want to! I want it instantly! You will say that love is a sacrifice in the first place, and that of a sacrifice the old snob is not capable. I am! I am ready to give everything, to spend and burn everything, if only I could truly love somebody. That's what I envy you. Really!<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to this, Marina's new affectivity might therefore be interpreted rather as misdirected than as nonexistent. Her fate sheds a new light on the critically introduced concept of autism, too, because a similar political misleading could not happen to Valentin, who is protected by his inability to love and therefore to sacrifice himself. Non-feeling is therefore also outlined positively as a basis for independence and logical deductive decision-making.

Although envying Marina's ability to love, the autistic genius anticipates her vulnerability due to her feelings. He reflects about this in terms of a discourse on art, when he qualifies her playing of Chopin as accurate, explaining this with her emotional understanding of the composer's music. Valentin's compliment includes the earnest indication that the emotional component of artistic creation has to be well tempered.

– Seriously, for Chopin you precisely strike the cord. You feel it. – Thank you. – One only mustn't fall from feelings into sentimentality, always be aware of the limit. Nowadays many aren't. Either academism, a dry typing on the typewriter, or sobbing and mawkishness. Chopin, dear Marina, in the first place was an urbane man. You have to play him with elegance.<sup>47</sup>

Within this novel, reflections on literature and music occur interchangeably and refer to the arts in general. Valentin's comment on Chopin, who had “in the first place” been an urbane man, shows that he understands arts in terms of the Russian *intelligentsia* as interconnected with integrity and nobility of feeling. His reflection on artistic techniques may also be applied to writing, where ‘dry acad-

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46 Ibid.: 388.

47 Ibid.: 391.

emism' of Marxist doctrines and 'mawkish bootlicking' in the dictated poetries of socialist realism and the writings of opportunist party officials appear closely linked.<sup>48</sup> The warning to follow neither the former nor the latter becomes clear only when Marina, infected by the national anthem, loses control over her affects and indiscriminately adopts both, forfeiting her sensitivity for the 'elegance' of emotions and the arts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The very different literary examples show that autism, love and the arts may mutually influence each other. Unexpectedly, tremendous feelings of attraction to the unattainable Tatyana lead Onegin, the convinced sceptic of love and writing, to write. For Lermontov's Pechorin, writing is a way of self-reflection and shows that even the cold dandy possesses feelings of love. In contrast, non-feeling can be reflected in writing, too, as has been exemplified by Tolstoï's Karenin and Camus' Meursault. Even though their reflection-based letters also occur in contexts that could motivate a high emotionality, the writings do not express feelings but fulfil necessities.

The novels mentioned illustrate the personal and social failure of autistic characters because of their inability to harbour affections. Gazdanov's manifold addressing of this topic becomes, especially in his late works, linked to literary writing, because not succeeding in this area would mean the worst kind of failure for his solitary but intellectual characters. The gap between two extremes elaborated in earlier texts, such as failure on the one hand and the idea of a literarily productive autistic savant on the other, can be surmounted in the author's last novel. Inspired by the Bakhtinian concept of a dialogic relation between the novelist and his characters, he claims tolerance regarding the emotional dispositions of others and illustrates his view on the arts as a medium of authentic emotions which may furthermore advance personal development.

In contrast to the outlined focus on the therapeutic character inherent in writing, politically inspired critical texts concordantly reflect on autism and writing to illustrate social deficits in society. This is true within the existentialist context, where Camus as well as Gazdanov reveal and accentuate the irrational decisions of legislative authorities by non-reflected remorseless writings of journalists and judges. A further genre that in another way appropriates the combination of autistic characters and a focus on emotional shades in writing is the dystopia.

48 Kneip 1995.

Stylistically as well as in interactions within plots about generations beyond emotions, non-feeling becomes an important indicator of a problematic development society could possibly undergo. At this point, written reflection on emotions is used also as a pastiche outlining how little is still left of humanity.

Before Sorokin commits to the post-human dystopia where feelings are reduced to an irrational object of often cruel satire, he examines them as structural categories. Connecting feeling and non-feeling to personal relationships and to the arts he outlines the irrational and potentially dangerous force of emotions that can easily be misdirected. Losing one's political consciousness by assimilation to an authoritarian system is illustrated as entailing a successive disintegration of aesthetic taste, attachment to beloved persons, empathy and one's proper identity. Sorokin thereby blames totalitarian politics for destroying the individual and at the same time sheds a new light on the non-feeling that protects his isolated autistic character Valentin from such a digression. Through performative strategies in writing and public self-performing, Sorokin allows his critical statements to go beyond literature.

Not only in his case, the reception of the texts under discussion also shows a change of public opinion on autism, where readers feel sympathy for and identification with the eccentrics of the 19th century, disapproval of or indifference to Gazdanov's apathetic characters and worship or disgust for the autistic writer Sorokin and his heroes who resemble him.

At least the Russian text examples reveal writing as a means for surpassing the gap between the feelings inside a subject and non-feeling for others. Even the passage around Karenin's formal letter to Anna, in which he does not express feelings, gives one of the rare insights into his emotional state through his reflection on his writing. The importance of building a "golden bridge for her return" shows Karenin's fear of losing Anna and thus some form of attachment to her. Such a potential of writing as a communicative medium for emotional expression that involves attachment to others is shown in a similar way as being inherent to personal and to literary writing and to artistic creation in general.

In this context, one important factor favouring emotional expression over direct interaction might be owed to the reserved characters' setting that allows them to keep their distance. An addressee usually will, like Tatyana, read the letter in the absence of its embarrassed writer and, as Karenin's reflection shows, what is more, writing allows the content to be reconsidered, which also means that the message might even not be transmitted to an addressee at all, as in the case of Pechorin's diary. Regarding literary writing and the arts, the meta-level allows Gazdanov's heroes a distant view of their own feelings, such as in the case of his autistic savants who even fully exclude personal emotions from the

writing process, which can in a similar way be stated for Valentin's piano-playing.

These reasons might seem to diminish the emotional content of writing and the arts, but on the contrary they also allow and demand the selection of what is precious and dear to be more precise. Such a personal basis allows attachments to be more exclusive and special, such as for artistic expression to concentrate on what is of prior importance and therefore to develop a higher quality, both of which are alluded to in Valentin's statement that Chopin has to be played with elegance. The impact of writing and the arts on emotional attachment seems to be closely linked to their materiality, through which they preserve what is, what was and what could be.

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# Riding Emotions

## The Motorcycle as a Vehicle of Political E/Motions in Rachel Kushner's Novel *The Flamethrowers*

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NORA BERNING

From zero to two hundred, turn right to go right.  
From two hundred to three hundred, turn left to  
go right.

Faster than three hundred, turn right to go right.

R. KUSHNER, *THE FLAMETHROWERS*, 125.

### 1. INTRODUCTION: EMOTION, LITERATURE AND MOVEMENT

Originally denoting a public disturbance in the 16th century, the word ‘emotion’ (from French *émotion*, from *émouvoir* ‘excite’ based on Latin *emovere*) has, since the 1980s, celebrated its comeback in a wide range of academic disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, medicine, neuroscience, cognitive literary theory and the arts, to name but a few. Consequently, Thomas Anz (2006) speaks – in analogy to the turns mentioned in Doris Bachmann-Medick’s seminal work *Cultural Turns* (2016) – of an “emotional turn”, which has left any number of traces in literary theory in recent years.

Emotions are at the very heart of the production and reception of literature, as one of the main functions of literature is to evoke and impart emotions.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, literature in general and travel writing in particular is predicated on the intimate link between emotion and movement. For the purpose of this paper and with a focus on the processual side of writing, I will conceive of motorcycle

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1 Cf. Winko 2003.

literature, understood as a specific type of travel literature, not as a fictional thought experiment, nor as the depiction of a certain worldview or *Weltanschauung*, but rather, following Patrick Colm Hogan, “as a human activity”,<sup>2</sup> i.e. as “something people *do*”.<sup>3</sup>

Such a processual approach to (travel) literature has the advantage that the relationship between writing, emotion and movement is foregrounded. In order to clarify this relationship it is necessary to first of all disentangle the triad of writing, emotion and movement by defining each individual notion as well as its rapport with the other two. In *Reading Fictions, Changing Minds* (2014), Vera Nünning convincingly shows in which ways fictional stories serve as a “tool for feeling”.<sup>4</sup> The cognitive value of fiction, she argues, is that it “provides a second-order representation and interpretation of emotions”.<sup>5</sup> While the capacity of fiction to change people’s minds is a topic that Claudia Hillebrandt (2011) has explored in-depth in relation to works by Kafka, Perutz and Werfel, reader-oriented studies in reception theory or empirical studies in discourse processing only give us half the picture. Hogan’s story-oriented account provides a glimpse into the complexity of the topic at hand. His argument that stories “are structured and animated by emotions”<sup>6</sup> stresses the production side of literature.

The process of writing a story is anything but a neutral endeavour. Whereas John Hayes and Linda Flower in their 1980s model of the writing process have largely ignored the role of emotions, research on the cognitive processes in writing has more and more come to attend to the subjective aspects of language production: one of the results of Alice G. Brand’s research<sup>7</sup> is that the writing process is by and large motivated by emotions. She argues that writers have an affective long-term memory in which they store past writing experiences. Emotions can have, at the same time, a facilitating and an inhibiting influence on the cognitive selection processes. They shape the emplotment and the revision processes in writing. This seems intuitively right, especially when one considers that narrative is the main format in which human beings make sense of their emotions.

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2 Hogan 2003: 3.

3 Ibid., emphasis N.B.

4 Nünning 2014: 109.

5 Ibid.: 117.

6 Hogan 2003: 5.

7 Brand 1987: 436-443.

In light of this, and taking Rachel Kushner's motorcycle narrative as an example, I argue that *The Flamethrowers* (TF)<sup>8</sup> is the result of a premediated process: The novel is premediated or prefigured in manifold ways by a number of paradigmatic scripts, scenarios and stories by which Kushner-the-author has come to learn, remember, process and share emotions. *TF* is thus formed by the author's emotions (or "emotion systems"<sup>9</sup>), which have informed her choice of specific narrative patterns. Emotions organize not only individual stories but even whole genres, as Birgit Neumann demonstrates in terms of the 18th-century sentimental travelogue.<sup>10</sup> For instance, considering the title of Laurence Sterne's 1768 travelogue, *A Sentimental Journey*, it is hardly surprising that it is primarily guided by affection. What is remarkable, however, is how closely linked the narrative portrayal of emotions is to the choice of the means of transportation. Sterne's travelogue is a particularly interesting case of "emotion work", as it powerfully associates emotions with movement. It illustrates that the ways in which stories of movement are structured depends on two things: our emotion systems and our means of motion. Sterne's work is, furthermore, evidence of the fact that emotions and means of motion are not only intimately bound up with one another but that the development of the means of transportation not only affects how people travel but also how they write about their journeys. Tim Youngs (2015) has sketched this interrelation between literature, emotion and movement in narratives of early motorcycle travel. Narrative portrayals of the experience of riding are often narratives of the self, where self-making implies emotion-making. As per Moritz Holfelder (2000), riding a motorcycle is essentially about emotion and movement.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the motorcycle is a perfect vehicle of e/motions, i.e. a driving force of intense feelings and also political themes, as I will demonstrate in this paper.

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8 All subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically in the text with page numbers in parentheses.

9 Cf. Hogan 2011: 1.

10 Cf. Neumann 2011: 155-176.

11 Motorcycle lore is based to a large extent on how different types of engines elicit different emotional states. "[T]he assumption that different motorcycle engines produce vibration different enough to be at least potentially influential in creating an emotional state is itself subject to experimental analysis." Thompson 2008: 38.

## 2. “RIDING EMOTIONS”: THE MOTORCYCLE AS A “TOOL FOR FEELING”

Just as emotions have for a long time been “perceived as part of the animal, i.e. lower, side of human nature”,<sup>12</sup> the motorcycle has always had a bad press; particularly, the portrayal of so-called ‘outlaw’ motorcycle clubs (e.g. the Hells Angels) in mainstream media is, as William L. Dulaney (2005) has shown, highly biased and predicated on stereotypes. Hollywood filmmakers were quick to perpetuate the distorted image in movies like *Wild Angels* (1966) or *Hells Angels on Wheels* (1967). In literature, too, the motorcycle serves as a metaphor for all sorts of e/motions and values: it stands simultaneously for subversion, discontent and freedom, for instance, in so-called ‘*roadlogues*’, i.e. “non-fiction road trip narratives”.<sup>13</sup>

What is striking in almost all examples of motorcycle literature is that “the emotional trip”<sup>14</sup> the rider makes and that is narrated in these texts is grounded in his or her emotional rapport with the machine, as the following example illustrates: Recounting how she was almost killed in an accident, Clare Sheridan, in *Across Europe with Satanella* (1925), writes: “I do not blame Satanella, she always seemed to me a *human thing*, full of temperament and tact.”<sup>15</sup> The anthropomorphism, i.e. the attribution of human traits, emotions and intentions to nonhuman entities, is characteristic of many motorcycle narratives. From the beginning, the genre of motorcycle literature was preoccupied with emotional selves – both human and nonhuman.

For example, the first motorcycle narrative, Victor Appleton’s *Tom Swift and His Motor-Cycle*, published in 1910, describes an emotional road trip to Albany, where Tom is supposed to deliver his father’s revolutionary turbine design plans. “Tom”, the narrator recounts, “had a natural love for machinery”, and when he saw how a man smashed his motorcycle, “it hurt him almost as much to see a piece of fine apparatus abused as it did to see an animal mistreated”.<sup>16</sup> The motorcycle, in this example, is not just a vehicle of e/motions and certain themes. Rather, it is a “tool for feeling”.<sup>17</sup> As the concept of the “semanticization of

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12 Schlaeger 1999: 9.

13 Jennings 2004: 98.

14 Potter 2013: 356.

15 Sheridan 1925: 215; emphasis N.B.

16 Appleton 2006: 16.

17 Nünning 2014: 109.

literary forms”,<sup>18</sup> suggests, narrative means of representation serve as carriers of meaning and, in this context, of e/motions.

In travel literature in general and motorcycle narratives in particular, the social relations of travel and travel narrating in the 20th and 21st centuries are almost always mediated by nonhuman objects, i.e. technologies of motion (e.g. animal, plane, ship, automobile, train). Vehicles of motion

organize the entire sensorium differently and thus affect the conditions, the focalizing range, and the position of the perceiving subject, differently connecting and disconnecting her to and from the terrain of travel, differently organizing her ways of negotiating unfamiliar territory, and differently affecting systems of behavior.<sup>19</sup>

Following from this logic, the motorcycle is a mode of thought, feeling, perception and meaning: in a nutshell, it is a vehicle of e/motions, precisely because it shapes the affective dynamics of travel and storytelling. In motorcycle narratives, the affective dynamics of travel are in profound ways about the unmaking of the borders between the human (the motorcyclist) and the nonhuman (the machine) and about the silent undoing of the borders between corporeality and technology. Kris Lackey, the author of *RoadFrames* (1997), refers to the automobile as a prosthesis, i.e. an extension of the body, because it fulfills the individual drivers’ desires. The same could be said about the motorcycle, which, ever since Donna Haraway’s (1991) cyborg theory found its way into motorcycle literature studies,<sup>20</sup> has been said to obliterate the slippery boundaries between machine and organism.

In this context, the destabilization of gendered and sexualized patterns of mobility plays a central role as well as the opening up of a political space in which identities can be reorganized *ad infinitum*. Instead of conceiving of the machine and the organism as a cyborg and likening the newly emerging hybrid to a closed identity, the connection between the two has, as of late, been theorized by Esperanza Miyake (2015), drawing on the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as a “connective union”, i.e. “as the productive process leading up to the cyborg product”.<sup>21</sup> Following Miyake, it is not so much the merging of organism and machine that scholars of motorcycle literature should pay attention to, but rather the question of how different connections create different meanings in different contexts of production.

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18 Nünning 2001: 579-580.

19 Smith 2001: 23.

20 Cf., e.g. Malone 2013.

21 Miyake 2015.

Taking Steven L. Thompson's claim that what drives the social dimensions of the motorcycle is "the actual and perceived nature of the motorcycle in motion, and the bodies thus in motion on it",<sup>22</sup> as the starting point for a reflection on gender, genre and identity in motorcycle literature, it is immediately apparent that Kushner, with her novel *TF*, revises a very masculine genre by bringing a woman, who encroaches upon two domains of masculine territory – that of the motorcycle and that of motorcycle racing – straight into the core of the narrative. The female protagonist Reno is a subject in motion through male territory. As "nomadic subject",<sup>23</sup> she resists the masculinist logic of travel, calling for a new female aesthetics of the road and for understanding movement not as linear mobility, but as transgressive and disruptive. Moving her bike, "the woman traveller assumes a place in the history of that technology of motion, even if she remains oblivious to it".<sup>24</sup> The travel narrator in Kushner's novel entices us to reimagine woman's relationship to technology and to rethink the history of the motorcycle as 'herstory' and the motorcycle itself as a political vehicle of e/motions in that story.

### **3. *THE FLAMETHROWERS, OR: THE MOTORCYCLE AS A VEHICLE OF POLITICAL E/MOTIONS***

An emotion-focused approach to motorcycle literature that starts from the assumption that the machine functions simultaneously as content and form is concerned with the construction of fictional emotions on different levels of narration. Thus, in order to provide at least a provisional answer to the question of how Kushner's narrative gives shape to the protagonist's emotional road trip, I will analyze the role of political e/motions in the conception of characters and demonstrate how affectivity is represented through events and political action. Since e/motions play a role not only on the story level but also on the discourse level, an analysis of the motorcycle as form is particularly fruitful: In *TF*, it is striking that questions of both political and gender identity are brought forth by Reno's road trip and the mode of travel, and that the discursive elements of the novel force a reflection on the close alliance between emotion, movement, politics and identity.

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22 Thompson 2008: 34.

23 Paes de Barros 2004.

24 Smith 2001: 27.

Kushner's motorcycle narrative revolves around three main characters: 'Reno' (named after a city in Nevada where she grew up), a young art school graduate who moves to New York City to become an artist, T.P. Valera, an Italian Fordist industrial magnate who founded the Valera Company, which is the premier Italian company selling motorcycles and tires, and Sandro Valera, his son. Valera is a past Italian futurist and fascist and a stand-in for Henry Ford. The fictional company can be thought of as a combination of Ducati motorcycles and Pirelli tires. When Reno moves to New York, the young working class motorcycle-riding-artist-narrator becomes infatuated with Sandro Valera, the wealthy grandson who decided to cut all ties with his family's business. Sandro is a prominent figure in New York's rising art scene of the 1970s who gives Reno access to networks of artists and galleries. He introduces her to his entourage of apolitical friends, who almost all make a living as post-minimalist artists in SoHo's empty factories.

From the very beginning of the story, the human bonds are relegated to the background, as most of the artists in Sandro's network are 'flat' characters anyway, whereas the triangular relationship, i.e. the special bond between Reno, Sandro and the Valera company, is mediated and propelled by a Fordist object – a 1977 Valera motorcycle. Reno, who has ridden motorcycles since she was fourteen and has brothers who also race and repair motorcycles, is extremely proud of her "brand-new 650 supersport" (12), which was a gift from her boyfriend. Back in those days, the model with the unmodified 650 cc twins had not yet been released and so no one in the United States but her was able to ride it. With her Moto Valera GT650, Reno heads to Bonneville Speed Week at the Salt Flats, where she was "the only woman on a motorcycle" (25). Having been interested in land speed records for a long time, Reno not only wants to set a new record, but she is also eager to capture the experience of speed.

Self-making in the narrative is implicated in an emotional road trip that has political overtones, as Reno is the only woman on the speedway. With her risk-ready attitude and her appropriation of a set of character traits and qualities traditionally viewed as masculine, Reno undermines the traditional motorcycle narrative of the "spermatic journey"<sup>25</sup> predicated upon the model of male mobility. It seems no coincidence that Kushner, like the protagonist, knows how to ride motorcycles at high speed. Writing about the experience of riding is thus also a form of writing the self; it is part of a process of self-making, in which both riding (a motorcycle) and writing (a novel about motorcycles) are politically charged in two ways: the act of "[w]riting the female body through motorcycles

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25 Leed 1991: 113.

is part of a political language<sup>26</sup> in the same way that “writing the motorcycle through the female body is part of politicising the discourse of motorcycles”,<sup>27</sup> which is arguably the case in *TF*.

Kushner’s novel is thus best understood as a counter-narrative about a female motorcyclist written by a woman, dismantling “the long-standing belief that it [the motorcycle, N.B.] is a ‘man’s machine’”.<sup>28</sup> In *TF*, the “connective union”<sup>29</sup> between the human body and the motorcycle not only destabilizes “the normative matrix of the motorcycle as masculine and the gazed upon body as feminine”,<sup>30</sup> but it depicts moreover the process of becoming as an ongoing process in which the body and the machine constantly connect, disconnect and reconnect in an infinite series of momentary encounters, movements and frictions rather than a finished product (cyborg).

I moved through the gears and into fifth. The wind pushed against me, threatening to rip my helmet off, as though I were tilting my face into a waterfall. I hit 110 on my speedometer and went low. The salt did not feel like a road. I seemed to be moving around a lot, as if I were riding on ice, and yet I had traction, a slightly loose traction that had to be taken on faith. I was going 120. Then 125. I felt alert to every granule of time. Each granule *was* time, the single pertinent image, the other moment-images, before and after, lost, unconsidered. All I knew was my hand on the throttle grip, its tingling vibration in my gloved fingers: 130, 138. (29)

Riding a Valera motorcycle, which serves as the epitome of speed, clearly entails, as this quote shows, a transformative aspect that is linked to fun factors in motion at the biochemical level. Candace B. Pert has shown that “what we experience as an emotion or a feeling is also a mechanism for activating a particular neuronal circuit – *simultaneously throughout the brain and body* – which generates a behavior involving the whole creature, with all the necessary physiological changes that behavior would require”.<sup>31</sup> In that sense, the motorcycle is literally a vehicle of e/motion, for it makes Reno “*feel* the size of this place” (30, emphasis N.B.), and yet it is not Reno herself who feels it, “but the cycle, whose tires marked its size with each turn” and she “*felt* a tenderness for them” (30).

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26 Miyake 2015.

27 Ibid.

28 Koerner 2007: 2.

29 *Sensu* Miyake 2015.

30 Malone 2013: 5.

31 Pert 1997: 145.

Reno's crash at 140 miles an hour happens at a moment of almost fatal disconnection of body and mind.

When we arrived at the crash site, I saw that I'd broken through. What seemed like endless perfect white on white was only a very thin crust of salt. Where the crust had been broken by the force of the impact, mud seeped up. I photographed all this, a Rorschach of my crash. (114)

Reno wants to come to terms with speed, with "a thing not signifying *history*, but merely a physical thing connected to a network whose very contingency signals the mutable nature of such networks"<sup>32</sup> Despite or perhaps because of the fact that the motorcycle connotes the propensity to fail for Reno from the very beginning, it has the potential for disruption in that it works against teleological closure and (narrative) progress.

Whereas the motorcycle racing passages in the novel can be interpreted as an engendered example of a political process of self-making and as a remaking of the 'history' of the motorcycle, the historical passages in the novel can be seen as a negotiation of political identities with the Valera motorcycle as a foil, and set against the backdrop of two disparate cultural contexts and time periods. Kushner projects the political tensions in 1970s Italy onto the reunion of Reno and Sandro at his family's villa on Lake Como, which culminates in a sudden U-turn on the part of Reno, leading her down an entirely different road. Her overt enthusiasm for Valera motorcycles gradually fading away, Reno's affection for Sandro is also on the brink of extinction. She realizes that his whole lifestyle is a product of the Valera motorcycle and thus ultimately of the factory workers' slave labour. If the family's villa is a metonym for Fordism and the motorcycle a metaphor for the powerful association of emotion with mobility, it becomes clear by superimposing the two strands of the novel that as a catalyst of political e/motions the machine is a highly ambivalent means of transportation. As much as it can be the multiplier of success and upward mobility, it can also be a source of downright failure and downward mobility.

Mobility has thus more than one function in the motorcycle narrative, opening up personalized and political spaces in which movement refers not so much to the number of miles travelled, but rather to the feeling of being moved. Back in New York, a city that after the 1977 blackout had a Detroit-like feel to it, Reno keeps her distance from Sandro, whom she had caught in the act in front of the Valera factory when he cheated on her with his cousin Talia. Although her emotional 'heat map' is again that of an average New York artist displaying

32 Strombeck 2015: 471; emphasis N.B.

indifference toward the end of Keynesian policies and the emergent cultural logic of post-Fordist capitalism, it would be wrong to conclude that Reno is the same person as before she had been tear-gassed and was in the march with Giani. She has regained her strength, and a corollary of her political awakening is that she finally knows where she belongs: "I was a girl on a motorcycle" (344). Never before has Reno so decidedly called herself a motorcyclist as in the final chapters of the novel. Kushner presents an emotionally stable female protagonist who has mastered the chauvinist world of the novel she is part and parcel of. When she picks up the repaired Valera motorcycle from Sandro's place and rides through the streets of New York City, she feels

separate, gliding, untouchable. A group of winos in front of a Bowery hotel gave me the thumbs-up. At a stoplight, a man in the backseat of a cab, a cigarette hanging from his lips, rolled down his window and complimented the bike. He wasn't coming on to me. He was envious. He wanted what I had like a man might want something another man has. There was a performance in riding the Moto Valera through the streets of New York that felt pure. It made the city a stage, my stage, while I was simply getting from one place to the next. Ronnie said that certain women were best viewed from the window of a speeding car, the exaggeration of their makeup and their tight clothes. But maybe women were meant to speed past, just a blur. Like China girls. Flash, and then gone. It was only a motorcycle but it felt like a mode of being. (297)

In this quote, the Valera motorcycle is framed exclusively positively: not just as a mode of transportation, nor as a symbol for exploitation and slave labour. Reno literally owns it and there is nothing in her way that could potentially change that. In contrast to the earlier chapters where the motorcycle had shifting associations, the image that stays with the reader is that of the motorcycle as a driving force or vehicle of political e/motions in the sense of feminine empowerment and identity politics.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: MOTORCYCLE “LITERATURE ON THE MOVE”**

As my reading of Kushner's novel *The Flamethrowers* (2013) has shown, there are at least three good reasons why motorcycle literature is a promising object of research for coming to terms with the complex interfaces of writing, emotion and movement. Firstly, emotions play a key role both in the production of motorcycle literature and in the narrative itself. In *TF*, the Valera motorcycle serves as “a

tool for feeling”<sup>33</sup> and, more concretely, as a vehicle of political e/motions, because it mediates political movements and shapes identities. Secondly, motorcycle literature stresses the processual side of writing, because it foregrounds such concepts as writing the self, emplotment and genre. Last but certainly not least, in highlighting the bond between the human (organism) and the nonhuman (machine), motorcycle narratives open up new vistas for emotion-focused approaches to literature that go beyond the analysis of characters, intrapersonal feelings and interaffectivity, i.e. emotions emerging from social interaction.

In *TF*, affectivity is depicted as a result of the second nervous system that links mind and body, organism and machine. Reno ‘feels’ with the Valera motorcycle. It affects the pace at which she drifts, and it also “affects the repertoire of identities available to her”.<sup>34</sup> These identities, as I have demonstrated, are “mobile identities”<sup>35</sup> that subvert the “spermatic journey”,<sup>36</sup> i.e. the masculinist logic of travel. In addition to identities, the motorcycle affects the emotional economy of the characters. The emotional make-up of the narrator shapes, for instance, what Reno knows and how she comes to know. Reno’s consciousness is a site of political and epistemological resistance. She resists the fourfold structure of parting, climax, arrival, and return. The moment that Reno gets on the motorcycle, she begins to negotiate the affective dynamics of travel and interrogates the cultural construction of femininity and her relationship to technology.

The motorcycle, furthermore, shapes Reno’s itinerary and her perception of spatiality and temporal coordinates. Ette (2003) distinguishes between five spatial figures of travel movement. These figures of the journey as a movement of understanding include the circular, the discontinuous-jumping, and the star- and pendulum-like readings. In *TF*, the spatial movement of understanding echoes the discontinuous-jumping figure. Reno’s itinerary has neither a definite starting point nor a destination. She drifts rather than travels across Italy. Digressions and transgressions are an integral element of her “emotional trip”.<sup>37</sup> One could infer a radical openness towards the future and life in general from this, which is reflected in the ending: “The answer is not coming. I have to find an arbitrary point inside the spell of waiting, the open absence, and tear myself away. Leave, with no answer. Move on to the next question” (383). These sentences imply that Reno’s meandering and drifting will continue and that there is no point of arrival, rest or closure. The hermeneutic movement of the jump, where “the linear

33 Nünning 2014: 109.

34 Smith 2001: 26.

35 Ibid.: 27.

36 Leed 1991: 113.

37 Potter 2013: 356.

mobility of the conventional road”<sup>38</sup> is disrupted, calls the narrative’s legibility into question and implies a reading that is also non-linear but not necessarily undirected.

In light of this, Kushner’s motorcycle narrative is a pertinent example of “literature on the move”. I have argued that with their reference to emotion and movement, motorcycle narratives can expand our knowledge about writing- and reading-specific aspects of motorcycle literature. The latter (i.e. reading-specific aspects), though, are beyond the scope of this paper. The nexus between the narrative construction of emotions and movement in motorcycle literature is in dire need of further research. Ette’s (2003) spatial figures of travel movement (circle, pendulum, linear journey, star, jump) are a good starting point for future research on the links between motorcycle literature, emotion and movement.

Motorcycle literature is, as the incredible rise in narratives over the last three decades has shown, a flourishing genre: whereas thirteen motorcycle narratives were published before 1974, most of which were written by men (with few exceptions such as Lady Warren’s *Through Algeria and Tunisia on a Motor-Bicycle*, (2009) [1922], Clare Sheridan’s *Across Europe with Satanella*, 1925, and Peggy Iris Thomas’ *A Ride in the Sun, or: Gasoline Gypsy*, (2012) [1954], with the release of Robert M. Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values* in 1974, the number of motorcycle narratives that have been published has exploded, with 115 works coming out between 1990 and 2015. Judging from these figures, motorcycle narratives are a lively form of expression that draws its fascination from the ways in which it moves its readers – emotionally, politically or otherwise – “with real velocity” (297).

“Like China girls. Flash, and then gone” (297).

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38 Paes de Barros 2004: 7.

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# “[...] which approximates ‘I love you’.”

## Jonathan Safran Foer’s Punctuation of Emotions

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JULIA GRILLMAYR

To tell the truth we have to trap the appearances  
with quotation marks.

HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

Denn die Welt bietet soviel Probleme an, als die Sprache Lücken, Elastizitäten, Neuschaffungsmöglichkeiten bereitstellt.

GÜNTHER ANDERS

“A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” by Jonathan Safran Foer is a short story without an actual plot. Being a *primer*, it constitutes a manual that provides a system of signs which can be applied to conversations in order to clarify the meaning and context of words, expressions and silences.

There is, e.g. □, the “silence mark”, which “signifies an absence of language”, a painful kind of silence that is caused mostly by the incapability of expressing feelings or reacting to strong emotions.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, there is the “willed silence mark” ■, which “signifies an intentional silence” and is a strategy to protect oneself and withdraw from the conversation; it is “the conversational equivalent of building a wall over which you can’t climb, through which you can’t see”.<sup>2</sup> Further, there are signs that constitute “Barely Tolerable Substitutes” for desired emotional expressions that can’t possibly be spoken out loud.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Foer 2005a: 1.

2 Ibid.

3 Cf. ibid.: 7.

The *Primer* suggests, e.g. the use of such punctuation in place of the all-time classic of unbearable phrases:



The 'severed web' is a Barely Tolerable Substitute, whose meaning approximates 'I love you,' and which can be used in place of 'I love you.' Other Barely Tolerable Substitutes include, but are not limited to:

→|←, which approximates 'I love you.'

♀□, which approximates 'I love you.'

❶, which approximates 'I love you.'

✗↗, which approximates 'I love you.'

Figure 1: *Barely Tolerable Substitutes*

The underlying principle of this sign system seems to be the insight that as soon as people communicate, there is misunderstanding and thus pain: "Familial communication always has to do with failures to communicate."<sup>4</sup> Especially when it comes to the articulation of feelings, there is necessarily something left unspoken. This inexpressible remainder calls for the help of these signs to at least "approximate" the feeling.

In the *Primer* we find descriptions of about twenty signs. Because they are created for the expression of something that cannot be put into words, they are not simply translatable but have to be explained in context: the narrator of the short story explains every sign and tries them out in dialogues with his family. In the course of the story, the signs add up and are weaved into more and more complex and long conversations. Even if there is no plot *per se*, we get to meet the inventor of the sign language and learn a lot about his family. Thus, the short story is of course more than a manual.

The quoted dialogues between the family members make explicit that the narrator, his parents and his brothers are extremely sensitive people. They are portrayed as insecure, introverted and overly thin-skinned. Thus, the proposed sign language, intended for situations in which strong emotional experiences literally leave them speechless, seems to be needed constantly.

This observation is true for the whole oeuvre of Jonathan Safran Foer.<sup>5</sup> The author states concerning "A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease": "[...] I

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4 Ibid.: 8.

5 Foer, born 1977 in Washington, is a contemporary, bestselling American writer. His first two novels *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2015) were also adapted for the screen in successful Hollywood productions.

think it [this short story] is fairly representative of my concerns as a writer: the difficulties of expression, family and love.”<sup>6</sup> If I wanted to characterise the protagonists of Foer’s books in one sentence, I would cite Ms. Schmidt, one of the protagonists in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, saying: “I spent my life learning to feel less.”<sup>7</sup> All of Foer’s protagonists feel too much and are constantly busy protecting themselves from being overwhelmed by their emotions. In this early short story we find, highly compressed, the main questions, or rather the main quest of Foer’s novels: the capability of putting the right words to things and especially to feelings.

To explore this idea, first a comparative close reading of the short story and certain passages from Foer’s novels will give insight into the fundamental problems of language that these books commonly address. Then, I will investigate the exact nature of the sign system established in “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” and, based on this insight, conclude on the utopian potential of this sign language of emotions. Consequently, this article on the one hand analyzes the motif and the role of emotional expression in Foer’s oeuvre and, on the other hand, reflects from a more general perspective upon the representation of feelings in writing and speech as a very basic problem of semiotics.<sup>8</sup>

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With *Eating Animals* (2009) he published a non-fiction book in favour of vegetarianism and with the die-cut novel *Tree of Code* (2010) an art book. In 2016 his most recent novel *Here I Am* was published.

6 Foer 2005a: viii.

7 Foer 2005b: 180.

8 In this article, I’ll not refer to a specific theory of emotions, but rather show in which way this short story itself contains a theory or at least a thesis on how our language is connected to our outer and inner life. Therefore, the terms emotion and feeling are often used colloquially and interchangeably. Nevertheless, for a basic understanding, I refer to the prominent distinction of the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, who describes emotions as unconscious, immediate and bodily reactions to certain stimuli. Feelings, on the other hand, in his definition occur when a person becomes aware of her or his emotions and can put a more general and conventional name to them. See further explanation in an interview with the *Scientific American*: “[...] for neuroscience, emotions are more or less the complex reactions the body has to certain stimuli. When we are afraid of something, our hearts begin to race, our mouths become dry, our skin turns pale and our muscles contract. This emotional reaction occurs automatically and unconsciously. Feelings occur after we become aware in our brain of such physical changes; only then do we experience the feeling of fear.” Lenzen 2013.

## DEALING WITH CONTAMINATED LANGUAGE

The name of the sign system – *Punctuation of Heart Disease* – goes back to the fact that several members of the narrator's family suffer from a weak heart: “we have forty-one heart attacks between us, and counting.”<sup>9</sup> This malady and other dangers to loved ones as well as unnamed dreadful experiences of this originally European Jewish family during World War II seem to be the source of their fearfulness and extreme sensitivity. The Holocaust as well as a more general fear of loss of love are constantly on the horizon and demand new ways of expression.

The statement that all of Foer's protagonists feel too much means that everything in the world affects them; everything comes *incredibly close*: “There was no such thing as a safe distance, then. Everything was either too close or too far.”<sup>10</sup> The main problem seems to be to find a healthy place in reference to their environment. They are not able to shield themselves and their emotional life from the outside.

It is a catastrophe that makes these people lose their “safe distance”, which manifests itself mostly in the problem of finding the right language to express emotions. One aspect of this problem is what I'd like to call the inevitable contamination of language. Two passages from Foer's oeuvre show, in a playful but very explicit way, that the insufficiency language is accused of in “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” is due to the fact that our words are contaminated with past meaning that is ever present while speaking: In *Everything Is Illuminated*, two lovers communicate through cut-up messages from articles taken from current newspapers. In order to, e.g. simply arrange a meeting, they have to go through the daily horror of the Second World War being evoked with every word.

The “M” was taken from the army that would take his mother's life: GERMAN FRONT ADVANCES ON SOVIET BORDER; the “eet” from their approaching warships: NAZI FLEET DEFEATS FRENCH AT LESACS; the “me” from the peninsula they were blue-eyeing: GERMANS SURROUND CRIMEA; the “und” from too little, too late: AMERICAN WAR FUNDS REACH ENGLAND; the “er” from the dog of dogs: HITLER RENDERS NONAGGRESSION PACT INOPERATIVE . . . and so on, and so on, each note a collage of love that could never be, and war that could.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Foer 2005a: 1.

10 Foer 2002a: 130.

11 Ibid.: 233.

In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* there is a very similar passage. Thomas Schell, who is originally from Dresden in Germany, has lost his speech in the course of World War II. He communicates only through writing; he writes phrases in little notebooks and shows the pages to people. Having fled to America and finally settling in New York, he meets a girl there from his past – Ms. Schmidt, who later becomes his wife. They have a very special but also very strange relationship, because there is always the traumatic past that casts its shadow over them. Soon after their reunion, she writes on the last page of his current notebook: “Please marry me.” Because there are no pages left to write on, Thomas Schell has to answer by flipping back and forth through the existing pages, reusing the phrases that have been written in the course of the day.

I flipped back and pointed at, “Ha ha ha!” She flipped forward and pointed at, “Please marry me.” I flipped back and pointed at, “I’m sorry, this is the smallest I’ve got.” She flipped forward and pointed at, “Please marry me.” I flipped back and pointed at, “I’m not sure, but it’s late.” She flipped forward and pointed at, “Please marry me,” and this time put her finger on “Please,” as if to hold down the page and end the conversation, or as if she were trying to push through the word and into what she really wanted to say.<sup>12</sup>

This somewhat absurd dialogue emphasizes the calamitous diagnosis that everything spoken and everything written is contaminated with unwanted past meaning. Every word and sentence has always already been contextualized and interpreted and in this sense always comes too late for what we “really wanted to say”. The only solution is to invent a new language that would, on the one hand, have a more subtle way of carrying meaning and, on the other hand, could thus subvert the old language and escape its imprints. This is what the narrator of “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” is trying to do by introducing his sign system – by means and methods that will be more closely examined later in this paper.

## WRITING VERSUS LIVING

Besides contamination, another language issue haunts the protagonists of Foer’s oeuvre. While language, and especially the practice of writing, has an unmistakably important and productive character for these people, it also occupies too much space: the text – in a figurative sense also designating reflection, self-

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12 Foer 2005b: 33.

consciousness and tradition – seems often to come between the characters and their lives; their textual practice seems to keep them from living. This aspect is closely linked to the Jewish tradition of text exegesis, as will be examined at the end of this chapter.

In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* this opposition between life and text is brought to the fore in the odd lifestyle of Thomas Schell and Ms. Schmidt. Struggling with living together, they invent a complex system of rules which they in fact map out on the blueprints of their apartment.<sup>13</sup> “Home is the place with the most rules.”<sup>14</sup> These rules, being virtually imprinted on all the surfaces of their home, create a textual layer that at first helps them to orient and root themselves in the apartment but, in the end, separates them from their home. In addition, Thomas Schell starts to take photographs of every detail of the flat: “He took pictures of everything. [...] He could have rebuilt the apartment by taping together the pictures.”<sup>15</sup> These photographs create a visual simulacrum of a home in addition to the rules, which are a textual simulation of a functioning relationship. Both are expressions of the artificiality of their living together; the text and the images are a barrier that separates the couple from a relationship dynamics that is more organically grown and based on authentic desires rather than on arrangements.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, text becomes a barrier in the most literal sense here: in the form of Thomas Schell’s *daybooks*. Using them for daily communication, they add up to hundreds of books, occupying the whole apartment.<sup>17</sup> His space-consuming way of communicating symbolizes once again the insufficiency of language to designate what ought to be expressed when it comes to feelings:

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13 Cf. ibid.: 111.

14 Ibid.: 185.

15 Foer 2005b: 175.

16 This formulation is of course problematic. My intention here is not to define one lifestyle as more authentic, natural or normal than any other. Rather, I want to shed light on the fact that this relationship is portrayed as obsessively constructed and governed necessarily by artificial rules and regulations. This again expresses the characters’ trauma of WWII.

In contrast, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* tells the story of Thomas Schell’s first love, before the war, an easy and uncomplicated relationship in the sense that there is no over-analysis and constant self-reflection.

17 “I went through a hundred of books, thousands of them, they were all over the apartment, I used them as doorstops and paperweights, I stacked them if I needed to reach something, I slid them under the legs of wobbly tables, [...]” Foer 2005b: 28.

I have so much to tell you, the problem isn’t that I’m running out of time, I’m running out of room, this book is filling up, there couldn’t be enough pages, I looked around the apartment this morning for one last time and there was writing everywhere, filling the walls and mirrors, I’d rolled up the rugs so I could write on the floors, I’d written on the windows and around the bottles of wine we were given but never drank, I wear only short sleeves, even when it’s cold, because my arms are books, too. But there’s too much to express.<sup>18</sup>

Even if everything is covered with text, something crucial always remains inexpressible. Rather, this textual layer – here literally a layer of letters – blocks the way to an uncomplicated social interaction. This insight is stressed by Oskar’s habits of writing. After the loss of his father, who died in the attacks on the World Trade Center on the 11th September 2011, the nine-year-old boy – grandson of Thomas Schell and Ms. Schmidt – starts writing application letters to various prominent scientists and rock stars in order to reassert his future plans.<sup>19</sup>

Besides this positive way of writing, which helps him to cope with the situation, he keeps a notebook entitled *Stuff That Happened to Me*.<sup>20</sup> In this scrapbook he collects articles and images from the internet that concern him. Here once again, the problem of not finding a “safe distance” to one’s surroundings expresses itself, because Oskar includes basically everything he stumbles upon, like “a shark attacking a girl, someone walking on a tightrope between the Twin Towers, that actress getting a blowjob from her normal boyfriend, a soldier getting his head cut off in Iraq [...].”<sup>21</sup> Everything he observes *happens* to him. In his scrapbook he tries to outsource the fears and pains he connects with these images and texts. This time, it is intended to create a barrier; the book should shield him from the cruelty in the world by miniaturizing and arranging it. When Oskar decides at the end of the novel that he won’t start a new volume of *Stuff That Happened to Me*, this indicates that he, in contrast to his grandparents, is ready to leave the sphere of self-reflection and over-analysis represented by the text, and to go on living.<sup>22</sup> In overcoming this obsessional everyday chronicling lies the subtle happy ending of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Oskar is finally able to draw the right conclusion from his grandmother’s insight: “You cannot protect yourself from sadness without protecting yourself from happiness.”

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18 Ibid.: 132.

19 Cf. ibid.: 11.

20 For a detailed analysis of this aspect of the novel cf. Siegel 2009.

21 Foer 2005b: 42.

22 Cf. ibid.: 325.

ness.<sup>23</sup> Writing is the characters' strategy of protection, but then again, too much text cuts them off from an untroubled, more immediate life experience.

In *Everything Is Illuminated*, this oppositional relation between text and life is brought to the fore with recourse to the Jewish tradition of text exegesis. One strand of the novel tells the story of the village Trachimbrod before the Second World War.<sup>24</sup> Foer draws a caricature of the often very detailed and strict rules of the Jewish religion, myth and tradition. He portrays Jewishness as life in an all-encompassing text that needs to be deciphered. In this image of the *book religion*, we can observe once again this double character of text: the written word is the basis of the Jewish religion; the word or name is at the origin of all creation and thus life is not only understood through text but brought into existence by it.<sup>25</sup> All the same, in practice, this text-oriented existence seems to cut off its adherents from their earthly life, as becomes clear in the following passage of *Everything Is Illuminated*.

The Well-Regarded Rabbi was exceedingly knowledgeable about the large, extra-large, and extra-extra-large matters of the Jewish faith, and was able to draw upon the most obscure and indecipherable texts to reason seemingly impossible religious quandaries, but he knew hardly anything about life itself, and for this reason, because the baby's birth had no textual precedents, [...] because the baby was about life, and was life, he found himself to be quite stuck.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Foer 2005b: 180.

24 Trachimbrod, or Trochenbrod, is a village in today's Ukraine, former Poland. In the course of WWII, the Nazis turned the shtetl into a Jewish ghetto whose population was almost completely liquidated in 1942. *Everything Is Illuminated* is fiction and does not claim to be of historical value. Still, it is clearly of autobiographical nature: Foer has undertaken a journey to Ukraine to research the history of his grandfather and the people who helped him survive the Holocaust just as in the novel the narrator called Jonathan Safran Foer does. Regarding the fictionalization of this experience, the author stated that the "novel is much more a response to my trip than a recounting of it". Cf. Foer 2002b. A historical account of Trachimbrod as well as a critique of Foer's fictionalization can be found in Ivan Katchanovski's article "NOT Everything is Illuminated". Katchanovski 2004.

25 This accounts especially for the mystical reading of the Torah by the Kabbalists, who "regarded creation itself as a linguistic phenomenon". Eco 1995: 25. In *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, Gershom Scholem gives a detailed account of this aspect of the Kabbala. Cf. Scholem 1965: 36. For a semiotic approach to this tradition cf. Assmann 2004: 718-719.

26 Foer 2002a: 21.

In a well reflected and nevertheless witty manner, Foer mingles this ontological dimension of the word as the origin of creation with a pragmatic understanding of text. Consequently, rabbinic scribes become bibliomaniac bookworms, unfit for everyday life, while in the most ordinary situations, the mystic-magical, generative dimension of text comes into play. This paradoxical and ambivalent relationship to writing and text – as barrier on the one hand and the chance of “building the world anew”<sup>27</sup> on the other – is at the core of Foer’s work. This can be proven by an analysis of the short story “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease”, as I will show in the following.

## THE NATURE OF THE SIGN SYSTEM

As with many aspects of Foer’s books, this punctuation provides more food for thought than one might think at first sight. These signs can be defined as symbolic as well as performative.<sup>28</sup> Firstly, because they are conventional: they need an agreed code to be understood. Secondly, because they can be meant as calls for action – this is the case, e.g. with the “willed silence mark”, which tries to silence the conversation partner, and also the converse, the “insistent question mark”, which wants the conversation partner to break his or her silence.

For a further examination, it is useful to explore these signs in two very different contexts: they can be compared to Egyptian hieroglyphs as well as to social media emoticons. Regarding the typeface of the short story, the contemporary reader, no doubt, thinks first and foremost of emoticons. Text-based internet communication has grown enormously in the last decade, as has the need for visual support to express emotions in chatting and text messaging.<sup>29</sup> For in-

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27 These are Thomas Schell’s words, who writes about Ms. Schmidt’s project of writing her life story: “[...] I heard from behind the door the sounds of creation, the letters pressing into the paper, the pages being pulled from the machine, everything being, for once, better than it was and as good as it could be, everything full of meaning [...].” Foer 2005b: 119-120.

28 This terminology refers to Aleida Assmann’s additions to Charles S. Pierce’s sign system. Cf. Assmann 2015: 54-56.

29 “Emoticons (a contraction of the words ‘emotional icons’) are glyphs used in computer-mediated communications, meant to represent facial expressions. When the Internet was entirely text-based, emoticons were rendered in ASCII, and read by tilting one’s head to the left, as the ‘smiley’ indicates :-). While more sophisticated methods to

stance, you might want to put :) or ;) after an ironic statement to ensure the intended interpretation. Emoticons are considered to add the information that gesture and facial expression provide in face-to-face communication; they serve as equivalents to nonverbal cues in spoken dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

Like emoticons in chat conversation, the *Punctuation of Heart Disease* adds “a paralinguistic component to a message”.<sup>31</sup> After being introduced to the system, the signs enable the reader of the short story to interpret the intonation and the silences in the quoted dialogues more accurately. However, a more thorough reading of the short story at least partly dismisses this comparison. While emoticons – in their primary, simple usage<sup>32</sup> – transmit collective and generally readable “social cues”<sup>33</sup> like a smile or a wink, the signs in Foer’s book mostly designate feelings that are very individual and have no conventional expression. Especially in the description of the “corroboration mark”, which looks exactly like a smiley, this distinction becomes obvious:

 The ‘corroboration mark’ is more or less what it looks like. But it would be a mistake to think that it simply stands in place of ‘I agree,’ or even ‘Yes.’ Witness the subtle usage in this dialogue between my mother and my father:

‘Could you add orange juice to the grocery list, but remember to get the kind with reduced acid. Also some cottage cheese. And that bacon-substitute stuff. And a few Yahrzeit candles.’



‘The car needs gas. I need tampons.’



Figure 2: *The corroboration mark*

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display emoticons exist today, their purpose has remained the same: They are used to communicate the emotional state of the author.” Senft 2003: 177.

For a useful summary of research on emoticons as well as empirical surveys cf. Derkx et al. 2007.

30 Cf. Derkx et al. 2007: 29.

31 Derkx et al. 2007: 843.

32 By stating this, I want to stress the difference between the sign system of the short story and the pragmatic usage of simple emoticons like the winking smiley. Still, I acknowledge the more and more sophisticated and subtle functions that emoticons and especially their stylized form, *emojis*, are gaining. Cf. Albert 2015: 16 (translation J.G.).

33 Derkx et al. 2007: 843.

Here, the sign adds meaning not only to the written word but to language in general. An iconic usage is suggested – the sign “is more or less what it looks like”<sup>34</sup> – but all the same, this is not a representation of a smiling person. It does not mimic the bodily reaction to emotional states, like raising the corners of the mouth, shivering or freezing. Neither does it hint at intonation, gesture or facial expression. Rather, this sign seeks to designate the feeling itself, which has not taken any visible form.

In this sense, the sign brings something into language that was not expressible before at all; it thus adds vocabulary. Bearing this in mind, the sign system of “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” can rather be compared to Egyptian hieroglyphs. In the hieroglyphic system there are signs that carry context information but have no vocal equivalent. These determinatives define, for instance, if the neighbour sign is to be read as a verb or as a noun, or, e.g. if it designates a single event or a reoccurring generality. Consequently, a written text can convey much more meaning than speech.<sup>35</sup> On this basis, the Egyptologist Jan Assmann has analysed the hieroglyphic determinatives as signs “beyond language”<sup>36</sup>. They are extraordinary because here, against our habit, the written word emancipates itself from speech.<sup>37</sup> It is rather in writing than in speaking that new meaning is created.<sup>38</sup>

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34 Foer 2005a: 5.

35 Cf. Assmann, Jan 2003: 52. In this function, hieroglyphs and emoticons can be compared, as Aleida Assmann suggests. Assmann, Aleida 2015: 99-100. For another semiotic account that draws on this comparison cf. Albert 2015: 14-15.

36 Cf. Assmann, Jan 2003: 41.

37 Even if this article cannot consider it in detail, one must mention Jacques Derrida’s *Grammatology* at this point. The French philosopher examines the relationship between the written and the spoken word and the hegemony of the latter over the former. In this respect, he discusses various thinkers’ interpretation of hieroglyphs; regarding the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he states that hieroglyphs constitute a “language of passion”: “La langue hiéroglyphique est une langue passionnée.” Derrida 1967: 337. Furthermore, in *Writing and Difference* (1967) he discusses Sigmund Freud’s reference to the hieroglyphs in his dream interpretation as well as the importance of hieroglyphs for Antonin Artaud’s understanding of theatre. Derrida’s philosophy of language is of great importance for the issue of this article, not only in regard to hieroglyphs but for a general consideration of the relationship between text and speech. A more deconstructivist account of Foer’s work and especially of this short story would be an interesting topic for another article.

38 Jan Assmann speaks in this respect of “etymography” as an equivalent to “etymology”; while the latter observes the origin and the formation of words, etymography ex-

Aleida and Jan Assmann explain the profound and timeless fascination with the hieroglyph in terms of its hybridity: “It represents a visual notion that cannot be translated into language completely.”<sup>39</sup> It thus undermines the clear distinction between *signifier* and *signified* that has dominated modern thinking.<sup>40</sup> “The hieroglyph is a holistic sign that exceeds the logic of the dualistic sign structure, including the hierarchy of values it implies.”<sup>41</sup> This is why, the hieroglyphic system has fed the imagination since its beginnings. It has been considered a material articulation of creation in opposition to a mere representation of the world.<sup>42</sup>

Comparing the punctuation to hieroglyphs, the intention of the narrator comes to the fore: his signs do not represent other, non-verbal signs – they do not, e.g. stand for a smile –, but they aim at creating new realities.

## THE SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT LANGUAGE

As already pointed out, the central issues of Foer’s protagonists are the unavoidable contamination of language with past meaning and too great a distance between word and world. These problems take place in the infamous space between the *referent*, the *signifier*, and the *signified*. It is this gap between *les mots et les choses* where the contamination takes hold, the misunderstanding happens and the distance to life is created – *the order of things* is never naturally

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amines similar metaphors of visual representation in different iconic languages, such as Hebrew script, Egyptian hieroglyphs and Japanese kanjis. Cf. Assmann, Jan 2003: 40.

- 39 “Die Hieroglyphe ist ein Zwitter: Sie verkörpert einen bildlichen Begriff, der nicht gänzlich in Sprache zu übersetzen ist.” Assmann, Aleida/Assmann, Jan 2003a: 20 (translation J.G.).
- 40 They refer to the famous dyadic semiotic model that Ferdinand de Saussure defines in his *Cours de linguistique générale* (*Course in General Linguistics*) from 1916. Following Saussure, the sign is composed of the *signifier* (the sound-image/the word) and the *signified* (the concept; the idea of what the speaker wants to express). The actual object the sign refers to he terms *referent*.
- 41 “Die Hieroglyphe ist ein holistisches Zeichen, das die Logik der dualen Zeichenstruktur samt der damit verbundenen Werthierarchie sprengt.” Assmann, Aleida/Assmann, Jan 2003b: 268 (translation J.G.).
- 42 Cf. ibid.: 269.

given to us, but always mediated through language.<sup>43</sup> “In its original form, when it was given to men by God himself, language was an absolutely certain and transparent sign for things, because it resembled them. [...] This transparency was destroyed at Babel as a punishment for men.”<sup>44</sup>

Foer’s protagonists dream the dream of a pre-Babylonian language that doesn’t have this gap, because it is primarily and naturally connected to the things it designates. However, as “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” shows, they don’t waste their time lamenting Babel. Rather they actively struggle to at least approximate this utopian, pre-Babylonian language usage – a non-representational, genuine and non-arbitrary expression: they engage in a *search for the perfect language*.<sup>45</sup>

To understand this search, we must come back to the fascination for hieroglyphs and to the hermeneutic tradition of Judaism. In *The Order of Things* Foucault hints at the particular role of Hebrew in the utopia of a perfect, original language:

There is only one language that retains a memory of that similitude, because it derives in direct descent from that first vocabulary which is now forgotten [...]. Hebrew therefore contains, as if in the form of fragments, the marks of that original name-giving. And those words pronounced by Adam as he imposed them upon the various animals have endured, in part at least, and still carry with them in their density, like an embedded fragment of silent knowledge, the unchanging properties of beings [...].<sup>46</sup>

In *Everything Is Illuminated* this primal link between language and life is a recurrent motif. For instance, there is *The Book of Antecedents*, a detailed report the villagers of Trachimbrod keep of their everyday life. At the same time, they seem to adhere to the idea that their life only comes into existence with this writing. When the narrator imagines a future report of this nature, its fatalistic context comes to the fore:

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43 In *Les Mots et les Choses (The Order of Things)* from 1966, Michel Foucault tries to grasp the relationship between words and things and how it changed in the course of history.

44 Foucault 2005 [1966]: 40.

45 *La Ricerca della Lingua Perfetta nella Cultura Europea (The Search for the Perfect Language)* is the title of Umberto Eco’s insightful book on religious, mystical and sociopolitical efforts to find or create a perfect language that bears the promise to breach the barrier of mediation and thus is envisioned to be immediate and inseparably connected to what it expresses. Cf. Eco 1995.

46 Foucault 2005 [1966]: 40.

Even the most delinquent students read *The Book of Antecedents* without skipping a word, for they knew that they too would one day inhabit its pages, that if they could only get hold of a future edition, they would be able to read of their mistakes (and perhaps avoid them), and the mistakes of their children (and ensure that they would never happen), and the outcome of future wars (and prepare for the death of loved ones).<sup>47</sup>

Especially in the Kabbalistic tradition, we find the strong belief that words bear an immediate connection to their signification and that a single letter could change the whole world.<sup>48</sup> In this view, the divine dimension of language is hidden or even lost to humans. However, since the word of God is the origin of the material world, the cosmologic meaning is still contained in the letters, even when used in an ignorant, pragmatic, everyday communicational way.

Since every letter represents a concentration of divine energy, it may be inferred from the deficiency of its present visible form that the power of severe judgment, which sets its stamp on our world, impedes the activity of the hidden lights and forces and prevents them from being fully manifested. The limitations of our life under the rule of the visible Torah show that something is missing in it which will be made good only in another state of being.<sup>49</sup>

Foer's most recent novel *Here I Am* (2016) reinforces this approach to his work: "Judaism has a special relationship with words. Giving a word to a thing is to give it life. [...] No magic. No raised hands and thunder. The articulation made it possible. It is perhaps the most powerful of all Jewish ideas: expression is generative."<sup>50</sup> This defines what has been called the "building the world anew"-aspect<sup>51</sup> of text in opposition to its being a barrier.<sup>52</sup>

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47 Foer 2002a: 196.

48 Cf. Scholem 1965: 38-39.

49 Ibid.: 80.

50 Foer 2016: 350. This can be said, once again, especially for Kabbalistic practices. Cf. Eco 1995: 31.

51 Foer 2005b: 119-120 (Cf. footnote 29 in this article).

52 *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, too, is highly interesting to read in this respect.

Even though it does not deal with this aspect of Jewish hermeneutics, the reading of signs and signals is at the core of the story. Cf. Grillmayr 2016.

## THE PUNCTUATION IN PRACTICE

That the *Punctuation of Heart Disease* wants to be one step towards the perfect language, which would have this generative power, becomes clear when thinking more thoroughly about the title of the short story. It describes itself as a *primer* introducing a *punctuation*. Taking this title seriously, it must be recognized ultimately that the sign system sketched here is of a very paradoxical nature. As has been stated for the hieroglyphic system, the additional information that it promises is produced in written language only; the icon or symbol has no equivalent in spoken language.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the system really is what it promises to be: punctuation. Equivalent to emoticons, it might help the reader of the short story to better understand the quoted dialogues. Moreover, if there were other books using these signs, this short text surely would qualify as a helpful primer.

However, only this short story draws on these specific signs and also, in the way the narrator uses and describes them, one rather gains the impression that they are intended for spoken conversations. This evidently does not make any sense, since the signs can't be communicated verbally. This paradox, which exposes this sophisticatedly described punctuation as useless, emphasizes the reading of the short story as a utopia of immediate language usage. Against the background of the Jewish tradition – that is ever present in Foer's literature – and its idea of a generative expression, it is valid to read these signs as kinds of speech acts.

While emoticons want to stimulate and increase communication, the *Punctuation of Heart Disease*, in contrast, seems rather to have the end of the conversation as a goal. Take for instance the “willed silence mark”: having called upon this sign, it should create a “wall over which you can't climb” – ideally not in a figurative sense, but literally. The narrator does not *use* “willed silence marks”, but he *inflicts* them *upon* his mother.<sup>54</sup> This is similarly the case for the converse, the expression of positive feelings; e.g. the “Barely Tolerable Substitutes” for the phrase “I love you” have the aim of transmitting the message with as little linguistic ballast as possible. In this case, the conversation ends because an understanding is reached.

Bearing in mind what has been stated about the idea of a generative dimension of hieroglyphs as well as letters in the tradition of the Kabbalah, these signs have to be considered as speech acts in a mystic-magical realm, where they

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53 With Jan Assmann, we could say the language produces meaning in an “etymographical” way. Cf. Assmann, Jan 2003: 40.

54 Foer 2005a: 1.

really could create walls, but also transmit feelings directly without any mediating role of language. This is the case, e.g. for the sign ↓, the “low point”, which is “used either in place – or for accentuation at the end – of such phrases as ‘This is terrible,’ ‘This is irremediable,’ ‘It couldn’t possibly be worse’”.<sup>55</sup> The narrator explains that the “low point” only comes in pairs in his familial communication, because the sadness it hints at is itself produced and augmented by the expression of sadness: “her sadness then makes me sad. Thus is created a ‘low-point chain’: ↓↓↓↓↓ . . . ∞.”<sup>56</sup> Another example of a speech act is ←, the sign for “backup”. It seems to allow the turning back of time, or at least its slowing down, in order to accurately comprehend and interpret what has been said by the conversation partner: “we start again at the beginning, we replay what was missed and make an effort to hear what was meant instead of what was said”.<sup>57</sup>

## CONCLUSION: WRITING THE WORLD ANEW

In conclusion, I can state that Foer’s books portray a love–hate relationship with language. They show the arbitrariness of language as a curse on the one hand and a blessing on the other: because everything we share in communication is always mediated through language, text can be considered a barrier between the speaker/the writer and life; at the same time, not only contamination and misunderstanding is created in this infamous gap between the word and the world, but also life itself. Writing bears the chance of “building the world anew”.<sup>58</sup>

“A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” can give us some leads on how to interpret Foer’s novels not only from a psychological perspective, but as a kind of laboratory in which one can approach very carefully the idea of a fundamental link between words and the world. In his reflection on the relationship between conservative religious practices and the mystical beliefs of the Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem points out that the creation of new symbols has the effect of a necessary renovation. He points out the social aspect of symbol building:

Symbols, by their very nature, are a means of expressing an experience that is in itself expressionless. But this psychological aspect is not the whole story. They also have a

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55 Ibid.: 4.

56 Ibid.: 5.

57 Ibid.: 8.

58 Foer 2005b: 119–120 (Cf. footnote 29 in this article).

function in the human community. We may indeed go so far as to say that it is one of the main functions of religious symbols to preserve the vitality of religious experience in a traditional, conservative milieu. The richness of meaning that they seem to emanate lends new life to tradition, which is always in danger of freezing into dead forms and this process continues until the symbols themselves die or change.<sup>59</sup>

This accounts also for the effort of the narrator to create symbols for a more accurate language of feelings. In the laboratory of “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease”, we are not in denial about the arbitrariness of language; however, the short story gives a taste of a kind of pre-Babylonian relation to language that is comforting. It can therefore give an understanding of what Umberto Eco calls the “consolation for the curse of Babel”:<sup>60</sup> “The story of the search for the perfect language is the story of a dream and of a series of failures. Yet that is not to say that a story of failures must itself be a failure.”<sup>61</sup> Because, concludes Eco, “[...] through examining the defects of the perfect languages, conceived in order to eliminate the defects of the natural ones, we shall end up by discovering that these natural languages of ours contain some unexpected virtues”.<sup>62</sup>

“*With writing, we have second chances*”<sup>63</sup> is the premise of Foer’s books. The “unexpected virtue” of our imperfect language is its very own creational character that is based on its arbitrariness, which makes it playful and every communicational act necessarily “full of meaning”.<sup>64</sup> These books leave us with the impression of text and life as ever entwined and at the same time ever separated – and the insight that this relationship can be hurtful as well as vital. Even if the quest of Foer’s protagonists seems to be the abolishment of language in favour of an immediate expression of their feelings, this search, which happens first and foremost through language, is the very motor of their lives. “The key itself may be lost, but an immense desire to look for it remains alive”<sup>65</sup> – and thus keeps them alive.

As has been pointed out, this love–hate relationship with language in the work of Jonathan Safran Foer is tightly linked to how he experiences Jewish text exegesis. Its hair-splitting, extremely detailed and severe dimension intensifies

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59 Scholem 1965: 22.

60 Eco 1995: 20.

61 Ibid.: 19.

62 Ibid.: 20.

63 Foer 2002a: 144.

64 Foer 2005b: 119-120.

65 Scholem writes this with regard to the mystical exegesis; “mystical exegesis, this new revelation imparted to the mystic, has the character of a key”. Scholem 1965: 12.

the impression of being caught in text while life passes by. All the same, this practice of course implies a high valuing and appreciation of text. In *Here I Am* there is a short passage considering a better translation of the word ‘Jew’ into sign language for deaf-mutes: “‘Maybe palms open like a book?’ [...] / ‘I wasn’t thinking that it was reading a book, but the book itself. The Torah, maybe. Or the Book of Life’.”<sup>66</sup>

Foer’s books are themselves love letters to literature and to the nature of literary expression that evades exact definitions and can preserve paradoxes and inconsistencies – which in the end seems to be the one and only accurate way to approximate the expression of feelings. In the hieroglyphic language there is one determinative that defines abstract notions that cannot possibly be pictured: it features a book.<sup>67</sup>

The very last sign of the *Punctuation of Heart Disease* supports this comforting, conciliatory reading that has been presented in conclusion to this article: {}, the “should-have brackets”, which “signify words that were not spoken but should have been”.<sup>68</sup>

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66 Foer 2016: 470-471.

67 Cf. Assmann, Jan 2003: 54.

68 Foer 2005a: 8.

{A child's sadness is a parent's sadness.}'  
'{A parent's sadness is a child's sadness.}'  
'← -'  
'I'm probably just tired!'  
'{I never told you this, because I thought it might hurt you, but  
in my dreams it was *you*. Not me. *You* were pulling the weeds from  
my chest.}'  
'{I want to love and be loved.}'  
:(  
:(  
:V  
:V  
:(  
:(  
:(  
'□ ↔ □ ↔ □'  
:V  
:V  
'↔OK↔'  
'■ + ■ → ■'  
:(  
'9□'  
'☒☒'  
'@□❖□◆□○□◆□○•'  
'■'  
'{I love you.}'  
'{I love you, too. So much.}'

Figure 3: *Dialogue*

Finally, the signs take over the conversation and there is hope that not all silences were actual silences, but “silence marks”, “low points”, “corroboration marks”, “Barely Tolerable Substitutes” and various “should-have brackets”. There is the hope that one can understand the other’s feelings and in turn, be understood by the other. In this sense, the “should-have brackets” are the ultimate speech act. What separates us from this genuine understanding of one another is just a little rewriting: “Of course, my sense of the should-have is unlikely to be the same as my brothers’, or my mother’s, or my father’s. Sometimes [...] I imagine their should-have versions. I sew them together into a new life, leaving out everything that actually happened and was said.”<sup>69</sup>

69 Ibid

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# **Form and Emotion in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower***

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MARIE DÜCKER

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The fifteen-year-old protagonist Charlie, who is “both happy and sad” and “still trying to figure out how that could be” in Stephen Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), finds himself in an emotional dilemma typical for adolescents and frequently presented in coming-of-age novels.<sup>1</sup> Not only is Charlie scared of starting high school but he also struggles to understand why his best friend Michael committed suicide without leaving a note for Charlie to read. Despair, sadness, self-doubt, occasional glimpses of hope and a deep longing for love are only some of the emotions dominating Charlie’s coming of age. Charlie, an underdog at his school and classified as the wallflower of his group of friends, starts letter writing over the course of one year to help him battle his fear of starting high school without having friends. His epistles record his own position within his social context as much as they establish a space in which Charlie learns to reflect critically on his role in life.<sup>2</sup> While Charlie’s epistles show a growing sense of self-reflexivity, Charlie eventually succeeds in fulfilling a number of promises he discusses in his epistles, such as attaining friendships with like-minded people at his school, growing closer to his family members, as well as falling in love with someone who cherishes him for who he is. Moreover, writing allows Charlie to remember his past of having been sexually molested by his late Aunt Helen, whom he praises as his favourite person of all time despite

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1 Chbosky 1999: 3.

2 Cf. Matos 2013: 86.

what she did to him. Thus, the epistolary form constitutes a vital tool in Charlie's learning about his identity formation and initiation into the adult world.

This essay asks how Chbosky employs the epistolary form as a means of demonstrating the protagonist's ability to assess his struggles with what he regards as his identity and self in a crucial phase of development. It will argue that Charlie's writing encourages his self-scrutiny, which helps in his understanding of how he can become more emotionally stable. Therefore, his attachment to writing letters figures as the central solution in Charlie's struggle: He succeeds in coming to terms with his repressed past of having been molested by his aunt, whom he thinks of as his best childhood friend, and ultimately learns what it means to be loved, while evolving "from a passive observer of life to an active participant".<sup>3</sup>

While the first section of this paper will focus on situating Chbosky's novel within the context of the epistolary Young Adult novel, the second section will utilize Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" in order to analyse Charlie's inner emotional upheaval. This latter section will address the cluster of promises he has constructed for himself, consisting of his hope to make friends, being able to enter a romantic relationship and accepting love, and freeing himself from letting the absent presence of his deceased aunt Helen hover over every decision he makes. Berlant's theory of "cruel optimism" focuses on affective and social belonging.<sup>4</sup> She argues that the individual forms bonds to various objects, hoping that these objects will make their fantasies a reality but which ultimately fail to do so. In *Perks*, Charlie faces a struggle in which he questions the reasons why he has been positioned into the role of the outsider, unable to express his feelings and find people to share his social life with and to ultimately attain what Berlant calls the "good life". Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" shall help in the analysis of this inner struggle of overcoming his attachment to his aunt, whose presence hinders him in attaining happiness. Her concept shall help in understanding how letter writing eventually helps Charlie succeed in coming to terms with his past and implications for his future.

## 2. CHBOSKY'S NOVEL AND EPISTOLARY FORM

When trying to determine the novel's genre, two factors need to be considered: first, the characteristics of the epistolary form and of the diary; second, the nar-

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3 Ibid.

4 Berlant 2011.

tive situation and communicative set-up implied by *Perks*. Regarding the first issue, it is central that Charlie is the only character writing the epistles. The novel thus lacks the communication character, as communication is one-sided in the novel. This begs the question as to why Charlie writes letters instead of diary entries. Regarding the second issue, the addressee of Charlie's epistles seems to be a stranger who Charlie does not know personally or, if at all, only superficially. The person's name is kept a secret and so is that of the writer, who uses 'Charlie' as his pseudonym, for he points out in his first letter that he would prefer to remain anonymous in order to be utterly candid in his writing.

## 2.1 The Epistolary Novel

Generally speaking, epistolary novels comprise a series of letters. These epistles present communication between two or more correspondents who are physically separated; hence, the letter serves "as a bridge between sender and receiver".<sup>5</sup> Altman claims that the epistolary form either draws the letter writers closer to each other or emphasizes their physical distance.<sup>6</sup> Concerning the unique form of any epistolary fiction, Altman regards their composition as an "epistolary mosaic" which evolves out of individual subunits, as each "letter retains its own unity while remaining a unit within a larger configuration".<sup>7</sup>

Despite retaining their own unity, there is a narrative continuity to be detected in the sum of the epistles comprising the epistolary novel. Narrative continuity is, according to Altman, "largely limited to novels dominated by a single correspondent".<sup>8</sup> When a single plot line starts to dominate the series of epistles, "narrative continuity frequently overrides epistolary discontinuity".<sup>9</sup> This development is seen when plot development becomes more important than identifying the narrator. When continuity is emphasized, the epistolary form limits the story to one single plot line as constituted by one letter writer and one addressee, whose letter exchange is then presented in a chronological manner.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, foregrounding the epistolary form's discontinuity can be emphasized by the instalment of various plot lines or the disruption of the temporal line. Moreover, variously coloured writing styles can emphasize the illusion of reading sets of epistles written by a number of different correspondents. The serial

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5 Altman 1982: 13.

6 Ibid.: 14-15.

7 Ibid.: 169.

8 Ibid.: 170.

9 Ibid.

10 Cf. ibid.: 169.

nature of epistles can instal cliffhangers or suspense between the epistles, which, too, contribute to the employing of discontinuity of the epistolary form.

As far as the role of the reader of the epistolary novel is concerned, he or she is given the role of the “detective-collector”, piecing together parts from the epistles to establish a certain continuity in plot that allows an understanding of the fragmentary narrative as a whole.<sup>11</sup> While the epistolary form usually serves as a means of communication between two or more physically dislocated correspondents and is thus frequently utilized to tell stories of love, it can also serve the purpose of assessing and reevaluating repressed emotions. In Saul Bellow’s 1964 epistolary novel *Herzog*, the protagonist writes to people from his past, some of whom are already dead. “Herzog’s epistolary style of free association enables him to recall his past, to bring to the conscious level repressed emotions”, Altman claims.<sup>12</sup> In Bellow’s novel, the epistle can be thought of as the “medium through which he [Herzog] resurfaces and reconstructs his past. [...] Only after the past has been conquered and classified as past can Herzog begin anew”, Altman points out.<sup>13</sup> Thus, epistolary communication does not necessarily need to take place between two correspondents in different locations. In the case of Bellow’s *Herzog*, epistolary mediation takes on the role of connecting the subconscious with the past of the protagonist. “Herzog’s abandonment of his scribbling at the end of his novel constitutes a declaration of mental stability”.<sup>14</sup>

To sum up, not only does the epistolary novel offer a narrative, but each of its subunits, the letters, do the same, and can therefore be considered separate narratives. While narrative continuity is more common in monologic epistolary works, narrative discontinuity occurs more easily when the epistolary work is of a dialogic or polylogic character, containing the epistles of two or more correspondents. The reader is given the role of the detective, who is encouraged to piece together the epistles despite possible discontinuity due to narrative and spatial distribution. While the epistolary form generally serves the purpose of communication between two or more correspondents who are separated in location, the writing of letters can, moreover, fulfil a psychotherapeutic purpose and help the writer face suppressed emotions of the past, as is the case in *Perks*, which I will further analyse later.

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11 Ibid.: 173.

12 Ibid.: 41.

13 Ibid.: 42.

14 Ibid.

## 2.2 The Epistolary Form vs. Diary Fiction

In the distinction between the epistolary form and diary fiction, a crucial facet characterizing and intrinsic to the epistolary form is the desire for exchange. "In epistolary writing the reader is called upon to respond as a writer and to contribute as such to the narrative".<sup>15</sup> Altman suggests that what distinguishes the two forms is the "existence of a real addressee", who is perceived as "other" than the writer of the epistles.<sup>16</sup> Just like Altman, Abbott is of the opinion that "letters require an *addressee* and a diary does not".<sup>17</sup> The central idea of the letter enabling a means of communication stands in stark contrast to the characteristics intrinsic to diary fiction as well as the diary novel.

The term 'diary' evokes an intensity of privacy, cloistering, isolation, that the term 'letter' does not. From our point of view, the strategic decision that the author makes is not the decision to have periodic entries in letter form or diary form, but the decision to create cumulatively the effect of a conscious thrown back on its own resources, abetted only by its pen. This effect is enabled by a proportional suppression of other writing, writing by narrators or correspondents.<sup>18</sup>

In diary fiction, Abbot claims, correspondence with other narrators is suppressed, causing the writer of the journal entries to reflect without any influence from the outside. Abbott, moreover, discusses the letter-journal strategy, or "échange unilateral". Richardson's *Pamela; or: Virtue Rewarded* of 1740 qualifies as such a letter-journal, being made up of both epistles as well as journal entries, which allow the protagonist Pamela "to reflect and improve upon her psychological well-being".<sup>19</sup>

The boundaries between the letter and diary are, however, often blurred. Fictive diaries sometimes have an addressee, which leads to the question of whether they are disqualified as diaries. "Fictive diarists commonly address their remarks to someone – friend, lover, God, the diary itself", which is the case in well-known diary novels such as Anne Frank's *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in which Anne addresses her diary as 'Kitty'; it is also the case in several Young Adult novels which entail letters to God, such as Judy Blume's *Are You There God?*

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15 Ibid.: 89.

16 Ibid.: 46.

17 Abbott 1984: 9.

18 Ibid.: 11.

19 Dale 2000: 53.

*It's Me, Margaret* (1970) or Sydney Hopkins' *Dear Mister God, This Is Anna* (1974).

Abbott, moreover, suggests that it is not only the existence or nonexistence of an addressee that distinguishes diary from epistolary fiction, but to which extent that addressee "is given an independent life and an active textual role in the work".<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the traditional correspondence novel as discussed earlier, sometimes the addressee is merely given the role of the listener. In Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), the addressee is "the silent friend, real or invented" whom fictive diarists frequently address.<sup>21</sup> Abbott points out that because the character of the addressee is constructed through Werther's words only, "he is easily conceived as Werther's other self, the solid rational self that Werther seeks to override".<sup>22</sup>

As has been shown, the epistolary form distinguishes itself from the diary in the sense that the diarist lacks the need for exchange. The diarist does not intend for his writing to be shared or commented upon. Instead, the diary serves a reflective purpose, allowing for its writer to reconsider their positioning in the diegetic reality in isolation, while the author of the letter intends for his epistles to be (usually) answered by an addressee other than himself or herself.

### **2.3 The Young Adult Epistolary Novel**

The epistolary form has been frequently employed within Young Adult fiction over the past years. Wasserman claims that "even though there seems to be more works written by, for, and about young adults in diary form, such as Anne Frank's seminal *The Diary of a Young Girl*" or Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), "there are many examples of adolescent fiction that use the epistolary style".<sup>23</sup> While novels such as John Marsden's *Letters from the Inside* (1994), Christ Crutcher's *Chinese Handcuffs* (1996), Gary Crew and Libby Harthorn's *Dear Venny, Dear Saffron* (2000), and Megan McCafferty's *Sloppy Firsts* (2001) all use the epistolary form in its traditional sense, works like Rainbow Rowell's *Attachments* (2011), Maria Semple's *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* (2012), or Lauren Myracle's "The Internet Girls trilogy", including *TTYL* (2004), *TTFN* (2006), and *L8TER, G8TER* (2008) among others, are told in emails, scripts of online chats, instant messages, snip-

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20 Abbott 1984: 10.

21 Ibid.: 11.

22 Ibid.

23 Wasserman 2003: 48.

pets from journal entries, or other web based means of communications, which mimic epistolary communication to a certain degree.

Wasserman points out that the epistolary form is a well fitted means to mirror how the protagonist “is trapped within his or her own world and within his or her own skin”.<sup>24</sup> Because adolescence marks a time in the individual’s life that is generally characterized as rocky, the “epistolary is well suited to adolescent literature, for young adult literature describes how the interior monologue can lead to constructive change”.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it is in particular the interior monologue of the protagonist that allows the reader to enter the young protagonist’s mind and diegetic reality he or she writes about in his or her epistles.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.4 *Perks* as an Epistolary Novel

In Chbosky’s novel, Charlie is the only letter writer. While an actual narrating instance is presented by the role of the narrator, “the reader has the impression that he is confronted by a personalized narrator, as opposed to direct or immediate presentation, that is, the reflection of the fictional reality in the consciousness of a character”.<sup>27</sup> As a narrator, Charlie seems personalized, as he actively discusses his daily experiences in his epistles and thus appears to be tangible as a narrating instance. Moreover, the character of Charlie inhabits the diegetic reality he writes about in his series of epistles. Thus, the novel can be classified as first-person narration in the traditional sense. As far as perspective in the novel is concerned, Charlie is the hero of the story he tells through his epistles. He provides the reader with an internal perspective of his story. The narrating and experiencing self in Chbosky’s novel can be considered almost identical. Because there is little time to reflect on his experiences, Charlie narrates from a more immediate perspective, usually composing his letters on the days the incidents he writes about happen. There is no time for maturation to take place between experiencing and narrating. Nevertheless, the novel illustrates Charlie’s maturing over time. While his individual epistles might show his inability to reflect effectively on his own person, Charlie is obviously working on improving his self-awareness: “Also, when I write letters, I spend the next two days thinking about what I figured out in my letters”.<sup>28</sup>

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24 Ibid.

25 Stringer quoted in Wasserman 2003: 48.

26 Cf. Wasserman 2003: 48-49.

27 Stanzel 1984: 48.

28 Chbosky 1999: 31.

While *Perks* fulfills most of Stanzel's prerequisites for a first-person narrative and can be considered an epistolary novel as pointed out above, the novel's structure also resembles that of a diary to a certain degree. As pointed out earlier, however, Charlie's addressee is part of the novel's diegetic world. In his series of epistles, Charlie addresses his recipient as "dear friend" and gives the reason why he chose that person to address his letters to: "I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand and didn't try to sleep with that person at that party even though you could have".<sup>29</sup> Charlie thus seems to have chosen his recipient because he thinks she or he is non-judgmental. Therefore, Charlie is not afraid to be honest in his writing. While Charlie shares not only his achievements with the addressee of his epistles but also the unpleasant truths he discovers through writing, such as remembering being molested by his aunt and realizing how lonely he is, Charlie feels inclined to keep his own identity a secret as well. Charlie points out in his first letter:

Please don't try to figure out who she is because then you might figure out who I am, and I really don't want you to do that. I will call people by different names or generic names because I don't want you to find me. [...] I just need to know that someone out there listens and understands [...].<sup>30</sup>

As far as the role of the addressee of Charlie's epistles is concerned, he or she cannot be introduced as Charlie keeps his or her identity a secret. Charlie does mention, however, that his addressee is older and more experienced than him. "Do you know what 'masturbation' is? I think you probably do because you are older than me", Charlie assumes of his addressee.<sup>31</sup> At other times, Charlie shares his most intimate thoughts, telling his addressee of his love for his friend Sam or of his sister's abortion, which "[n]ot anyone [...] not ever" can learn about, which again emphasizes the addressee as being a stranger to Charlie and his family.<sup>32</sup> Even though the reader of Chbosky's novel is given little information about the anonymous recipient of Charlie's epistles, we do know that Charlie sends them off and thus experiences a sense of closure. In one of his epistles he writes, "I knew that if I didn't put it in a mailbox that I couldn't get it back from, I would never mail the letter".<sup>33</sup> Wasserman claims that "Charlie needs to feel as though someone is listening to him, and these letters are his

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29 Ibid.: 3.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.: 23.

32 Ibid.: 125.

33 Ibid.: 98.

chosen medium for being heard".<sup>34</sup> The addressee offers his presence in the form of mute responsiveness by "listening" to what Charlie has to say.<sup>35</sup>

To conclude, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* can be classified as an epistolary novel rather than a diary novel for the following reasons: despite lacking a need for exchange, Charlie sends off the epistles, which provides closure and at the same time suggests that his addressee is a real person whose address Charlie has. By sending them off, Charlie is given the impression that he is heard and has made the friend he lacks in real life in the recipient of his epistles. I claim that the epistolary form seems to have been chosen carefully in that it makes clear the message that the act of writing functions as a means of accepting the past Charlie has struggled to come to terms with. Only during the course of the novel does he find a real-life listener in his friends Patrick and Sam. This realization would not have been possible if Charlie wrote down his fears, wishes, hopes, and dreams in a diary without having to trust that there are people like his addressee who are, according to Charlie, genuinely good people willing to listen to what he has to share.

### 3. CRUEL OPTIMISM

Charlie, a loner and outsider at his new school, observes instead participates in social events and is deeply hurt by the fact that his best friend, Michael, commits suicide without leaving a note for Charlie to explain this atrocious act. Only through writing does Charlie gradually regain emotional stability. Moreover, Charlie hopes not only to come to terms with his past, but also to fulfil a number of promises he has made to himself which he thinks will help him to eventually attain happiness, such as crafting a closer bond with his family, making new friends, as well as improving his writing and language skills. Repeatedly, he refers to his dead Aunt Helen, who, he claims, was the only person to ever love him unconditionally: "My Aunt Helen was my favorite person in the whole world", he says of her.<sup>36</sup> However, his attachment to his aunt, for whose death he blames himself – she died in a car accident when about to buy Charlie's birthday present – keeps him from obtaining a level of mental stability that would allow him to have hope for his future and trust in reaching the goals he has set for himself. Reading Charlie's emotional struggle of suppressing the memory of his

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34 Wasserman 2003: 50.

35 Cf. Johnson 1986: 30.

36 Chbosky 1999: 6.

unhealthy relationship with and distorted image of his aunt through Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism", offers the possibility of contextualizing Charlie's journey over the span of a year in which he writes to his "dear friend", eventually remembering having been molested as a child and finding closure with his past. As he lets go of allowing his aunt's legacy to control his everyday life, he ultimately forgives her and understands that she is only one of the people who have made him the person he is by the end of the novel.

### **Gaining a Sense of Self**

Berlant claims that "all attachments are optimistic"<sup>37</sup> So are Charlie's, as he is sure that letter writing will help him in his personal development. The catch is that people tend to be attached to attaining something that turns out to be an obstacle to personal fulfilment. Instead of attaining a single object, whether it may be tangible or intangible, it is much rather a cluster of promises "we want someone or something make to us and make possible for us".<sup>38</sup> Only when those expectations are fulfilled does an individual consider himself or herself capable of being happy and attaining the so-called "good life". While Berlant does not define this idea of the good life, she claims that, for many, it turns into a "bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it".<sup>39</sup> Charlie hopes to be able to live his own idea of the good life once he has fulfilled the following promises comprising his own personal cluster.

First, Charlie's aim is to acquire a group of like-minded people with whom he can share his life. "It would be very nice to have a friend again. I would like that even more than a date", Charlie writes.<sup>40</sup> Second, Charlie repeatedly mentions how he wishes to be closer to his family members. Just as in school, Charlie embodies the role of the outsider in his family. When his best friend Sam tells Charlie she loves him, he writes, "it was the third time since my Aunt Helen died that I heard it from anyone", which also suggests that he urges to hear such affirmations in the social space of his family.<sup>41</sup> Third, Charlie longs to find love and enter a romantic relationship with Sam. He is, however, hindered from being with her, as his memory of being molested by his aunt when Sam touches him in a sexual way stops him from enjoying it. Cruel optimism can in this discussion

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37 Berlant 2011: 23.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.: 27.

40 Chbosky 1999: 23.

41 Ibid.: 69.

be thought of as a “model for encountering scenes where object loss appears to entail the loss of an entire world and therefore a loss of confidence about how to live on, even at the microlevel of bodily comportment”.<sup>42</sup> Letting go of the memory of his aunt in the setting of a sexual encounter would allow Charlie to be with Sam and freely live his sexuality. Because his aunt is the only one who has ever hugged Charlie throughout his childhood, he clings to the memory of her: “Sam then gave me a hug, and it was strange because my family doesn’t hug a lot except my Aunt Helen”.<sup>43</sup> Fourth, Charlie wishes to turn his passion for writing into a profession one day. Through writing additional assignments for his English class teacher, Bill, Charlie develops a love for writing outside the space of his series of letters and his style gradually develops from being descriptive to lively.

Charlie’s inability to detach himself from letting his memory of his aunt influence his daily life is also due to Charlie blaming himself for his aunt’s death: “And I know that my aunt Helen would still be alive today if she just bought me one present like everybody else. I miss her terribly”.<sup>44</sup> That feeling of guilt keeps Charlie from letting go of his past and his memories of Aunt Helen. “[A] poetics of attachment always involves some splitting off of the *story* I can tell about wanting to be near x (as though x has autonomous qualities) from the *activity* of the emotional habitus I have constructed, as a function of having x in my life”, explains Berlant.<sup>45</sup> In the novel, x is embodied by Charlie’s memories of his aunt. Having constructed a habituated emotional reality around his belief that his aunt was the only person to ever love him, Charlie keeps her memory in close proximity in his mind and is thus unable to detach himself from the memories he has of her, nor from feeling responsible for her death.

In the course of writing his epistles, however, Charlie realizes that there is no vast change when he attains some of his goals. Berlant offers the following explanation for why optimism turns cruel: “optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation” an individual is hoping to attain by reaching a certain goal.<sup>46</sup> As far as his cluster of promises is concerned, Charlie does succeed in acquiring a group of people around him whom he feels comfortable with and enjoys being around. Moreover, he notices that they care about him, too, in the way his aunt did. As far as his hope of feeling closer to his parents and sib-

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42 Berlant 2011: 16.

43 Chbosky 1999: 24.

44 Ibid.: 98.

45 Berlant 2011: 25.

46 Ibid.: 2.

lings is concerned, he does mention that his relationship with his sister in particular progresses over time. Towards the end of the novel he mentions how much he loves his sister, who has hugged him twice that day: "Two in one day! I really do love my sister. Especially when she's nice", he tells his addressee.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, he enters a relationship with Sam, who makes Charlie believe that he does matter and is in fact loveable. The reader does not learn whether or not he succeeds in becoming a writer, as the novel ends when Charlie is still a teenager.

In the epilogue of the novel, Charlie has a central realization, understanding how he has come to terms with living, with what Berlant discusses as a life shaped by crisis at all times.<sup>48</sup> After suffering from a nervous breakdown before having sex with Sam and slowly but surely remembering his aunt molesting him, "Charlie begins to come to grips with his repressed past, and he proposes to move on and change the direction of his life".<sup>49</sup> "When I fell asleep, I had this dream. My brother and my sister and I were watching television with my Aunt Helen. Everything was in slow motion. The sound was thick. And she was doing what Sam was doing. That's when I woke up. And I didn't know what the hell was going on."<sup>50</sup> Despite remembering that he was sexually abused as a child, Charlie is not defeated by his realization about his Aunt Helen, as indicated when he comes to the following conclusion:

It's like if I blamed my aunt Helen, I would have to blame her dad for hitting her and the friend of the family that fooled around with her when she was little. And the person that fooled around with him. [...] I'm not the way I am because of what I dreamt and remembered about my aunt Helen. That's what I figured out when things got quiet.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to understanding that it is not Aunt Helen's fault that he has had trouble fitting in and finding people like his aunt who express their love towards him, Charlie comments on having been unaware of other people's struggles influencing the attaining of their own happiness, as he was too focused on his own problems. Despite feeling unable to accept the love he has been given by the people around him, such as Sam, his outlook sounds positive and optimistic: "So, I guess we are who we are for a lot of reasons. And maybe we'll never know most of them. But even if we don't have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there. We can still do things.

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47 Chbosky 1999: 184.

48 Berlant 2011: 57.

49 Matos 2013: 94.

50 Chbosky 1999: 218.

51 Ibid.: 228.

And we can try to feel okay about them.”<sup>52</sup> That realization proves that Charlie has matured in the course of the novel and has gained an understanding of his surroundings, which has been primarily made possible through the act of writing. Berlant offers the following explanation, which also applies to Charlie's realization:

Even when it turns out to involve a cruel relation, it would be wrong to see optimism's negativity as a symptom of an error, a perversion, damage, or dark truth: optimism is, instead, a scene of negotiated sustenance that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently.<sup>53</sup>

Having suppressed the memory of his aunt molesting him as a child ultimately does not cause Charlie to lose hope altogether. Cruel optimism can, according to Berlant, be thought of as a “mode of lived immanence” by people who “ride the wave of the system of attachment that they are used to, to syncopate with it, or to be held in a relation of reciprocity, reconciliation, or resignation that does not mean defeat by it”.<sup>54</sup> Because he has become so accustomed to clinging to his aunt's memory, he is only able to detach himself when the shocking moment of remembering her sexual touching takes place and reveals the true nature of the relationship between himself and his aunt. In Charlie's journey of letting go of his past and disregarding the fact that he has been molested, the character of Aunt Helen takes on the role of Berlant's “powerful mute placeholder”, who is “a silent, affectively present but physically displaced interlocutor”, whose “convenient absence” has prevented Charlie from living the life he so desperately longs to live.<sup>55</sup> However, having reflected on the role of his aunt in his life, Charlie's conclusion proves the maturation he has experienced through addressing his personal development. Enduring that critical stage of learning about what his aunt did to him as well as surviving his first year of high school, which, as stated in his first letter, he was so afraid of, has made the flourishing of Charlie's new friendships and relationship with Sam possible. As Berlant sums up: “Any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance of something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it.”<sup>56</sup> In the end, Charlie tells his addressee of his unconditional

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52 Ibid.

53 Berlant 2011: 14.

54 Ibid.: 28.

55 Ibid.: 25-26.

56 Chbosky 1999: 48.

love for his aunt, whose memory is discussed as powerful enough for Charlie to keep a magnetized attachment to. He forgives his aunt for what she did to him, as she is only *one* of the people who has made him the person he has become when he closes his last letter.

With aborting letter writing, Charlie furthermore lets go of the fear that made him start writing to his “dear friend” in the beginning of the novel: “And believe it or not, I’m really not that afraid of going”, he says about starting his next year of school in the epilogue.<sup>57</sup> By that point, Charlie seems to have understood that the ordinary is “an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on”.<sup>58</sup> “It is through the reflection in his letters, however, that Charlie finally comes to recognize that no one can live his life for him”, Wasserman suggests.<sup>59</sup> “I think the idea is that every person has to live for his or her own life and then make the choice to share it with other people”, Charlie concludes in one of his letters.<sup>60</sup> In his last epistle he writes the following: “So, if this does end up being my last letter, please believe that things are good with me, and even when they’re not, they will be soon enough. And I will believe the same about you.”<sup>61</sup> Optimistic and having found the ability to believe in his ability to face his life from now on by himself, he lets go of writing to his “dear friend” and signs off ready to accept whatever the future might bring.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The novel ends with the climactic reawakening of Charlie’s repressed past, with Charlie finally understanding why he has struggled with being the outsider and wallflower he has been characterized as throughout the novel. Matos claims that such moments of insight are a prominent characteristic of the Bildungsroman or coming-of-age novel. It is when “[the protagonist] feels a responsibility for change of heart and conduct” that characterizes the young hero’s journey coming to an end.<sup>62</sup> The burden of his past is lifted from Charlie in a time that could be characterized as an impasse. While writing about having stayed at a mental insti-

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57 Ibid.: 231.

58 Berlant 2011: 8.

59 Wasserman 2003: 51.

60 Chbosky 1999: 169.

61 Ibid.: 231.

62 Buckley quoted in Matos 2013: 94.

tution for a while, Charlie's last letter can be, according to Matos, thought of as the most emotionally charged in his series of epistles.<sup>63</sup> "A substantive change of heart [...] does not generate on its own the better good life, though, and never without an equally threatening experience of loss", Berlant points out.<sup>64</sup> Clinging to his memory of his aunt is what ultimately kept Charlie from enjoying his life as a teenager, actively engaging in the social spheres he is part of. As the cruel notion of failing to understand why he feels so out of place outweighs his optimism for the greater part of his series of epistles, his clinging to his past is what Berlant discusses as the "survival scenario" that was the problem keeping him from attaining happiness in the first place.<sup>65</sup> By accepting this, while he is shaped by his suppressed childhood memories of his aunt, he understands that it is his choice to decide where to go from there, letting go of his past and having "the power to steer his life in another direction if he so desires".<sup>66</sup>

Eventually, the emotional sphere of the optimistic overshadows the cruel in Charlie's journey, characterizing his development as a shift typical for the coming-of-age novel. Matos claims that the passage of Charlie's realization as commented on above "marks a moment in which Charlie develops an awareness of his own *Bildung* [sic!] process".<sup>67</sup> This affirmative ending, a typical characteristic of the Young Adult novel, is made possible through Charlie's attachment to writing, which aids in the regaining of his emotional stability as well as his understanding of why he is both happy and sad, as he wonders in his first letter. The epistolary form serves as a crucial means of illustrating Charlie's personal growth and transformation from his point of view, which is only made possible through his continuous writing as well as reflecting on that writing and the effect it has had on him as a person. Charlie aborts his attachment to letter writing because he is no longer afraid to face his fears. While he claims that he is motivated to start writing out of fear of what his first year of high school will bring in his first letter, some of his wishes from his cluster of promises have been fulfilled: for instance, he has found the listener he lacks in his first letter in his group of friends. He affirms to the recipient of his epistles that even though he might not be where he wants to be just yet, he is optimistic that his development and growing sense of self-understanding will aid him in continuing his journey of selfhood.

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63 Matos 2013: 95.

64 Berlant 2011: 48.

65 Ibid.: 49.

66 Matos 2013: 95.

67 Ibid.: 96.

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# **The Intermediality of Emotion**

## Representations of Emotionality and Fear in YouTube Vlogs and Beyond

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SILKE JANDL

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Showing emotions is a core component of successful YouTube vloggers' careers. The overt expression of emotions, i.e. emotionality that suggests to viewers that the expression of emotion is an outburst of authentic feelings, is a precondition for the intricate relationships viewers develop with YouTubers. Thus, conveying genuineness in displaying emotions in vlogs is a highly effective tool. Emotionality regarded as genuine in YouTube vlogs elicits higher view counts and generates an increased number of sympathetic as well as accusatory comments. Appreciative as well as derogatory comments ultimately translate into financial gain; this is especially the case on channels that normally produce content that is not centred on emotional outbursts. Perceived emotional authenticity aids in the fostering of loyal fanbases that are keen on consuming their content as well as building communities. The communities centred around YouTube personalities are often based on the emotionality that is frequently implied in vlogs, and as David Matsumoto claims, emotional expressions are fundamental building blocks of social interaction.<sup>1</sup> Even though bursts of emotion "[...]" are often produced in a spontaneous and unintentional fashion, sometimes defying efforts of expression control or emotion regulations, they can be produced intentionally and strategically, often with the aim of bestowing greater

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1 Matsumoto 2009: 175-176.

authenticity or naturalness to one's emotional display".<sup>2</sup> Encouraging the notion of authenticity certainly is of key importance and can determine a YouTube vlogger's professional success. However, the debate about whether or not emotions presented in a YouTube video are "authentic" or staged can already lead to the viral success of a video. Chris Crocker, for example, who became a meme after uploading an exceptionally emotional video defending Britney Spears,<sup>3</sup> gained fame and notoriety and continues to generate the ongoing interest of notable news outlets<sup>4</sup> following the viral and controversial success of his video.

Given the importance of displaying and/or eliciting emotions in building an online audience, I will investigate two separate areas of emotion(ality) in order to give an insight into the complexity of the issue in two interconnected media: YouTube videos and YouTuber books. Firstly, I will examine the emotions and emotionality linked to coming out publicly to an established audience on YouTube. Emotionality, as I will use the term in connection to coming out processes, refers to the overt expression of one or more "higher cognitive emotions".<sup>5</sup> Higher cognitive emotions, as outlined by Paul E. Griffiths, include, for example nervousness, embarrassment, pride, shame and excitement. As an illustration of how these emotions are depicted in vlog and book form, I will have a closer look at YouTuber Connor Franta. So called "basic" emotions, however, and how they are handled intermedially compared to higher cognitive emotions will be examined in a second focus, namely, on the specific basic emotion of fear. This will be illustrated with an analysis of British YouTubers' *The Amazing Book is Not on Fire: The World of Dan and Phil* and Jenn McAllister's *Really Professional Internet Person*, as well as their respective audiobooks. Distinguishing between higher cognitive emotions and basic emotions is of course only one attempt at better understanding emotions. When writing about emotions, the examples discussed below show that both kinds of emotion transform somewhat when transposed from the audiovisual to the written medium. Discussing basic emotions in written text, however, seems to invite plurimedial representations to a significantly greater extent than writing about higher cognitive emotions.

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2 Scherer 2009: 11.

3 Chris Crocker closed his YouTube account in 2015; however, a re-upload of the "Leave Britney Alone" video is still available on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqSTXuJeTks> (30.01.2016).

4 Cf. for example, the *Daily Mail*'s article from February 23, 2016 (Jackson-Edwards 2016); or the *Independent*'s article published a day later (Blair 2016).

5 Griffiths 2004: 237.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The intermediality of emotions and emotionality in YouTube videos and in the books that YouTubers have published in 2015 will be tackled. Since late 2014, there has been a wave of YouTuber book publications that still continues. Significantly, almost all of the books written by “Big YouTubers”<sup>6</sup> have become instant bestsellers, nationally as well as internationally. Broadly defined, the theory of intermediality is used in contexts where the boundaries between two or more conventionally distinct media are transgressed.<sup>7</sup> In Werner Wolf’s typology of intermediality, he distinguishes between several forms of either intracompositional or extracompositional intermediality. Adaptation, or “intermedial transposition”, a form of extracompositional intermediality that deals with the transfer of meaning-making elements between media, will be a primary focus in the discussion below. “Plurimediality”, on the other hand, is a form of intracompositional intermediality and allows the examination of the interactive meaning making of several media within a video or book. Plurimediality has been termed differently by various scholars: e.g. media combination by Irina O. Rajewsky or multimodality by Lars Elleström. These terms all denote a media artefact that combines two or more semiotic systems to make meaning. Both intermedial transposition and plurimediality are integral parts of virtually all book publications by YouTubers and therefore warrant closer inspection. This tendency, furthermore, begs the question as to whether the visual design and the written text have equal capacity for meaning-making in contemporary book publications and whether authors will increasingly be required to consider paratextual elements when writing books.

The YouTuber books that will be of interest for this paper are primarily works of autobiographical non-fiction. Rather than independent artefacts, I argue that these books are adaptations, or intermedial transpositions, of the respective writer’s YouTube channel. In some cases, chapters in these books are in fact directly adapted from individual videos.<sup>8</sup> The omnipresence of adaptations that Linda Hutcheon sees in the contemporary cultural landscape, and which she asserts is “increasing steadily in numbers”, seems to be especially pertinent in the YouTuber book context and might well have to do with YouTube establish-

6 “Big YouTubers” are the best known, most visible, most influential because of their large number of subscribers, as opposed to the vast majority of creators with a mid-range subscriber base but more tightly knit community.

7 Cf. Rajewsky 2002 and Wolf 2011.

8 Cf. Franta 2015: 206-208.

ing itself as a new medium.<sup>9</sup> The new media that have evolved recently, Hutchesson argues, “have clearly fuelled an enormous demand for all kinds of stories.”<sup>10</sup> YouTube, and especially the vlog, have accordingly fuelled the need to tell and consume highly personal stories in particular.

A YouTuber’s main channel is typically intricately linked with their book in terms of content, style, narrative voice and aesthetics. While YouTubers’ channels or books can stand alone, the books’ content and success depend to some extent on the respective YouTube channel. Thus, the books YouTubers have published recently are perhaps best described as examples of transmedia storytelling. This concept, as popularized by Henry Jenkins, studies how narratives can be told via more than one medium and “[...] transmedia storytelling has been celebrated by media scholars as a narrative model that promotes collaborative authorship and participatory spectatorship”.<sup>11</sup> While transmedia storytelling in Jenkins’ sense<sup>12</sup> disperses parts of a story across several media platforms, with no hierarchy between the media, it seems more appropriate to look at YouTubers’ books as transmedia expansions, a branch of transmedia storytelling. Henry Jenkins emphasises the role of transmedia expansions when he says that “[t]he current configuration of the entertainment industry makes transmedia expansion an economic imperative [...].”<sup>13</sup> Even though the books are for the most part effective publications in their own right, the frequent implicit and explicit inter-medial references to YouTube videos and the writers’ channels, as well as numerous “insider jokes” that have been established between vlogger and audience over the years, essentially make the books transmedia expansions of the YouTube channels they have grown out of. These non-fictional books can, thus, be seen as examples of this understanding of transmedia storytelling, as they also expand the personality brands that YouTubers have been building over the years through their videos (e.g. by trying to keep in tone with the videos and providing more – and frequently intimate stories – that have not yet been discussed on YouTube).

Given that portraying emotion(ality) is a central element in conveying authenticity in YouTube vlogs, it will be of interest to explore how emotion transcends media boundaries. Are emotions at the core of YouTubers’ book publications? Can the portrayal of emotionality translate into the written medium? Has the discussion of emotionality the potential to elicit the perception

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9 Cf. Hutcheon 2006: 4.

10 Ibid.

11 Scott 2013: 101.

12 As outlined in Jenkins 2006: *Convergence Culture*.

13 Jenkins 2007: “Transmedia Storytelling 101”.

of authenticity? In order to investigate these questions, I will be looking at anglophone YouTubers who vlog on a regular basis, and who have published an – at least partly – autobiographical non-fiction book in 2015.

### 3. YOUTUBERS COMING OUT: CONNOR FRANTA

2015 saw numerous “Big YouTubers” discussing their sexuality and coming out to their millions of subscribers. Since potential repercussions of coming out remain problematic, the stakes of doing so publicly are high. This, in turn, frequently results in an array of emotions being overtly shown on screen when a YouTuber comes out to their audience. Therefore, the emotionality depicted in coming out videos will be examined and compared to that in the book chapters on the topic, in order to illustrate how YouTubers present a myriad of emotions in either medium. This will be done by having a closer look at the example of American YouTuber Connor Franta.

Coming out videos have been an integral part of YouTube almost since its inception. This development has significantly increased recently, as was pointed out on the official YouTube blog in February 2015:

Coming out videos are a large and important part of YouTube culture: there are more than 36,000 videos related to the subject on the platform today, the sum of which have received more than 300m views. Last year alone, we saw ~9,600 coming out stories shared on YouTube – a 20% increase from the year before.<sup>14</sup>

Coming out on YouTube is extremely popular, as the number of views and comment responses clearly demonstrate, which consequently makes these videos financially lucrative. The obvious popularity of coming out videos has given rise to a rather problematic trend as well: gay-baiting. Especially around the time several Big YouTubers came out on the platform, others sought to emulate their success by insinuating, via misleading titles and suggestive thumbnails, that their videos might also reveal details about their own potentially non-hetero sexuality. Despite the increased attention and the financial benefits a coming out video promises, coming out publicly on the platform often entails a negative impact on the safety of YouTubers. Not only do openly gay YouTubers receive a larger number of negative, homophobic and offensive comments, but they often also

14 Lanning 2015: *YouTube Trends Blogspot*.

have to deal with an increased number of threats.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, those who have come out on YouTube usually describe the positive reactions they received, the affirmations of support and the gratitude of those who feel heard and represented because of the video. Joey Graceffa, for example, claimed that 99% of the comments on his coming out music video were positive and even encouraged anybody who needed support to turn to the comment section on either his coming out music video or his vlog.<sup>16</sup> However, the gender divide that most definitely exists on YouTube seems to favour male gay YouTubers over female gay YouTubers in this respect. As YouTube user MimiKitty Art observed in a comment on Franta's "Coming out" video:<sup>17</sup>

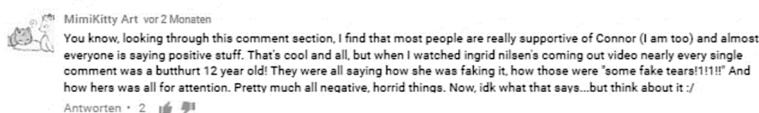


Figure 1: Screenshot of comment on Franta's "Coming out" video

Even if the comments are overwhelmingly positive and supportive, coming out publicly is always an emotional endeavour. The emotionality of the process is clearly discernible in Connor Franta's "Coming out" video. Connor Franta has been a YouTube vlogger since 2010. In five years of sharing personal stories and anecdotes about his life, however, Franta has only once addressed his sexuality. Because of the numerous accusatory and derogatory comments suggesting he was gay, in 2011 Franta uploaded a rather defensive video claiming, as the title said, "I'm not gay".<sup>18</sup> Only in December 2014 did Franta<sup>19</sup> come out to his more than 5 million subscribers. The video has since garnered well over 11 million views and seems to have encouraged other creators of the YouTube community to also come out to their audiences. In April 2015 he published his autobiograph-

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15 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afaNnZKe2ZU> (2:24) (31.01.2017).

16 Graceffa, Joey 2015a: "Don't Wait" and Graceffa 2015b: "YES I'M GAY".

17 "You know, looking through this comment section, I find that most people are really supportive of Connor (I am too) and almost everyone is saying positive stuff. That's cool and all, but when I watched ingrid nilsen's coming out video nearly every single comment was a butthurt 12 year old! They were all saying how she was faking it, how those were 'some fake tears !!!!' And how hers was all for attention. Pretty much all negative, horrid things. Now, idk what that says.... But think about it :?".

18 Franta 2012: "I'm not gay".

19 Franta 2014: "Coming Out".

ical book *A Work in Progress: A Memoir* in which Franta specifically discusses his coming out story.

The video “Coming out” and the book chapter “The Long Road to Me” basically relate the same situation and circumstances. Even though the coming out video preceded the book publication by several months, it is likely that the discussion of Franta’s coming out in both media was conceived almost simultaneously. This is highlighted especially if the temporal delay resulting from editing, revising, printing and distributing books is compared to the virtual immediacy of uploading videos to YouTube.

Despite the very clear similarities in content, medium specific affordances and limits certainly contribute to significant differences between the video and the chapter. One consequential difference between a vlog, which is presented as unscripted, spontaneous and immediate, and a published book, which is by necessity scripted and carefully planned out, is the level of sophistication. While elliptic sentences and mistakes are a common and accepted feature of vlogs, there is an expectation for published books to be more complex and to avoid including any orthographic errors. This increase in complexity can, for example, manifest in the inclusion of metaphoric language, as the following juxtaposition of a scene relating the confusion and anxiety triggered by unresolved issues with homosexuality shows:

“Coming out”	<i>A Work in Progress</i>
“I was up all night, for I can’t tell you how many nights, just thinking. Like looking at the ceiling, just thinking about this. And I was so scared of it, that I never told anybody.”	“Sleepless nights became frequent, and would carry on for years. I cast all my confusion up to the ceiling, staring, wide awake. Worse than that, the self-judgement and self-hatred kicked in for daring to think such taboo things.” <sup>20</sup>

As can clearly be seen, the same content is related, but with added metaphors in the book version. Thus, “looking at the ceiling” is transformed into “I cast all my confusion up to the ceiling”, thereby creating stronger imagery that seems less pertinent in a medium that is already dependent on visuality.

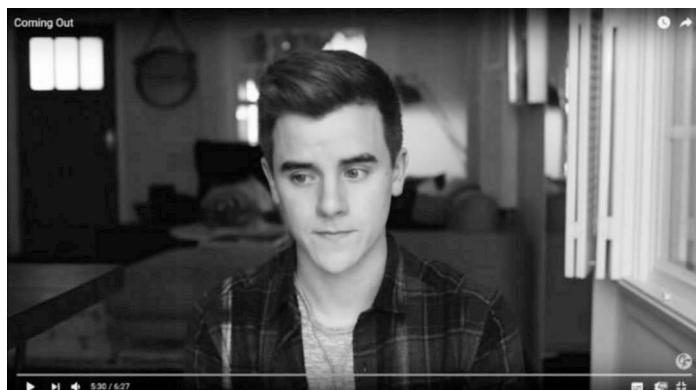
Moreover, the quote illustrates the refinement in emotional self-analysis. While Franta states that he was “scared” to reach out in the video, the book presents a more precise analysis of Franta’s emotional state by attributing the suppression of his sexuality to “self-judgement” and “self-hatred.” In a material

20 Franta 2015: 153.

sense, the increase in sophisticated, metaphorical language in the written medium is not only possible and expected, but also more easily included; after all, a vlog is typically between two and eight minutes long, as opposed to the average length of memoirs.

There are other changes that also occur due to medium specificity. When Franta talks about admitting his sexuality to himself in his coming out video, he says “one year ago, I kept trying to get myself to look in the mirror and say it.” The same struggle is also related in the book, but in the written medium it comes with a very specific time reference: “then on the evening of January 3, 2014, I actually said it.”<sup>21</sup> Due to the conventions of YouTube, “one year ago,” as opposed to “January 3, 2014”, is not significantly less specific, since audiences tend to consume YouTube vlogs immediately, i.e. within 24 hours of their release, and because the date when a video was uploaded is easily accessible as it is always visible right underneath every video.

Besides a more metaphoric way of expression and a higher degree of specificity in the book, one major difference between the media is that the audio-visual medium allows for the illusion of a face-to-face conversation. This results in immediacy as well as perceived authenticity and intimacy. As in actual face-to-face conversations, the viewer hears and sees the effects of emotion in voice, facial expressions and posture:



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21 Ibid.: 157.

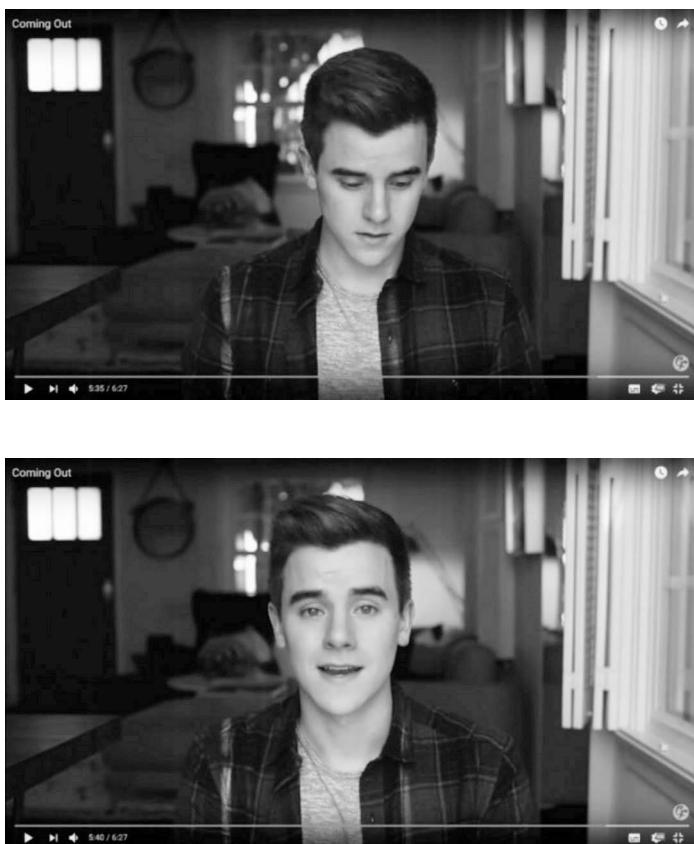


Figure 2-4: Screenshots of Connor Franta's "Coming out" video

These screenshots illustrate how a moderate outburst of emotionality in Franta's video – beginning with the pensive gaze down to one side, the composing glance down the other side, ultimately culminating in the revelation of teary eyes when he looks directly at the camera – adds to the emotional impact the video has on its viewers. David Matsumoto calls these bodily signs “emotional communication” and states that it “helps individuals in relationships – parent and child, mates, boss and subordinates – respond to the demands and opportunities of their social environment. They are basic elements of social interaction [...].”<sup>22</sup> Seeing how particular emotions affect a YouTuber’s body, and especially their face, also works as a warrant for authenticity and as an invitation for sympathetic responses. As Mark J.P. Wolf stresses:

22 Matsumoto 2009: 175-176.

Images can do many things that mere words cannot; they are sensually richer and more immersive, they can present a great deal of detail or information simultaneously and use complex compositions, and they have a more immediate effect on the audience's emotions, from foregrounded dramatic action to subtle effects involving atmosphere and mood.<sup>23</sup>

The effect on the audience is evidenced in the innumerable comments on the “Coming out” videos that express similar reactions to YouTube user Ello Ell.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 5: Screenshot of comment on Connor Franta's “Coming out” video

The commenter describes a profound emotional reaction that mirrors Franta's when he opines that fear of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion or sexuality are “not OK” in his video.<sup>25</sup> Franta's own teary eyes at this exclamation, as well as the rather inclusive statement, which most viewers will agree with, aids in eliciting such intense emotional responses. These emotions then, seemingly, need to be expressed immediately in the form of written commentary that addresses the impact the video had on the recipient (I/he) as well as a testimony of support aimed at the YouTuber directly (I/you).

Comments that exhibit the emotional reaction to a video or to other commenters are numerous. Writing comments most often means writing down immediate reactions, including emotionality that is often expressed mimetically in the form of emojis or emoticons. Such responses are in part due to the set-up of vlogs: vloggers typically film themselves talking to a camera, which means that what we see in vlogs is, so to speak, a permanent close-up of their face. Even though there are innumerable differences between television and vlogs, conventions derived from television have certainly also shaped how vlogs are perceived. Close-ups of faces are, thus, traditionally associated with the inner self. As Joanne Finkelstein says,

23 Wolf 2012: 253.

24 “I'm crying so bad when I watch this! Especially the part when he tears up and says ‘it's not ok! It's not!’ I LOVE YOU SO MUCH CONNOR!!” followed by several emojis including a teary face, a heart, a hand, and a smiling face.

25 Franta 2014: “Coming Out”.

Through the close-up, thoughts are made visible. [...] facial expressions transport the audience into the deep interior of the mind. The close-up uses the eyes as “the windows” to the concealed personality. Suddenly the interior becomes exteriorized; certain gestures and subtle movements – a tear, quiver of the lip, a slight smile – are signs from the interior of unmediated, true emotion. These fine facial movements caught by the close-up camera shot suggest authenticity [...].<sup>26</sup>

Given that the conventional association of the close-up is with the representation of “unmediated, true emotion”, and given the simulation of face-to-face conversation in vlogs, YouTubers’ emotional outbursts are often taken at face value. Audience members consequently tend to uncritically and vigorously defend their favourite YouTubers against those who question the sincerity of an emotional expression.

This need to defend a YouTuber against haters stems from the intimate connection many viewers feel they have with those YouTubers. Over the course of several years they have witnessed the YouTuber growing up, mature personally and professionally, go through relationships and share personal stories and feelings about a variety of subjects. This, in combination with the vlog format, provides viewers with a wealth of information and insight into the YouTuber’s life, which gives them the impression that they know them intimately. When she discusses emotionality and immersion, Marie-Laure Ryan states that “[...] we are also more likely to be affected by what happens to people we know than by the fate of strangers”,<sup>27</sup> and YouTubers who have shared their lives with their subscribers for several years in hundreds or, in some cases, thousands of videos have become more familiar than real-life acquaintances.

The emotions associated with coming out on YouTube – nervousness, embarrassment, pride, shame, excitement – are all “higher cognitive emotions” in Paul E. Griffiths’ sense. And as Dylan Evans explains, higher cognitive emotions “are fundamentally *social* in a way that basic emotions are not”<sup>28</sup> and they “have been designed by natural selection precisely to help our ancestors cope with an increasingly complex social environment. [...] [T]hese emotions may well be the cement that binds human society together”.<sup>29</sup> The overwhelming response to and popularity of coming out videos suggests that there is a need, especially amongst teenagers, to observe and react to emotional content, which is why even the promise of emotionality draws a large number of people to certain

26 Finkelstein 2007: 4.

27 Ryan 2001: 149-150.

28 Evans 2001: 20, original emphasis.

29 *Ibid.*: 21.

YouTube videos: through emotionality they offer a platform and, arguably, also an incentive to engage with one another socially and join the communities that might already have formed around the YouTuber in question.

## 4. WRITING AND DEPICTING FEAR: PLURIMEDIALITY

While higher cognitive emotions are clearly connected to coming out videos and also partly conveyed in book chapters, basic emotions, such as fear, also play a central role in YouTubers' content on- and offline. In this second part, medium-specific and media transcending strategies will be investigated that convey fear across different media, in order to show that writing about basic emotions, more so than higher cognitive emotions, seems to invite the engagement of visual elements to augment the meaning-making process. The emotion of fear, as Evans points out: "is even older than this particular physiological expression [hairs standing on end]. In fact, fear is probably one of the first emotions ever to have evolved. It is likely to have been present in the first vertebrates, which appeared some 500 million years ago or more."<sup>30</sup>

### 4.1 Plurimedial Fear: *Jennxpenn* aka *Jenn McAllister*

Nineteen-year-old Jenn McAllister's autobiographical book *Really Professional Internet Person* relates a number of anecdotes – positive and negative – that she claims she was not prepared to share in vlogs. Among bullying and panic attacks, she relates the story of how she was doxxed.<sup>31</sup> Doxxing is an area of cybercrime in which hackers steal personal information and make it publicly available on the Internet. In McAllister's case, there were severe consequences as her and her family's credit card information, their address, their social media account passwords and their telephone numbers were all freely accessible online. This meant that all her family had to cancel cards, phones and eventually move to a different address. Many YouTubers have had to deal with doxxing incidents and threats. The fact that millions of subscribers are interested in their lives and seek a personal connection, for example by showing up at their homes or talking to them on the phone, makes them interesting and sometimes lucrative targets for hackers. Moreover, prosecution for doxxing and those who make personal in-

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30 Ibid.: 31.

31 McAllister 2015: 117.

formation available online is often impossible, especially since law enforcement is often struggling to understand the crime at all.

Even though doxxing severely affects the lives of those attacked, many YouTubers who seem to share so much of themselves and their lives online have chosen not to discuss actual threats that result from doxxing. McAllister, accordingly, introduces the topic by explaining that she did not address the incident in her vlog, “because it was a really upsetting and terrifying period of my life. Of course, part of me wanted to share this with the Internet, but the other part of me was too afraid to even talk about it”.<sup>32</sup> Serious negative experiences, in fact, are often not discussed in YouTube videos at all. Most YouTubers expressly produce positive content on their channel because they are aware of their status as role models for very young viewers and because their explicit goal is to make their viewers’ day better with the content they put out. The transmedial approach to promoting the personality brand of a YouTuber via social media websites such as Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat and Instagram creates the impression that YouTubers, and especially daily vloggers, share every little detail of their lives, and most of it is cheerful, uplifting and positive. Consequently, being a YouTuber has become the dream job most teenagers now aspire to<sup>33</sup> because the lives of YouTubers are often perceived as perfect and ideal, exactly because they often steer clear of negatively connotated incidents.

When Jenn McAllister talks about the fear she felt after being doxxed in her book, it is not only explicitly verbalized but visualized as well. The whole discussion of the incident is printed on a black background. The rest of the book is printed on a light grey, pastel pink or cork background, so that the white font on black makes the chapter “Life Hacked” a visually striking contrast. Consequently, McAllister’s autobiographical book utilizes a range of visual as well as written elements to convey a message, e.g. the differing backgrounds, the inclusion of numerous photographs, charts, screenshots and fonts. Because of the meaningfulness of visual aspects in the book, it can be categorized as plurimedial. Plurimediality is quite common in all YouTubers’ book publications, which is most likely due to the fact that multiple media are necessarily involved in making YouTube videos. The visual and the verbal, music, sound effects and written text superimposed on the image are the important media that characterize YouTube videos.

Deliberately foregrounding colour, or lack thereof, can be a significant marker intended by the YouTuber to trigger emotional responses in viewers. In fact, YouTuber Charlie McDonnell started a trend in 2012 when he uploaded a

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32 Ibid.: 118.

33 Cf. London 2014: *Daily Mail Online*.

black and white video entitled “I’m Scared”,<sup>34</sup> which sparked innumerable video responses – by fans as well as fellow YouTubers – on the same topic, and also in black and white. Intuitively, the colour black as a visual marker for a frightening episode and fear in general seems appropriate: particularly bad days are often referred to as a “black day” in the news, and it is common to describe momentous and frightening events idiomatically, such as the initiation of the Great Depression historically being named Black Friday. On the other hand, black is of course also an iconic representation of a very common human fear that most humans have probably experienced at some point in their life: the fear of darkness and the unknown dangers that might be hidden therein.

## 4.2 Plurimedial Fear: Dan Howell and Phil Lester

The iconic representation of darkness through the colour black and the implication of unseen dangers is the predominant reason why Dan Howell and Phil Lester have chosen a black background for a chapter in their book. The two British YouTubers wrote the book *The Amazing Book Is Not on Fire: the World of Dan and Phil* together and it includes two chapters dealing individually with the two writers’ fears: “Dan’s Fears”,<sup>35</sup> and “Phil’s Phears”.<sup>36</sup> The visual concept of these chapters is different from McAllister’s simple black backdrop, as visual representations of some of their fears and phobias are embedded in the black background. In Howell’s chapter, for example, trees are visible in the background, which is an item on his list of fears. In Lester’s chapter the outlines of horses are distinguishable in the darkness, representing the first item on his list.

Similarly to Connor Franta, Howell also discussed these fears in a video prior to the publication of the book. Given the timing – the video was uploaded on 29 Oct 2014 while the book was released almost a year later – it is likely Howell was already working on the book when he decided to make the video. However, even if the video preceded the conception of the book’s chapter, the intricate intermedial links between them are undeniable. In the video “My Greatest Fear”<sup>37</sup> he partially rationalizes his fear of the dark by explaining that it is an evolutionary fear of the unknown and the once very real danger of nocturnal predators. As Dylan Evans points out in *Emotion: A Very Short Introduction*,

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34 Cf. McDonnell 2012: “I’m Scared”.

35 Cf. Howell 2015: 160-161.

36 Cf. Ibid. 162-163.

37 Cf. Howell 2014: “My Greatest Fear”.

“[t]he capacity for fear is very useful in a world where hungry predators lurk in every shadow”.<sup>38</sup> Lyons affirms Howell’s assessment when he says,

Thus fear of the dark may not be fear of the absence of light but fear of the absence of knowledge or, to put it more exactly, fear arising because one does not know what might be out there in the dark and because one thinks that there might be something to injure or startle one.<sup>39</sup>

Contrary to the comparison between Franta’s coming out video and book chapter on the topic, Howell’s video is more complex and sophisticated than the print version. In the book, fear is presented in a compact list of specific phobias, whereas the video engages with research on fears and phobias. When he explains the distinction between learned and genetic fears, for example, the video is rather analytical and presents a compelling and ultimately convincing argument. The list in the book, by contrast, is much shorter, light-hearted, and even sarcastic. This can be illustrated by the manner in which the fear of the supernatural is explained: “Poltergeists, witches, demons – you name it, if it’s a magically powered evil being that defies the rules of reality, I’m terrified of it. Which is funny because I do not believe that any of those things actually exist. 100%. Go figure.”<sup>40</sup> The aim of this clearly sarcastic exploration of this particular fear does not point to research on the topic. In part this is probably due to the fact that Howell and Lester anticipated the book would primarily be consumed by their fans, who would likely already be familiar with the theories presented in the video, in which Howell even attempts a scientific explanation of where his personal fears originate. This leads him to advise his viewers that analysing fears and where they come from “can help you overcome them”. He thus merges his research with his personal anecdotes in order to be helpful, which is a common feature not only of YouTube but quite clearly also of YouTubers’ autobiographical and advice books.

Almost all of the books YouTubers have published so far can also be experienced as audiobooks read by the author(s). Even though the physical books are often innovative and experiment with various forms of intermediality, the majority of these audiobooks are rather straightforward readings of, exclusively, the written text. This means that the plurimedial character of these books is not reflected in any way in their audio version. In their audiobook, Howell and Lester, however, have taken a different approach to incorporate the added mean-

38 Evans 2001: 25.

39 Lyons 1980: 75.

40 Howell 2015: 160.

ing conveyed via visual modes. The numerous photographs, collages, drawing etc. are adapted into the audiobook, either via dialogue or verbal description and commentary. Since not all of the visually based content could be adapted into an exclusively auditory medium, Howell and Lester have also made a pdf document available to those who purchased the audiobook. Thus, this audiobook exemplifies the direction audiobooks might take when dealing with the increasingly plurimedial books on the market.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Showing emotion on YouTube has an authenticating effect that suggests intimacy, immediacy and honesty. The combination of these features is expressed in a plurimedial way in YouTube videos but also in YouTubers' books. As adaptation of the YouTube content, these YouTubers seek to translate emotions, at least partially, into their print books. In accordance with medium specific affordances, Connor Franta's "Coming out" video shows bodily responses to emotion. The book, on the other hand, conveys the emotions connected to his coming out via elaboration on context and background.

As these books are also transmedia expansions, the upholding of a unified and coherent personality, voice and visual style are imperative to their success. Books by YouTubers are marketed and consumed largely as extensions of a pre-existing YouTube channel and thus the two media are inextricably linked. A YouTuber's personality and mannerisms thus become crucial components for the success and effectivity of the book. Key features of voice, style and video aesthetic are often deliberately transposed into the book medium to enhance the unity of the YouTuber's brand and to create an experience of familiarity for readers.

Intermedial strategies contribute to the experience of the books as transmedia expansions and adaptations. Plurimediality is often a way to link the aesthetics of the YouTube channel with the book, but can also serve to mirror the emotionality of a certain passage or story. Plurimediality can also be a key factor in making a traditionally monomedial medium like the audiobook into a more effective intermedial transposition of both the physical book and the online content. Thus, I hope to have shown how intra- and extracompositional forms of intermediality and transmedia storytelling can aid in the exploration of how emotion(ality) transcends the audio-visual medium.

In conclusion, the earnestness and honesty of a public display of emotions on the part of the YouTuber is to a great extent dependent upon the audio-visual

possibilities of vlogs: quivering lips, shaky voices, flushed faces and watery eyes all contribute to the perception of authenticity that is so essential for a vlogger's career. Viewers, on the other hand, make use of the written commentary feature to immediately express their emotional reactions and share them with the YouTuber and their community. Transmedia expansions, such as books and audiobooks, however, can contribute to the coherence of these personality brands by providing additional information surrounding emotional biographical episodes or presenting problematic and negative incidents, thereby adding to the complexity of the YouTube personality in question. Beyond the coherence and complexity which the written content is advertised as providing, many YouTubers seem to value the design of their book – as a physical object for their fans to cherish and engage with but also as a lasting memento of their achievements – equally or higher than the written content. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of YouTubers for writing and publishing books, as well as their viewers, zeal to buy, read and respond to them, attests to the continued importance of writing in general and writing as communication in particular.

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Figure 2: *Screenshots of Connor Franta's "Coming out" video*. in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYodBfRxKWI> (5:35) (30.10.2016).

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# **Emotions on Stage and in Literary Texts**



# “‘Tis Magic, Magic that Hath Ravished Me”

Passionate Conjuring in

*Doctor Faustus* and *The Devil’s Charter*

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GUDRUN TOCKNER

Magic on the early modern English stage was a cause of strong feeling, from the disapproval of anti-theatrical writers, who found it doubly reprehensible that the sinful theatre would depict magic, to alleged outbreaks of panic among actors and audience alike when there were rumours of the devil himself appearing on stage during a magical scene.<sup>1</sup> But feelings play a role not only in the reception of plays: they are an integral part of dramatic action and theatrical performance. This paper will focus on the depiction of one particular kind of early modern magic, learned ritual magic involving the evocation of spirits, or in this case, devils. It will then situate it both within the early modern dramatic tradition of writing emotions into texts for the stage and within the wider discourses surrounding emotions at the time. At the core of the analysis are two plays centred entirely on characters who practice ritual magic: Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (published first in 1604 and in a longer version, the so-called B-text, in 1616 but assumed to have been written around 1590) and Barnabe Barnes’s *The Devil’s Charter*, first published in 1607, and in particular the scenes in which the conjurers call up spirits and those centred on their final torment and death.

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1 Cf. Chambers 1974: 423-424.

## INTRODUCTION: EARLY MODERN PASSIONS

In the course of what has been termed the emotional or affective turn, early modern concepts and representations of emotions have come increasingly into focus in the past two decades.<sup>2</sup> In addition to studies on religion and philosophy,<sup>3</sup> much recent scholarship has centred on the interface of feeling and early modern literature and theatre. As Emanuel Stelzer points out in his essay in this collection, in keeping with the recent focus on the body of the actor, the audience, and the theatre as an affective and collaborative space, some of this scholarship has focused especially on the emotional engagement of the audience;<sup>4</sup> but that is not to say that textual strategies fall by the wayside. Emotions are inscribed in texts and in particular in dramatic texts, where actors were supposed to recognize and appropriately represent feelings; and these strategies can be traced.

When reading early modern texts in terms of their emotional content and strategies, one is once again reminded of the often invoked ‘radical otherness’ of the past. The way feelings are spoken of and conceptualized has changed significantly, although enough superficial similarity remains to make it challenging to appropriately historicize these texts. Recent scholarship has done much to tease apart these terminological and epistemological shifts, although early modern terminologies and theories relating to passions, emotions and humours, like modern theories of emotions, seem not to have been a unified, coherent whole. To start with the question of terminology, ‘affection’ and ‘passion’ have been suggested as the closest terms describing what we would now conceptualize as emotions, but these words were not used consistently or even always differentiated.<sup>5</sup> In addition to this, almost all the words connected to emotions (or affections and passions), despite still being used today, have undergone a semantic shift – including the word “emotion” itself. For the researcher, this means careful philological study to avoid what Robert White, following David Crystal, has called “false friends”.<sup>6</sup>

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2 For an overview of the field cf. Broomhall 2017.

3 On religion cf. e.g. Ryrie 2013, on philosophy cf. e.g. James 1997, Dixon 2003.

4 Cf. e.g. Lopez 2003, Steggile 2016, Hobgood 2014.

5 Cf. Paster/Rowe/Floyd-Wilson 2004: 2.

6 White 2017: 89–93, cf. also White 2012: 286–296. White’s insistence on literal physiological readings of what look like emotional metaphors in early modern plays, based on Paster’s theories about humoralism, might overstate the matter slightly, but it is certainly important to highlight the semantic drift and the interdependence of language use and early modern conceptions of the emotions.

The conceptual differences between early modern and modern understandings of emotions have most importantly been highlighted by Gail Kern Paster's influential research on the humoral system underlying the use and expression of passions in Shakespeare and his contemporaries.<sup>7</sup> In a pre-Cartesian worldview, she argues, "the psychological had not yet become divorced from the physiological".<sup>8</sup> Instead, feelings were supposed to stem from physiological processes based on the four "humours", blood, bile, yellow bile, and black bile. In this system, "melancholy", for instance, was not just a mental state – it was literally the melancholic humour or liquid of black bile coursing through the bloodstream and affecting physical and psychological symptoms. The neural analogy to humours, and "distilled" from them, were so-called animal spirits, which moved between the physical body and the immaterial soul. Emotion was thus seen as embodied, and the system as one of constant flux – the balance of the humours and spirits affecting and being affected in turn – in which human emotion is seen as essentially passive.

This focus on an entirely physiological model of early modern emotion in literary studies has recently come under some criticism, however. While acknowledging the importance of the humoral model, recent works have drawn attention to the importance of the plurality of early modern discourses on the passions and their importance for literary analysis, including political thought, religion and theology, and rhetoric and style.<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this paper, to analyse the passions in scenes of magic in plays, two of these are especially important: religion, especially as it relates to magic, and rhetoric, especially as it relates to the theatre. Taking an active role in the management of the passions, both those of oneself and others, is a central idea in both discourses. In the Protestant philosophy of the time, the passions are seen as both something to be ruled and disciplined and something that is integral to spiritual life. Unlike the popular image of emotionless Puritans, strong spiritual passions were highly prized by British Protestants and thought of as a means to salvation.<sup>10</sup>

Similar importance was ascribed to the passions in the art of rhetoric, taught to every schoolboy and unsurprisingly important for early modern playwrights. Thomas Wilson, in his 1560 textbook, for instance, writes that after teaching and delighting his audience, an orator must "moue the affections of his hearers", a

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7 Cf. Paster 2004, Paster/Rowe/Floyd-Wilson 2004.

8 Paster 2004: 7.

9 Cf. esp. Cummings/Siehuis 2013, Meek/Sullivan 2015.

10 This is the argument of the first part of Alec Ryrie's excellent *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (2013). For the passions and religious experience cf. also Bagchi 2015.

phrase he uses synonymously with persuading them.<sup>11</sup> The skilful orator, Wilson argues for much of the second book of this work, moves his audience's passions particularly through the rhetorical figure of amplification, but has to be aware of how human passions work before he can amuse his listeners, or move them to pity, envy or laughter.<sup>12</sup> He defines affections (which he uses synonymously with passions) as “a stirring or forsing of the minde, either to desire, or els to detest and loth any thing, more vehemently then by nature we are commonly wont to doe”<sup>13</sup> and explains that we “desire those things [...] that appeare in our iudgement to be godly: wee hate and abhorre those things that seeme naught, vngodly, or harmefull vnto vs”, not just for ourselves but also for other people.<sup>14</sup> However, he cautions, listeners' affections also depend on whether they like or dislike someone (they will feel pity for an innocent person but joy at the sight of an evildoer punished), unless that person has better luck than them, in which case the human reaction is envy.<sup>15</sup>

Informed by humoralism, theology and rhetoric, how can passions then be read in early modern plays apart from their explicit thematization and the strategies of classical rhetoric? Simon Palfrey's and Tiffany Sterne's *Shakespeare in Parts* provides particularly valuable tools in this respect.<sup>16</sup> In addition to foregrounding the importance of the passions in the early modern theatre for playwrights, actors and audiences alike, they also trace how passions structure the texts themselves. Since a “snappy and seemingly spontaneous change from one passion to another [...] was one of the qualities for which an audience looked when judging a performance”,<sup>17</sup> and since actors only received their individual ‘parts’ rather than the entire text, playwrights had to ensure that their actors knew which passion they were supposed to be presenting and include textual signals accordingly. These include “short lines, complete and incomplete pentameters, and shifts between prose, blank verse, and rhyme” and “help the actor to pace and measure the ‘units’ of his speech: they indicate a change in the tone or direction of acting; they single out transitions from one passion or humour to another, often within a single speech; and they direct stresses and enunciation, for instance by implicitly ‘pointing’ pauses”.<sup>18</sup>

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11 Wilson 1909: 4.

12 Ibid.: 116-156.

13 Ibid.: 130.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Palfrey/Sterne 2007: 311-389.

17 Ibid.: 312.

18 Ibid.: 329.

## MAGIC AND THE PASSIONS

Defining and categorising magic in early modern England, like defining and categorising the passions, is not as neat and straightforward as one might wish. A number of different discourses and practices existed concurrently at the time: one of them was the belief in witches, strongly influenced by continental ideas but with several English peculiarities.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, all strata of society made use of the services of so-called "cunning folk" or "white witches": folk practitioners of magic offering help in all areas of life, from health to love to lost property.<sup>20</sup> And, on the learned end of the spectrum, scholars became interested in the hermetic and Neoplatonic philosophy espoused by writers such as Ficino and Pico. In addition to propagating 'natural magic', based on an intricate system of sympathy and antipathy between every part of the world, this school postulated that there were two kinds of ritual magic, one illicit, one licit: *goëthia*, the calling up of evil spirits, and *theurgy*, operations calling on the help of angels and good spirits and ultimately aiming at a vision of God.<sup>21</sup>

However, clear differentiations between good and bad, popular and scholarly, illiterate and literate magic are difficult to sustain when looking at the historical record, let alone the depiction of magical practice in the theatre. Cunning folk ran the risk of being accused of witchcraft,<sup>22</sup> and scholars like Doctor John Dee, who was employed by Elizabeth I, were regularly suspected of dealing with the devil as the differentiations between natural, theurgic and goëthic magic became blurred;<sup>23</sup> and while the importance of Renaissance philosophy is apparent in the rituals of some English practitioners like Dee, research has recently stressed the continuing influence of medieval ritual magic.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, a number of different discourses can be found in texts concerning magic from the period. The following is a brief discussion of the views on magic and the passions found in the two most common kinds of texts: those condemning magic (as illusionary, as

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19 The defining work on popular magical beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England is still Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), and a still influential study of witchcraft in particular is MacFarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1970).

20 Cf. Davies 2007, Wilby 2005.

21 Cf. e.g. Yates 2001.

22 Cf. e.g. Davies 2007: 29-65.

23 Cf. Thomas 1991: 264-274.

24 Cf. Klaassen 2013: 187-218 et passim.

harmful or as diabolical) and those featuring instructions on how to conduct magical ceremonies and to what end.

A humoral view that especially links magic to the melancholic humour can be found, for instance, in one of the most striking 16th century works on magic: Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (originally published in 1584). Perhaps surprisingly, this book is not concerned with the reality of witchcraft but with its refutation. Scot argues that witchcraft and magic "being contrarie to nature, probabilitie and reason" simply do not exist,<sup>25</sup> attributing the belief in such phenomena to superstition, Catholicism, legerdemain and psychophysiological conditions.<sup>26</sup> Scot explains confessions by alleged witches with the natural propensity of old women (who are most commonly suspected) to melancholy and therefore to imagining things "which are both false and impossible".<sup>27</sup> Rather than using 'melancholy' as a synonym for depression, Scot explicitly describes it as a fluid. Post-menopausal women suffer from a build-up of melancholic humour because their menses have stopped<sup>28</sup> and "this humor, which is the verie dregs of bloud" produces the psychological consequences, since "these affections, though they appear in the mind of man, yet are they bred in the body".<sup>29</sup>

Melancholy and magic were also linked by the most prolific author on this particular humour, Richard Burton. Burton, in his encyclopaedic work *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, reiterates that melancholy can lead to fantastical imaginings: not only that one is a witch<sup>30</sup> but also that one is bewitched or witnessing an act of magic.<sup>31</sup> However, while cautious, he does not deny the reality of magic and witchcraft, listing "Witches and Magitians" [sic] as one of the possible supernatural causes of melancholy and their help in combating this "disease" as one of its "Unlawfull Cures".<sup>32</sup>

An entirely different approach to magic and the passions can be found in a text on witchcraft first published in 1597 by the then James VI of Scotland, who

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25 Scot 1972: 280.

26 Scot uses the term witchcraft to include ritual magic and spirit conjurations, although he does make allowance for some kinds of "naturall magicke" based on a system of analogy and sympathy, like the influence of precious stones. Cf. *ibid.*: 164-174.

27 *Ibid.*: 31.

28 Cf. *ibid.*: 30-33.

29 *Ibid.*: 33.

30 Cf. Burton 1989/1: 204

31 Cf. *Ibid.*: 386-387, 424-426.

32 *Ibid.*: 195-199; vol. 2: 1-4. It has to be stressed, however, that for Burton magic is only one among a vast number of possible causes and cures for the condition.

would ascend the English Throne as James I in 1603. In the form of a learned dialogue, James vehemently denies Scot's argument that melancholy can be a factor in the unreliability of witness testaments.<sup>33</sup> Instead, he offers a different link between affections, passions and magic: human passions, he argues, allow the devil to ensnare his prey. He starts by differentiating between "*Magie or Necromancie*" and "*Sorcerie or Witch-craft*" and then poses the question, "What, I pray you, and how many, are the means whereby the Devil allures persons into any of these snares?"<sup>34</sup> The answer is as follows:

Even by these three passiones that are within our selues: Curiosite in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great pouerty. As to the first of these, Curiosity, it is onelie the inticement of Magiciens, or Necromancers: and the other two are the allureres of the Sorcerers, or Witches, for that olde and craftie Serpent, being a spirite, hee easilie spyes our affections, and so conformes himselfe thereto, to deceaue vs to our wracke.<sup>35</sup>

James, using "passions" and "affections" synonymously like Thomas Wilson before him and applying the terms to a wide variety of emotions, argues that it is curiosity which leads men to become "necromancers", while (male or female) witches are driven by a desire for revenge or by personal hardship. According to James, practitioners are led "vpon the sliperie and vncertaine scale of curiosite" by certain aspects of science, in particular by astrology.<sup>36</sup> While today the focus on curiosity might sound like a wholesale condemnation of intellectual inquiry, the word carried different connotations at the time. Under the definition "Desire to know or learn", the OED lists the obsolete pejorative meaning of "[t]he disposition to inquire too minutely into anything; undue or inquisitive desire to know or learn" as earlier than the neutral or positive meaning common today, which seems to have taken hold in the course of the seventeenth century.

Magic books of the time, so-called grimoires, put special emphasis on ritual fasting and purification but say little about the affects and passions of the practitioner during the ritual. The *Clavicula Salomonis* or *Key of Solomon*, in an English manuscript of the mid- to late-sixteenth century, for instance, prescribes

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33 James I 1924: 30-31.

34 Ibid.: 8. James differentiates between "necromancy", or ritual magic focused on summoning spirits, and witchcraft, but finds both equally deplorable.

35 Ibid.: 9. As evident in grimoires and in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Devil's Charter*, greed (with or without actual poverty) can of course also be a factor in the conjurations of magicians using ritual magic for their own gain.

36 Ibid.: 10-12.

confession (to god, not to a priest), fasting and baths before attempting magical operations.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the *Heptameron*, a grimoire (spuriously) ascribed to the medieval philosopher Pietro D'Abano, advises that “[t]he Operator ought to be clean and purified by the space of nine daies” before making preparations for an invocation “and to be confessed, and receive the holy Communion”, and then purified again “with fasting, chastity, and abstinence from all luxury the space of three whole dayes” before undertaking the actual invocation.<sup>38</sup> In the same vein, the *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, or *Sworn Book of Honorius*, advises to “let the worker be clean, not polluted” and to “[l]et him not eat nor drink till he has done his work”.<sup>39</sup>

While many grimoires stress the importance of spiritual cleanliness, the *Liber Iuratus* is one of the few texts to also hint at the state of mind of the practitioner: “and let him do it [i.e. consecrate the magic seal] with devotion, not deceiptfully”.<sup>40</sup> Passions on the part of the practitioner described in grimoires are twofold: firstly, the orations, especially in theurgic works like the *Ars Notoria*, make much of the love of God, and secondly, the magus is advised to be free of negatively connotated passions. “Banish wrath: yt was the first [...] and greatest Commanndment”, reads a manuscript written by John Dee.<sup>41</sup> The *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* states that “the chiefest thing that ought to be observed, is, constancy of minde, and boldness, free, and alienated from fear”.<sup>42</sup> Magic, in some instances, was even supposed to be able to help adepts understand the nature of their affections: “But the man that is ignorant of Magick, is carried to

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37 Cf. Anonymous: 1999.

38 Abano 2008: s.p.

39 Anonymous 2009: IV.

40 Ibid.

41 Dee 1997: Liber Primus, cap. 2; in a note on this passage, Dee explains that he is referring to a commandment he supposedly received from the angel Annael, not the first of the Ten Commandments.

42 Agricola 1655: 69. First printed in English in 1655, the original Latin version was published in 1559. The attribution of this book to Agricola is spurious. Cf. Klaassen 2013: 176-177.

The potential fear of the practitioner is also highlighted by James's *Daemonology*, in which he claims that “if they [i.e. magicians] haue missed one iote of all their rites; or if any of their feete once slyd ouer the circle through terror of [the devil's] feareful apparition, [...] hee carries them with him bodie and soule”. James I 1924: 18.

and fro, as it were in war with his affections; he knoweth not when they issue out of his own minde, or are impressed by the assisting essence".<sup>43</sup>

While works of 'high' theurgic magic like the *Liber Iuratus* and the *Arts Notoria* seem relatively orthodox in their treatment of passions (however blasphemous they might have seemed otherwise), other works of ceremonial magic add a different aspect: the supposed ability of magic to move the passions of others. Not all grimoires are content with celestial knowledge and aim for more prosaic gains: apart from money, this is often the favour of both women and wealthy patrons. The rituals to achieve these ends or "experiments" are very often acts of sympathetic image magic rather than involving the help of spirits,<sup>44</sup> although there is a comment in the *Heptameron* that "[t]he Spirits of the Air of Thursday [...] procure the love of woman" and "pacifie strife and contentions".<sup>45</sup>

## PASSIONATE CONJURING: EVOCATION SCENES

On the stage, ritual magic (in addition to witchcraft) occurs with some frequency, especially between 1590 and 1620.<sup>46</sup> The following section will analyse the way passions are written into the text in two scenes of the ritual evocation of demons: Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Barnes's *The Devil's Charter*.

Studies of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* have long remarked that, while the play shows thorough engagement with contemporary books of magic, Faustus goes about the ritual in precisely the wrong way from the start.<sup>47</sup> He does not follow the instructions to ritually cleanse himself and he does not fast; he has "prayed and sacrificed" to the demons he is about to invoke, and, in his detailed Latin invocation, he does not call upon the power of god but on Beelze-

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43 Agrippa 1655: 213. This quote comes from the *Arbatel*, a grimoire included in Turner's English translation of Agrippa's *Fourth Book*. This translation was published in 1655, later than any of the plays discussed here, but the original Latin edition was printed in Basel in 1575. Cf. Davies 2009: 52-3. The translation follows the original Latin text which reads "Ad homo Magiae imperitus tanquam bellua *affectibus* sursum & deorsum fertur". Anonymous 1997: XLIII, emphasis G.T.

44 See for instance Anonymous 1999: book 1, chs. 8-11.

45 Abano 2008: Considerations of Thursday.

46 For a good overview of the 'types' and development of magicians on the early modern stage cf. Traister 1984, Traister 2014.

47 Cf e.g. Kocher 1962.

bub (I.iii.1-22).<sup>48</sup> When Mephistopheles later informs Faustus that his conjuring has only made the devil appear because he has “rack[ed] the name of God”, rather than because the ritual had inherent magical power (43-51), it becomes clear that Faustus, despite his learning, is little better than any other blasphemер.

Faustus, however, is undaunted and makes much of his own strength of character, harping on his absence of fear: “This word ‘damnation’ terrifies not me” (I.iii.56), he claims, and even berates Mephistopheles for showing an excess of feeling. When asked how, if he is damned to be in hell, he can be out of it, Mephistopheles famously claims, “Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it”, and passionately asks Faustus to stop this line of enquiry:

Think’st thou that I, that saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?  
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul! (74-80)

Faustus has nothing but contempt for this, quipping, “What, is great Mephistopheles so passionate / For being deprivèd of the joys of heaven?”, and even admonishing the devil to learn from his own “manly fortitude” in rejecting fear and despair (81-84). Fear and despair, as opposed to the joys of heaven and the short-lived delights of magic, will of course reappear in the course of the play; but Faustus also forgets that it was passion of a different kind that led him to practice magic in the first place.

In Faustus’s famous opening soliloquy, he quickly dismisses the traditional scholarly pursuits of logic, medicine, law and theology, before lighting on magic. In the space of six lines he goes from exclaiming, “[s]weet *Analytics*, ’tis thou hast ravished me!” (I.i.5)<sup>49</sup> to concluding that “[a] greater subject fitteth Faustus’ wit” (11). This economy of space and Faustus’s abridged and sometimes faulty arguments for his rejections have led to numerous critical readings concerning Faustus’s learning and the effect the scene would have had on the audience’s judgement of the character,<sup>50</sup> but it also showcases what Palfrey and Sterne have highlighted in terms of the text’s performative potential: the “snappy and seemingly spontaneous change from one passion to another”, from admiration to distain. This is repeated for each of the disciplines, and Faustus’s short quotation

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48 All quotations are from the B-Text, Marlowe 2008, unless otherwise noted.

49 Original emphasis.

50 For an overview of critical reactions cf. Brandt 2015: 31-32.

from Romans 6:23 seems particularly cynical, punctuated by a mocking laugh and a sarcastic comment: ““*Stipendium peccati mors est.*” Ha! / ‘*Stipendium*’, etc. / The reward of sin is death? That’s hard.” (I.i.37-39).<sup>51</sup>

His language changes into something euphoric when he finally takes up a book on magic. The diagrams and shapes he finds in necromantic books are suddenly “those that Faustus most desires” (I.i.51-52), and his desire is at the centre of his excitement about magic: “O, what a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honour, and omnipotence / Is promised to the studious artisan!” (53-55). The word delight, first introduced here, will continually reappear throughout the play, always connected to the potential of magic to not just entertain but also to distract. And Faustus, goaded on by the Bad Angel, positively raves about the possibilities of magic, starting with rhetorical questions (“Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please?”), but soon eschewing questions for statements: “I’ll have”, “I’ll levy”, “I’ll make” (77-95). Joined by the magician-scholars Valdes and Cornelius, he sums up his state of mind, subverting his initial statement on Aristotle: “Philosophy is odious and obscure / Both law and physics are for petty wits; ’Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me” (103-104). Faustus’s last line in the scene (“This night I’ll conjure, though I die therefore”, 160) makes clear that the ensuing conjuration scene (I.iii.) takes place very soon after, and Faustus’s renewed exclamations about what he will do through magic (I.iii.102-109) tie these two scenes together not just temporally but also emotionally. In the evocation scene, Faustus might not feel fear or despair (yet), but he is anything but dispassionate.

Passions are much more overt in an invocation scene from a later play, Barnabe Barnes’s *The Devil’s Charter*. Much indebted to Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and usually dismissed in terms of its quality,<sup>52</sup> it is nevertheless an interesting example of the depiction of magic on the early modern stage, and it features one of the most detailed conjuring scenes in the canon. The play centres on the life of Pope Alexander VI, formerly Rodrigo Borgia, and the diabolical corruption of his court and family. A dumb show in the prologue already shows the pact made between Borgia and the devil, who crowns him pope, although Alexander prefers to use poison rather than magic to dispatch anyone who stands in his way in the rest of the play. He does, however, call up demons when he views the murder of his son, the Duke of Candy, in his magic glass.<sup>53</sup>

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51 Original emphasis.

52 Cf. e.g. Cox 1998: 934.

53 For similar scenes of a magician showing far-off scenes happening simultaneously (like an early modern security camera), see e.g. Robert Greene’s *Friar Bacon and*

The scene begins with Alexander already distracted to the point of incoherence: “Fore God, 'tis Candy, 'tis Candy, 'tis Candy, I know 'tis Candy” (IV.i.1).<sup>54</sup> He quickly gives instructions for the magic ritual,<sup>55</sup> interspersing astrological details and the instruments of conjuration with outbursts in which he repetitively harps on his dead son:

Candy my son is murder'd, Candy my son,  
Candy my son is murder'd. I will raise  
All the great devils to show the murderer.  
Even as thou lov'dst my son, haste and dispatch,  
Haste and dispatch it as thou lov'st my soul. (IV.i.22-26)

He seems entirely overcome by emotion when the devils he has raised finally show him in a dumb show that Candy's murderer is Alexander's other son, Caesar, demanding the dumb show be stopped and even (untypically) invoking the saints: “Hold, hold, hold, hold, hold! *Per todos santos*, now no more!” (78, original emphasis). Yet despite this, he is not yet finished with the devils, asking them to also show him who murdered his daughter Lucretia's husband. As the dumb show reveals that it was Lucretia herself, he again raves, calling for “no more” and claiming that his “soul dissolves” (84).

Yet the continuous protestations of his misery are double edged. There is a dark pun in the “cureless wounds” he has received in discovering these truths, which at first seem to refer only to his wounded feelings. They are “of my body: / Wounds both of my soul and body” (90-91), i.e. both injuring his humoral constitution and begotten by him, his son and daughter themselves. And indeed, Alexander immediately comforts himself – by giving detailed instructions to have his daughter poisoned, a far cry from the confused rhetoric employed in the beginning of the scene. As with Faustus, this rapid shift illustrates the changes between passions that showcase the ability of the actor; but in this case, it also calls into question the veracity of the passion of the character.

Passions continue to be invoked after the revelation that Caesar is Candy's murderer has the pleasant side effect of giving the father unprecedented power over the son: Alexander can now blackmail Caesar to ensure his loyalty, and

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*Friar Bungay* (which also features a magic glass for this purpose), and John Webster's *The White Devil*.

54 All quotes from Barnes 1999.

55 As Robert West has shown, the details of the scene echo the *Heptameron* (quoted in Traister 1984: 59).

indeed he does so in the scene following the conjuration.<sup>56</sup> Seeing his remaining son firmly in his power, Alexander forgives Caesar for the murder and advises him to continue to dissemble grief for his brother: "Look sullen and demure, hold down thy head / Like one swoll'n up with sorrow" (IV.ii.135-136). This affectation of passion fits well with Alexander's diabolical Machiavellianism, which makes even the devil seem more truthful than the supposedly grieving father, but it also touches on the dissembling of passions that an actor must do – whether he is playing Faustus or Alexander.

## **THE WAGES OF SIN: SCENAE ULTIMAE OF SPIRITUAL DESPAIR**

Both characters thus exhibit and utilize different passions when calling up devils and in their interactions with them. Yet in the final hours before their grisly ends, both reflect on their spiritual state and both have extended scenes in which faint hope, fear, and despair are played out on stage.<sup>57</sup> In *The Devil's Charter*, the titular contract is fulfilled and the devil claims Alexander by thwarting yet another attempt at poisoning a political enemy, leading to Alexander and his son drinking the fatal wine themselves. In a final confrontation with the devil, he finds himself outmanoeuvred and taunted by the Devil for his inevitable damnation. For the first time, Alexander shows his knowledge of the doctrines of divine salvation, arguing that God will have mercy on him – but it is his incapability to be moved, to wholeheartedly ask for forgiveness, that seals his fate. "Stir, stubborn, stony, stiff, indurate heart! Not yet up? Why? What? Wilt thou not, foul traitor to my soul?" he cries in a panic (V.vi.163-165). The very words he uses harken back not only to humoral discourses on the passions,<sup>58</sup> but to a common Protestant concept described by Alec Ryrie: the stony, cold, dry and insensible heart, an affliction thought worse than spiritual pain.<sup>59</sup>

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56 Cox 1998: 940 even reads Candy's murder by Caesar as purposefully instigated by Alexander to effect this situation.

57 The ensuing discussion of passions in the two final scenes is only partial due to spatial constraints; much more could be said about the interaction of humoral and theological concepts and their rhetorical expressions, and especially on the masterful use of rhetoric in the depiction of Faustus's mounting panic.

58 Alexander imagines his heart "clogg'd with sin / Oppressed with damnation", mixing spiritual and humoral concepts, V.vi.166-167.

59 Ryrie 2013: 20-26.

Faustus's deeds are nowhere near as heinous as Alexander's, and it has often been noted that his magic ultimately gains him little of the riches and power he originally craved. Magic has brought transient "delight", in the form of dancing spirits and a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins,<sup>60</sup> both called in by the devil to distract Faustus from his doubts (II.i. and II.iii.), a trip to Rome and Italy (III.i.), and in the form of magical demonstrations for the Emperor of Germany (IV.i.) and the Duke of Vanholt (IV.vi); but throughout the play, Faustus struggles with the fact that the "joys" he originally expected to gain from magic (I.i.146) are denied to him, as they are to Mephistopheles. "Joy", apart from Faustus's one mistaken assumption in the first scene, is a word only ever associated with God.

When Faustus finally finds himself confronted with the inevitability of his end, despair wins out over the stale delights of magic. His melancholic mood is interpreted by his fellow scholars as a humoral affliction that can be cured by physicians. They assume it to be a result of him being "over-solitary", but he corrects them: the "surfeit" he suffers from is not an excess of solitude but one of sin. His despair is spiritual, not physical (V.ii.31-40). Faustus, like Alexander, is unable to access the kind of passion that will mollify his heart and allow him to repent, a state of spiritual paralysis he has already encountered in earlier attempts to regain God's favour (cf. II.iii.17-18).<sup>61</sup> Instead, images of a different kind of passion enter into his speech: in the last two scenes, his meditations on blood finally bring him to the Passion of Christ.

Mephistopheles, waiting unseen with other devils for Faustus to appear for his final scene, is the first to link blood to Faustus's heart of stone in an image that can be read literally in the context of humoralism: "now his heart-blood dries with grief; / His conscience kills it" (V.ii.12-13). But Faustus takes up the image of blood and expands it further. Recognising his inability to feel true contrition and to show it with tears, he wishes that blood would gush forth instead (56-57),<sup>62</sup> and finally, in his last hour, he returns to the image of gushing blood in a more symbolic vein. In a beautiful instance of word scenery, he evokes the sunset with "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firma-

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60 Themselves associated with the passions: cf. Gaukroger 1998: 2.

61 "My heart is hardened; I cannot repent" (II.iii.18). Marlowe's influence on Barnes is of course very apparent here, but both writers draw on established theological Protestant discourse as noted above.

62 This macabre foreshadowing of Faustus's grisly end also harkens back to the diabolical contract signed in blood which he finally divulges to his associates (V.ii.61-66).

ment!"<sup>63</sup> and hopes for salvation through even a drop of it. However, when he calls on Christ he seems to suffer immediate physical consequences: "Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ", he begs the devil (V.ii.146). But in the context of the multiple passions in this scene, is this really the devil torturing Faustus's heart, or finally a trace of the true feeling that could conceivable save him? The complex relationship of hearts, blood, and passion retains its typically Marlovian ambiguity when the light disappears and Faustus is left fearing the wrath, rather than hoping for the mercy, of God.

## CONCLUSION

The treatment of passions in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Devil's Charter* is undoubtedly deeply influenced by the concept of the four humours and the physiological basis of early modern emotions. But both plays enrich this physiology with conceptions of the passions that echo other discourses, especially the theological and moralistic ones that can also be found in contemporaneous texts on magic. Human feelings have a basis in bodily states, but beyond that, these texts portray their proper management as integral to both the efficacy of ritual and the spiritual grace of the soul. In *Doctor Faustus* and *The Devil's Charter*, the passions are both dangerous and the only path to salvation. As greed, pride, or undue curiosity, they can lead to damnation; as sincere feelings of repentance and love of God, they can lead to salvation.

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63 This line is only present in the A-text of 1604, but seems to have been omitted in error from the B-text since the later reference to the line appears in both variants. Cf. the parallel texts in Marlowe 1950: 288-289.

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# Passionate Writing

## The Rhythms of Jealousy in Early Modern English Texts and Drama

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The aim of this contribution is to discuss a notion of “passionate writing” in relation to the rhetorical strategies employed by early modern English authors to write jealousy.<sup>1</sup> Early modern texts can be understood as potentially inscribed with emotional content since they were designed to evoke and stimulate the transaction of passions between author, text and reader, as entailed in the phenomenological discourses of humoralism. While paying particular attention to drama (and especially to Shakespeare’s *Othello* and *The Winter’s Tale*), this contribution will also use, as case studies, passages from poems and both fictional and non-fictional prose texts, in keeping with the early modern conception of literature, which comprised poetry as well as sermons and treatises. It will be demonstrated that, when reading or listening to these texts, form should not be disjoined from content, since they are both implicated in an inscribed ecology of emotion. Moreover, it is important to historicize the emotional transaction produced, since the literary evocation of jealousy would notably resonate in a culture that was constructed on and was heavily marked by male jealousy and what Breitenberg calls “anxious masculinity”.<sup>2</sup>

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1 For a general study on “writing jealousy”, see Monneyron 1997.

2 Cf. Breitenberg 1996.

## INTRODUCTION: DANCING JEALOUSY AND JEALOUS CHEMICALS

The year 2014 saw the debut of a much acclaimed ballet adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, a co-production of The Royal Ballet and the National Ballet of Canada. The Royal Opera House has uploaded a video on YouTube of Edward Watson playing Leontes, the king of Sicily who becomes monstrously jealous of his wife, Hermione. The dancer's expressions, his frenzied movements and the harrowing music have led a YouTube user, "Steemdup", to comment: "is Leontes a tortured character? Ed is magnificent and a joy to watch. so [sic] passionate".<sup>3</sup> Obviously, "Steemdup" is not familiar with the story of *The Winter's Tale*; but what is striking is that s/he says that the dancer is "passionate". This response shows that the ballet has achieved to convey the king's emotion through movement only. This may indicate that those scholars who have recently focused on the role of the actor's body to express emotions rather than the language used have a point. The last two decades have produced a spate of studies related to what Keir Elam has called "the corporeal turn".<sup>4</sup> With the decline of New Critical taboos on "affective fallacy", as well as of Structuralism's logocentrism, the discourses of corporeality and its connections with emotion have become one of the most active and fascinating hermeneutic movements in studies of early modern drama and literature.<sup>5</sup> This shift has many positive assets. For instance, it foregrounds the multiplicity of media and of the sensorial channels making up theatre: theatre is not only made of words, but also of bodies, music, lighting, costumes etc.

The dancer has then been able to express jealousy without verbal aid. This is what had preoccupied Joby Talbot, the composer, who recalls his reaction on first hearing that he should compose a score for a ballet adaptation of *The Winter's Tale*: "My first thought was, 'how do you tell the story through music and dance of a jealousy?' Jealousy being the least kinetic, the least active, the least constructive emotion that kind of is."<sup>6</sup> We could compare Talbot's statement and

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3 The Royal Opera House 2015b.

4 Elam 1996: 143.

5 Just a sample: Roach 1985; Hillman/Mazzio 1997; Paster/Rowe/Floyd-Wilson 2004; Paster 2004; Smith 2009; id. 2010; Cummings/Sierhuis 2013; Craik/Pollard 2013; Hobgood 2014; Johnson/Sutton/Tribble 2014. For a concise discussion of what can be gained from a study of emotions and passions in literature and linguistics, see Elam 1993.

6 The Royal Opera House 2015a.

predicament with the performances of *commedia dell'arte* players who would travel across Europe, occasionally not speaking the local language, and whose plots often revolved around jealousy. This could be explained considering that the experience of jealousy seems to have some universal, cross-cultural qualities which can be perceived by anyone. Indeed, although the majority of scientists argue that jealousy is a secondary, non-basic emotion<sup>7</sup> involving blends of other emotions, “anthropologists have so far failed to uncover a single culture that is free of this affliction”<sup>8</sup>.

Yet, when reading the aforementioned comment of the Youtube user or listening to the interviews with the producers of the ballet, something very interesting can be noticed. Christopher Wheeldon, the choreographer, recalls having said to the Leontes dancer: “perhaps that movement looks like it might start to suggest a slow flushing through of the body of [...] all these dreadful jealous chemicals we all have the ability to release”.<sup>9</sup> The dancer is thus “passionate” and releases “jealous chemicals”. It can be argued that these pronouncements are vestigial tokens of a now obsolete medical discourse, humorism, or humorism.<sup>10</sup> According to humorism, all human beings are characterized by their “temperament”, a unique mixture of bodily fluids, called humors (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile). The humors course through and across bodies which were believed to be highly porous; Helkiah Crooke famously described the human body as “*Transpirable* and *Trans-fluxible*”.<sup>11</sup> Humors could be easily excited or perturbed (for instance, by change of climate, diet, age etc.), and could in turn alter the temperament. What is important to understand is that pre-Cartesian passions crossed physiology and psychology: they were not internal objects but were thought to “comprise [...] an ecology or a transaction”.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, early moderns would not have found our views on embodiedness as alien as we may first suppose. As Bruce R. Smith puts it:

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7 Cf. Salovey 1991. For a very good introduction to “emotion studies” relating to jealousy, see Sanders 2014:13-31.

8 Nordlund 2002: 148.

9 The Royal Opera House 2015a.

10 It must be said that to talk of “humorism” is to commit a broad, though necessary, generalization: there were various strands of medical, theological and philosophical discourses that relied on Galenian and Aristotelian writings on the workings of the soul and of the humors. However, they were often interrelated in significant ways. See Park 2009 and Kessler/id. 2009.

11 Crooke 1615: 175.

12 Paster/Rowe/Floyd-Wilson 2004: 18.

Instructed by Freud, we think of emotion as an energy that acts *on* the material body; for Donne and his contemporaries, passion was a biochemical state that arises *from* the material body. An emotion is, for us, a *response* to an act of cognition; for Donne and his contemporaries passion was the *impetus* for an act of cognition.<sup>13</sup>

Humors were refined as “spirits” and, as such, mediated between different individuals: Giorgio Agamben has coined the expression “pneumatic culture”.<sup>14</sup> For instance, one did not fall in love by directly perceiving an external, attractive body: instead, “an internal image, that is, the phantasm impressed on the phantastic spirits by the gaze, [was] the origin and the object of falling in love”.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most frequent views of playgoing as an activity was that seeing and hearing a play could literally transform the spectator. Playwrights inherited and explored the classical teachings of Cicero, Horace and Quintilian, for whom an actor, just like an orator, needs to be “passionate”, that is, imbued with and dominated by an emotion, to move the spectator accordingly. By making himself angry, sad, jealous or amorous, he would transmit these angry, sad, jealous or amorous humors to the spectator, who would undergo a constitutive change, since these humors would alter his or her internal balance. We can apply to playacting what Thomas Wright in 1604 wrote of the amazing skills of orators in altering their audiences’ passions:

The Christian Orator [...] perfectly vnderstanding the natures and properties of mens passions, questionlesse may effectuate strange matters in the mindes of his Auditors. I remember a Preacher in *Italy*, who had such power ouer his Auditors affections, that whē it pleased him he could cause them shedd abundance of teares, yea and with teares dropping downe his cheeke, presently turne their sorrow into laughter: *and the reason was, because hee himselfe being extremely passionate*, knowing moreouer the Art of mouing the affections of those auditors [...] The same commoditie may be gathered by all other Orators, as Ambassadors, Lawyers, Magistrates, Captaines, and whomsoeuer wold perswade a multitude, because if they one can stirre a Passion or Affection in their Hearers, then they haue almost halfe perswaded them [...].<sup>16</sup>

Nothing could terrify the antitheatricalists more than such powers of transformative persuasion. However, it was not only theatrical or oratorical performances

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13 Smith 2009: 4.

14 Agamben 1993: 99.

15 Ibid.: 23.

16 Wright 1971: 3-4 (second emphasis E.S.).

that were believed to work such perturbations: written texts were thought to do the same.

## PASSIONATE WRITING

The most recent studies on early modern playacting primarily focus on the ways emotions were expressed through and across the bodies of actors and spectators. As Anthony Dawson puts it: “the body of the actor both represents and is what it impersonates, since it is that body, as identified with the character’s, that generates emotions.”<sup>17</sup> In these studies, after years of meticulous close readings of the texts, less marked attention is paid to the words uttered by the characters. This is detrimental since theatrical performances were certainly seen, but also, and for some scholars,<sup>18</sup> especially, heard, during the Elizabethan age. Moreover, plays were read: since the 1590s, the market for playbooks burgeoned substantially.<sup>19</sup>

As John Milton put it, books in general “do contain a potency of life in them”.<sup>20</sup> The contents of such texts were inscribed with emotions, which were designed to impress themselves onto the reader. Thus, to quote Thomas Wright again,<sup>21</sup> “corrupted Bookes [...] insinuate their matter vnto the chiefe affection and highest part of the Soule”.<sup>22</sup> Wright lists among such books the texts produced by “light and wanton Poets”, comparing them to “Machiauelian policies”.<sup>23</sup> The threat of similar books equals that of “many shewes, stage-plaies, and such impure exercises, which tend to the manifest overthrow of tender Soules”.<sup>24</sup> The only cure Wright can think of is to imbibe different humors, those

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17 Dawson/Yachnin 2001: 33.

18 Cf. Gurr 2004: 102-115.

19 Cf. Berek 2012; Erne 2013.

20 *Areopagitica* (1644), quoted in Craik 2007: ix.

21 I am aware that scholars have relied far too heavily on Thomas Wright, whose text *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1601; 1604) presents many peculiarities that should not be generalized for the overarching paradigms of humoralism: he was a Jesuit and he often delves into moral and theological discussions (see Sullivan 2015). Still, the importance of that treatise cannot be overestimated, also because of the influence it had in his own time: see Wright 1986: 3-16.

22 Wright 1971: 333-334.

23 Ibid.: 333.

24 Ibid.: 333-334.

instilled by a different kind of literature: “thousands of spirituall Volumes, the holy Scriptures, sermons, exhortations, homilies, meditations, prayer-bookes”.<sup>25</sup>

In a recent article, Claire Labarbe suggestively uses the expression “the dark ink of melancholy”,<sup>26</sup> and discusses how character-books perpetuated traditional beliefs in the symptoms of black bile, but also portrayed a different type of this disease. She terms it “poetical melancholy”, a manifestation of inspiration that could “be sought after as a remedy against physical or circumstantial melancholy”.<sup>27</sup> This stance can be strengthened by drawing from the perspectives of historical phenomenology: it can be shown that early modern texts were actually believed to be “passionate”, imbued with humors that could affect the reader, as it were, “biochemically”.

Words written on the page and/or heard in the theatre do shape cognitive and emotional experience. However, the ways in which these processes are conceptualized provide important insights into one’s aesthetical appreciation of literature and drama. In the writing process, early modern authors were deeply aware of the phenomenological processes related to humorism and tried to influence and stimulate them. It was even necessary to coin a particular verb: “to passionate”, that is, “to excite or imbue with passion, or with a particular emotion, as love, fear, anger, etc.” (*OED* 1). Thus, according to Thomas Pastell, “Beaumont and Fletcher coyn’d a golden way / T’expresse, suspend, and passionate a Play”.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, this power on the part of authors was perceived as so strong that:

It was even claimed, extravagantly enough, that a playwright’s ability to handle the passions well brought him near to God; he alone could turn his own “quicke passions, and witty humors [...] into matter and forme as infinite, as Gods pleasure to diversifie mankinde” [...] passions were not simply what playwrights depicted; they were what motivated the writing in the first place. “Passion” was *inceptive*.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to this, the nature/nurture divide in relation to issues of mimetic representation of emotions was quite ambiguous. Angela Locatelli has investigated how the English Ramist Abraham Fraunce (1558?-1593?) dealt with the manifestation of emotions in rhetoric. Fraunce’s writings on the concept of “utterance” reveal “a paradox inherent in the early modern conception of mimesis:

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25 Ibid.: 334.

26 Labarbe 2015.

27 Ibid.

28 Pastell 1652: B6r.

29 Palfrey/Stern 2007: 316.

one prescribes the symptom as gesture in order to effectively represent an emotion".<sup>30</sup> In other words, what is cultural (a symbol) is made to fold itself onto what is physiological through prescription: a particular gesture, a particular tone of voice are given an appearance of spontaneity when, in fact, their meaning is supposed to be recognized by a certain community familiar with these conventions. For instance, to show pity, "the voyce must be full, sobbing, flexible, interrupted".<sup>31</sup>

The contemporary spectator or reader may not understand how these emotional patterns were articulated because they speak a different code. Martha Nussbaum succinctly explains that: "A person who does not know the emotional 'grammar' of his or her society cannot be assumed to have the same emotional life as one who does know this 'grammar'".<sup>32</sup> It is well known that, in the early modern period, the study of rhetoric was not simply the object of antiquarian education or the source of flowery embellishments, but the very groundwork for social interaction and self-fashioning. Rhetoric structured and shaped the "emotional grammar" of the Renaissance *sensu* Nussbaum.

Most noteworthy in this context are the considerations of Bruce R. Smith: we may not be able to stand at the centre of the early modern "intersubjective 'field of perception'", in Edmund Husserl's terms, but this "should not stop us, however, from projecting ourselves into the historically reconstructed field of perception as far as we are able".<sup>33</sup> This attempt opens up new perspectives in judging and enjoying early modern texts.

We have seen that texts were considered very potent instruments to move and change the reader's beliefs, whether to good or to evil. This was so because of the perceived permeability of the human body. The spirits that enabled the humoral mediation between the author, the text and the reader, as well as between the actor and the spectator, were part and parcel of Agamben's "pneumatic culture". Of course, this ecosystem of intersubjective fields of perception was ideologically inflected: women, for instance, were believed to be much more vulnerable to humoral perturbations, and melancholy in men was often perceived as having an emasculating force.

This contribution discusses passionate writing in relation to one particular emotion: early modern jealousy. Renaissance England seems to have been obsessed with male jealousy: "Extraliterary evidence certainly reinforces the view that anxiety about female sexual fidelity ran high in English Renaissance cul-

30 Locatelli 1993: 162 (translation E.S.).

31 Ibid.

32 Nussbaum 2001: 149.

33 Smith 2010: 28.

ture”.<sup>34</sup> Women’s jealousy was more rarely thematized for various reasons, but to put it in one word – patriarchalism. Excerpts from different texts will be used as examples, paying particular attention to Shakespeare’s *Othello* and *The Winter’s Tale*. In this attempt, Allison P. Hobgood’s pioneering study is very useful: in her book, she sets out to examine “feeling early modern bodies to uncover the ways they forced drama to reckon with and acknowledge their significant role in making sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English theater emotionally meaningful”.<sup>35</sup>

## LINES OF JEALOUSY

Jealousy was almost always associated with the melancholy temperament, the one dominated by black bile, the cold and dry humor.<sup>36</sup> However, the most dangerous type was “melancholy adust”. Choleric men, that is, those whose temperament was dominated by yellow bile, were said to be very easily irritated and incensed. When subjected to the great humoral perturbation of jealousy, their temperature would increase so much that the yellow bile would burn (it would become “adust”) and turn into a form of black bile worse than simple melancholy. This dreadful perturbation would not allow them to reason any more.

The dramatist Philip Massinger visually showed these humoral alterations in a tragicomedy, *The Picture* (1629-30). In the play, a jealous husband is given a magic picture which will turn yellow if his bride should be tempted to adultery and which will turn black should she yield completely. These changes of colour are revealing. The picture may reflect the state of his wife’s chastity given the early modern humoral permeability, but it also signals the jealousy in the husband himself, whose passion literally turns from irascible to melancholic.

How can these changes be expressed through words? How do you write jealousy?<sup>37</sup> Has jealousy a particular sound or noise? In one of his elegies, John Donne says that a jealous man “snorts”<sup>38</sup> – is this universal? Early seventeenth-

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34 Maus 1987: 561. Maus’s article has deservedly become a classic for studies on early modern jealousy. Concerning *Othello*, see the concise Allan 2010.

35 Hobgood 2014: 4-5.

36 See Babb 1951; Klibansky/Panofsky/Saxl 1964; Trevor 2004.

37 Monneyron 1997 is an important reading but only concerns literature of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and moves from mainly psychoanalytic and Marxist perspectives.

38 Cf. *Elegy 3: Jealousy* in Carey 1990: 14, l. 22.

century musicology saw the emergence of the *Affektenlehre*, a doctrine which aimed at representing human emotions through musical rhetoric, and scholars started to codify these emotions in music. So jealousy was alternatively associated with minor key music, or with discordance and even chromaticism.<sup>39</sup> This serves to show that the representation of emotions is heavily dependent on cultural bases. Humoralism was perhaps the most important of these cultural bases in the early modern period. It was thought that prosody and rhetorical devices could both elicit and reveal passions, because “[w]ords represent most exactly the very image of the minde and soule”.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Wright pointed out how to identify a particular temperament: “if they rage with furious words, brawle or wrangle, such carie the conscience of cholericke.”<sup>41</sup> Humoralism was a framework which enabled early modern individuals to present passions in the emotional and cultural ecology between text and world.<sup>42</sup>

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is one of the greatest works on melancholy ever written. Interestingly, he characterized his writing both as an encyclopedia on the effects produced by black bile and as a pre-Freudian talking/writing cure: “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy.”<sup>43</sup> He portrays himself as a man afflicted by melancholy and he says that by writing of it he feels purged of this disease. He devotes a large section to jealousy, a malady he perceives as so strong that he denotes it as a separate type of melancholy. What is very interesting is *how* he writes of jealousy. Jealousy is “a fury, a continual fever, full of suspicion, fear and sorrow, a martyrdom, a mirth-marring monster” (vol. 3, 264). Note the alliterations. When in turn he portrays the behaviour of the jealous man, he regales us with a passage (vol. 3, 281) that cannot be described but as a dramatic piece:

[...] he gloats on him, on her, accurately observing on whom she looks, who looks at her, what she saith, doth, at dinner, at supper, sitting, walking, at home, abroad, he is the same, still inquiring, maundering, gazing, listening, affrighted with every small object; why did she smile, why did she pity him, commend him? why did she drink twice to such a man? why did she offer to kiss, to dance? &c., a whore, a whore, an arrant whore.

39 Cf. Anonymous 1975: 175.

40 Wright 1971: 105.

41 Ibid.: 106.

42 For a similar view, see the acute Oggiano 2012.

43 Burton 1977: vol. 1, 20. All subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically in the text.

The rhetoric of this quotation is exquisite. The repetitions are like bullets, and the asyndeton reflects the way this man cannot or refuses to reason. His style does not construct articulated independent and subordinate clauses; he proceeds in a fury. These sentences are dramatic in every sense of the adjective. One can surely compare Burton's quotation with Leontes's "affection speech" in *The Winter's Tale* (I.ii 139-148):<sup>44</sup>

Can thy dam?—may't be? —  
Affection, thy intention stabs the centre.  
Thou dost make possible things not so held,  
Communicat'st with dreams — how can this be? —  
With what's unreal thou co-active art,  
And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent  
Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost —  
And that beyond commission; and I find it —  
And that to the infection of my brains  
And hard'ning of my brows.

This passage has been famously described as the most obscure lines in Shakespeare.<sup>45</sup> But as Alessandro Serpieri has poignantly shown,<sup>46</sup> these lines are not unintelligible: they manage to mirror exactly the delusional, tortured frenzy of Leontes's passion. Listening to or reading these words, with their pauses, elisions and rhythms which do not permit logical connections, makes us feel this passion. This also happens thanks to the various types of *repetitio*, since "rhetoric taught repetition: it provided schemes for organizing language in patterns of reiterative sound".<sup>47</sup>

Before coming to *Othello*, it can be useful to refer to a passage from two poetical works which "dramatize", or "passionate", jealousy. In both cases, the authors employ alliteration and discordant prosody. Spenser, in *The Faerie Queene*, weaves an alliterative triumph (III.v 59) when relating the transformation of a man, Malbeco, into Jealousy itself:<sup>48</sup>

Ne euer is he wont on ought to feed,  
But toades and frogs, his pasture poysonus,

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44 All quotations from Shakespeare's plays refer to Taylor/Wells 2005.

45 Cf. Shakespeare 2010: 38-42.

46 Serpieri 2001.

47 De Grazia 2001: 62.

48 Spenser 1978.

Which in his cold complexion do breed  
A filthy bloud, or humour rancorous,  
Matter of doubt and dread suspitious,  
That doth with curelesse care consume the hart,  
Corrupts the stomacke with gall vitiuous,  
Croscuts the liuer with internall smart,  
And doth transfixe the soule with deathes eternall dart.

Normally, Nicholas Breton was a fine melodious lyricist, but when he writes of jealousy, he intentionally writes lines whose prosody is so impervious and hard that the reader is bound to be emotionally involved (and compare its similarities with the above-mentioned quotation from Burton):<sup>49</sup>

It workes, and watches, pries, and peeres about,  
Takes counsell, staies; yet goes on with intent,  
Bringes in one humour, puts another out,  
And findes out nothing but all discontent.

How should we evaluate such rhetorical strategies? One could dismiss them as merely ornamental devices, but if this use of rhetoric becomes a pattern itself, then it is bound to have much more significance.

## **Othello<sup>50</sup> AND DESTRUCTIVE RHYTHMS**

G. Wilson Knight was the scholar who introduced a seminal idea for criticism on *Othello*: he was the first to speak of “*Othello* music”<sup>51</sup> There are lines in the play which achieve a mesmerizing sublimity, a jewel-like eloquence which is

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49 Breton 1600: s.p. See it also discussed in Breitenberg 1996: 177-178.

50 It may be reasonable to warn in advance that for obvious reasons of space, I will not discuss at all the many, many *other* aspects of Othello’s jealousy, first and foremost, the intricate issues of class, race and gender (the last two are of great importance in understanding how humorism is deployed in the play). It is by the grossest and most simplifying of conventions that we say that *Othello* and *The Winter’s Tale* are Shakespeare’s “jealousy plays”. For a recent reading of how *Othello* resonated with Jacobean culture and how the play has been infinitely reappropriated and changed over time, see the recent Marzola 2015.

51 Knight 1993.

juxtaposed with the evoked noises of the sea storm and with the rhythms of Iago's fiendish insinuations. Recently, while still very influential, this idea has been attacked from many points of view; for example, we evidently risk not differentiating between the play and the character. And furthermore, what about Desdemona's own music?<sup>52</sup> Still, Shakespeare's lines in this play have a peculiar quality. It cannot be a coincidence that *Othello* was the source of so many musical scores, first and foremost, Rossini's and Verdi's operas. This led G.B. Shaw to scathingly remark: "The truth is that instead of *Othello* being an Italian opera written in the style of Shakespeare, *Othello* is a play by Shakespeare in the style of Italian opera."<sup>53</sup>

Iago's famous lines in the temptation scene read thus:

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy.  
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock  
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss  
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger.  
But, O, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er  
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet soundly<sup>54</sup> loves! (III.iii 168-73)

Othello will try to justify himself saying that "It is not words that shakes me thus" (IV.i 40), but actually it is Iago's verbal poison that triggers his furious jealousy.<sup>55</sup> Bruce R. Smith argues that "Iago's warning enkindles Othello's jealousy" precisely because he manages to divert Othello's and, it could be added, possibly *our* "sense of hearing from its rational work".<sup>56</sup> He comments:

The opening exclamation immediately wrests the imagination away from the regimen of words. [...] The power of Iago's speech over Othello's passions is very much an effect of

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52 See especially Hopkins 1994 and Hyde 1994. See also the acute reading in Locatelli 1988.

53 Quoted in Kimbell 1994: 607.

54 I prefer the Folio's "soundly" to Q's "strongly" and especially Knight's emendation "fondly" to strengthen the alliterative balance of the line.

55 The counterpart of all this is of course the visual dimension, the search for the "ocular proof". As we can see in Robbe-Grillet's astounding novel *La Jalouse*, jealousy, like envy, is an emotion that seems to feed on the creation of visual scenarios and engages in perspectival distortion. The spectators of the play are involved in a voyeuristic frame while watching the spectacle of jealousy: we are called to collude in Iago's orchestration, and we want to see as much as Othello fatally does.

56 Smith 2009: 203.

assonance and alliteration. Sounds of /o/ insinuate surprise or moaning in ‘*lord*’, ‘*jealousy*’, ‘*monster*’, ‘*doth*’, ‘*mock*’, and ‘*on*’. [...] Stronger still is the keening intimated by the /i/ sounds in ‘*jealousy*’, ‘*green*’, ‘*meat*’, and ‘*feeds*’. The ruminative [m] in ‘*monster*’, ‘*mock*’, and ‘*meat*’ completes the job of aural seduction. The stops in ‘*mock*’, ‘*meat*’, ‘*it*’, and ‘*feeds*’ give the completed utterance a deadly inevitability.<sup>57</sup>

Is this an instance of impressionistic criticism? To a certain level, the answer could be “yes”. In fact, we now know, for example, that some of the sounds italicized by Smith were pronounced differently in the early seventeenth century.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Reuven Tsur, the prominent exponent of the “cognitive poetics” movement, has discussed in his numerous works how certain sounds seem to be better suited to express particular emotions. For instance, “periodic sounds are perceived as smooth, soft, tender, whereas a-periodic, abrupt sounds are perceived as hard, aggressive, clearly-articulated”.<sup>59</sup> The contexts in which these sounds are situated realize different emotive potentials of sound symbolism and early modern playwrights were keen observers of this.

Iago may well say that it will be easy to taint Othello’s mind because of his “unbookish jealousy” (IV.i 100) (the adjective is a Shakespearean coinage). From the previous textual examples, it is by now clear that Othello’s jealousy is definitely not uncultured: it is deeply embedded in early modern world-making rhetoric. This is in perfect agreement with Frederick Turner: “Iago’s rhythm destroys Othello’s.”<sup>60</sup> Othello’s thoughts and words are overcome by Iago’s eloquence, and Othello’s own rhythms will, quite literally, be nullified by Iago: he is silenced through epileptic seizures.

## CONCLUSION: “RAGE HAS ITS LAWS”?<sup>61</sup>

What this contribution has tried to show and discuss is the passionate inscribing of jealousy in early modern English texts. Now, jealousy has been described by

57 Ibid.

58 Cf. Crystal 2005.

59 Tsur 2012: 273.

60 Turner 1971: 116. See this argument beautifully developed by Wood 2016: 79 et passim.

61 Tolstoy 1890: 134. I would like to thank Ingeborg Jandl (University of Graz) for sharing with me her great knowledge of the autobiographical elements of Tolstoy’s text and of its connections with modern and contemporary Russian culture.

cognitive scientists as well as by anthropologists as a “plastic phenomenon”: “something that is universal but also individually, culturally, and situationally variable”.<sup>62</sup> “Situationally variable”: this is fortunate enough, otherwise anyone hearing Beethoven’s *Kreutzer Sonata* would want to kill their partner as in Tolstoy’s novella. Thus, it would be inane to say that the rhythms of Iago’s eloquence correspond to the music of Beethoven that triggers the Tolstoyan character’s jealousy. However, early modern authors tried to write so that their texts could draw the reader or spectator into somebody else’s state of mind. The orchestration of the character’s jealousy is rhetorically articulated in texts which were thought able to physically as well as psychologically alter the reader, the actor and the spectator. The emotional transaction produced would resonate even more in Renaissance England, where there was a widespread culture of male jealousy.

It may be objected that too much emphasis has been placed here on form and style instead of content. It must be stressed that, if writing was intended to stir somebody’s passions, it is evident that form cannot be coarsely disjoined from content. Passionate writing could indeed make you “dote, yet doubt”.

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62 Nordlund 2002: 149.

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# When the Author Is Not the Author of Passions

J.J. Engel's *Herr Lorenz Stark* and the Pathognomy of Style

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YULIA MARFUTOVA

In the eyes of the 18th century, physiognomic portraits work in a twofold way: They reveal the character and affects of the *portrayed*, while also shedding a light on the soul and passions of the *portrayer*. Johann Caspar Lavater discussed this epistemic problem in his *Physiognomische Fragmente*, a protoscientific bestseller of the 1770s. However talented an artist might be, he is creating a person's portrait in his own very distinctive way, inevitably lending it his own characteristic style.<sup>1</sup> Lavater showed how differently a portrait, for example of Isaac Newton, would be carried out by different artists, providing a list of all the spots that would be “zu unbestimmt schattirt” or “verschliffen”.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he never tired of mentioning that a silhouette or a drawing might be faulty, “um etwas verschnitten” or “etwas verzeichnet”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he warned his readership that the various modes of imagination as well as the different aesthetic abilities of distinct painters could change the portrait of one and the same man (“wie sehr die verschiedenen Vorstellungsarten der Maler, und ihre verschiedenen Fähigkeiten ein und ebendenselben Mann umbilden und verschieben”).<sup>4</sup> For

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1 Cf. Arburg 2016: 28, 34–35.

2 “Too indeterminately shaded” or “blurred”. Lavater 1775–1778/vol. 2: XXXIV. Fragment, 277. *Physiognomische Fragmente* was preceded by *Von der Physiognomik* (1772). Translations, if not otherwise indicated, by Y.M.

3 “Slightly miscut” or “slightly misdrawn”. Lavater 1775–1778/vol. 3: XII. Fragment, 313; vol. 2: XII. Fragment, 116 i.a.

4 Lavater 1775–1778/vol. 2: 276.

Lavater and his contemporaries, there is no way around the fact that a portrait is inevitably showing the soul of the portrayed *and* of the portrayer.

This knowledge seems to be shared by literary portraits as well. In the anthropological novel *Herr Lorenz Stark. Ein Charaktergemälde* (1801), Johann Jakob Engel shows how portraits of characters can be (involuntarily) corrupted by their author's character and passions. However, an author's influence on a portrait is not only a major topic in the story told in the novel, but is also mirrored in the novel's style itself, as will be elaborated in the course of the essay.

But let us recall some biographic facts first:<sup>5</sup> Johann Jakob Engel, author of various theatre plays, held the prestigious post of director of the Royal Theatre in Berlin until 1794. When he was sacked by King Frederick William II of Prussia over a quarrel about Mozart's *Magic Flute* without even being granted a pension, he found himself in financial difficulties. Just in time came an offer from Schiller that he contribute to the newly founded literary magazine *Die Horen*. From the very beginning, the aesthetic ambitions of Schiller's magazine collided with economic realities. Like his friend Goethe and many others, Schiller made disparaging remarks about Engel's literary qualities, but now he was in need of a 'popular' author for his magazine to suit the taste of the general public. It was out of economic necessities on both sides, that, beginning in 1795, the first seventeen chapters of Engel's novel *Herr Lorenz Stark* started to appear as a series in the magazine. The complete novel was eventually published in 1801 – and it became a huge success. The novel was staged in 1802 in the Royal Theatre in Weimar under the directorship of Goethe and with Iffland as the main actor. During the 19th century, sixteen editions of the novel were published in the German language alone, not counting translations into English and French and so-called "Klassiker-" or "Miniaturbibliotheken". As early as 1806, the French translation became part of the school curriculum, and in 1870 the novel even became part of the literary canon of Reclams Universalbibliothek.

Engel's novel centres on the merchant and housefather Lorenz Stark. Holding strong beliefs in economic and moral virtues, Stark misjudges the characters of his son and his son's bride-to-be badly, until the end of the novel brings about a kind of characterological *anagnorisis*. The novel's subtitle is: *Ein Charaktergemälde* ("a character portrait").<sup>6</sup> The metaphor "character portrait" is not only referring to anthropology and physiognomy as the novel's subjects, but also stresses the connection between physiognomy and the visual arts, between phys-

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5 For the following biographical account as well as the history of publication cf. Košenina/Wehrhahn 1991: 99-105. Cf. furthermore Košenina 2005: 1-26.

6 The subtitle of the 19th century English translation (cf. Engel 1826) is inaccurate: *Lorenz Stark, A Characteristic Picture of a German Family*.

iognomy and pictorial representation. In accordance with the metaphor “character portrait”, Stark is depicted both as a judge of customs (“*Sittenrichter*”<sup>7</sup>) and of art; indeed, when judging a person’s character, he is doing nothing else than judging a piece of art, i.e., “strenge [...] kunstrichtern”<sup>8</sup>.

To a certain extent, drawing a character portrait involves drawing one’s own portrait. Engel’s novel exemplifies this by a scene in which Stark’s daughter is drawing his portrait for the widow Lyk. Of course, she is not really drawing a character portrait but rather evoking one mentally – but it is no coincidence that metaphors deriving from the sphere of visual arts are being used. Since it is distorted by her own perception as well as by the intention of drawing a favourable ‘picture’, the validity of such a ‘portrait’ is rather limited:

Und nun fing sie an, ein *Gemälde* zu entwerfen, das zwar wirklich dem alten Herrn [Lorenz Stark, Y.M.] ziemlich ähnlich sah, das aber gleichwohl für ein *Bildnijß*, wofür es doch gelten sollte, zu wenig Eignes und Unterscheidendes hatte. Eine zu gerührte kindliche Dankbarkeit, und eine zu lebhafte Begeisterung, die immer idealisirt und verschönert, hatten die *Farben gemischt* und den *Pinsel geführt*. Indessen war eben durch diesen Fehler das *Gemälde* um so geschickter, der Witwe ein unbedingtes Vertrauen einzuflößen, und eine lebhafte Begierde nach einer so vortrefflichen Bekanntschaft bei ihr zu wecken. Wäre mitten unter den schönen Zügen des verständigen, menschenfreundlichen, großmüthigen Mannes, auch die ernste Falte des Sittenrichters und das heimliche Lächeln des Spötters, die doch sehr zur *Physiognomie* des Herrn Stark gehörten, sichtbar geworden: so würde freilich jenes Vertrauen sehr geschwächt, und diese Begierde sehr gedämpft worden seyn.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Engel 1991: 7 i.a.

8 Ibid.: 16. The verb “kunstrichtern” (“*judging a piece of art*”) is a neologism.

9 Ibid.: 50. “Here she began *to sketch a picture*, and although it resembled the old gentleman tolerably well in the main points, still as *a portrait*, for which it was intended, it had too little distinctness of feature, too little of the peculiarity of his manner to be perfect. Filial love warmed into fervour, and that too vivid enthusiasm, which always embellishes and idealises, had *mixed the colours*. However, these very faults rendered *the picture* better calculated to inspire the widow with unlimited confidence, and to awake in her bosom a strong desire to form so excellent an acquaintance. Had there also appeared among the finer features of the sage, benevolent, generous old man, the severe air of the moralizer [Sittenrichter, Y.M.], and the smile of the satirist, traits so predominant and characteristic in the *physiognomy* of Mr. Stark, her confidence would undoubtedly have been much weakened, and her desire to see him considerably diminished.” (emphasis Y.M.) Engel 1826/vol. 1: 187-188.

Physiognomy – the art of looking into a person's soul by analyzing his or her facial traits – was one of the virulent ideas of the late 18th century; and, in fact, Engel was acquainted with Lavater. However, as an author of various theatre plays and former director of the Royal Theatre in Berlin (1787-1794), Engel's *professional* interest lay in the field of pathognomy rather than physiognomy, i.e. in the field of an actor's changing facial expression rather than his unchangeable facial features, in the exhibition of passions rather than firm character traits. While some of Engel's contemporaries used the term 'physiognomy' as an umbrella term, others – most prominently: Lavater – made a more or less sharp distinction between physiognomy and pathognomy.<sup>10</sup> In the strict sense of the word, physiognomy was called the cultural technique of reading a person's basic character traits by his or her outward appearance, while pathognomy was understood as the art of deriving a person's momentary affects from his outward appearance. Engel dedicated two volumes and almost 700 pages to the cultural technique of pathognomy as an *eloquentia corporis* in theatre plays when he wrote a treatise entitled *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, published in 1785 and 1786.<sup>11</sup> Here, Engel states:

Ich nenne die Physiognomik eine der Mimik ähnliche Kunst; denn beyde beschäftigen sich damit, den Ausdruk der Seele im Körper zu beobachten: nur daß jene die festen bleibenden Züge, woraus sich das Allgemeine eines Charakters abnehmen läßt, und diese

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10 "Physiognomik, im eingeschränkten Sinne des Wortes, ist *Kraftdeutung*, oder *Wissenschaft der Zeichen der Kräfte*. / Pathognomik, *Leidenschaftsdeutung*, oder *Wissenschaft der Zeichen der Leidenschaften*. Jene zeigt den *stehenden* – diese den *bewegten* Charakter. / Der *stehende Charakter* liegt in der *Form* der *festen*, und in der *Ruhe* der *beweglichen* Theile. Der *leidenschaftliche* – in der *Bewegung* der *beweglichen*. [...] / *Physiognomik* zeigt die *Summe* der *Capitalkraft* – *Pathognomik* das *Interesse*, das jene abwirft. Jene, was der Mensch *überhaupt* ist; diese, was er in dem *gegenwärtigen Moment* ist.“ [Emphasis in original.] Lavater 1775-1778/vol. 4: II. Fragment, 39. "Physiognomy, opposed to pathognomy, is the knowledge of the signs of the powers and inclinations of men. Pathognomy is the knowledge of the signs of the passions. / Physiognomy, therefore, teaches the knowledge of character at rest; and pathognomy of character in motion. / Character at rest is displayed by the form of the solid and the appearance of the moveable parts, while at rest. Character impassioned is manifested by the moveable parts, in motion. / Physiognomy may be compared to the sum total of the mind; pathognomy to the interest which is the product of this sum total. The former shows what man is in general; the latter what he becomes at particular moments: or, the one what he might be, the other what he is." Lavater 1804/vol. 1: 20.

11 Cf. Engel 1785-1786.

die vorübergehenden körperlichen Bewegungen untersucht, die einen solchen und solchen einzelnen Zustand der Seele ankündigen.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, Engel's novel *Herr Lorenz Stark* pays close attention to the meticulous description of facial expressions and gestures that bear pathognomic or affective significance. It is no wonder that contemporary critics praised the detailed observations of facial expression and gestures in the novel that build upon the treatise *Ideen zu einer Mimik*.<sup>13</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel complimented Engel on being an experienced observer of mankind.<sup>14</sup> In particular, critics praised the novel's dialogues for their ability to add vivacity.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in the case of Engel's novel *Herr Lorenz Stark*, 'writing affects' means finding linguistic descriptions of facial traits that can be interpreted in a pathognomic way. On the other hand, 'reading affects' means paying attention to facial traits and gestures that disclose affective states. Although the novel aims at depicting protagonists as individuals (not as types), their facial expression and hence the form of their affective expression is in a paradoxical way far from being individual.

In *Ideen zu einer Mimik* Engel aimed at systematising all possible facial expressions; he believed in finding a kind of grammar or morphology of feelings that could be taught and learned (by theatre actors):

Es ist mir unwahrscheinlich, daß Sie die Arten der Seelenveränderungen selbst, die sich durch den Körper ausdrucken lassen, für so unendlich, so unbestimmbar sollten gehalten haben. Der gemischten zusammengesetzten Empfindungen ist ohne Zweifel die größte Anzahl; aber wenn man nur die reinern, einfachern, und für jede derselben einen bestimmten Ausdruck angeben könnte, so müßte dadurch, wie es scheint, auch für jene Mischungen

12 Engel 1785-1786/vol. 1: 6-7. "I see physiognomy as an art similar to facial expression [Mimik]; both observe the expression of the soul in the body: only that the first examines the firm, permanent traits that reveal the general character, and the latter examines the temporary physical movements that announce such and such a single state of the soul".

13 "[K]leine[] Bemerkungen des Ausdrucks in Minen und Geberden, in denen man den Vfs. der Mimik wiederfindet", were praised by a review in: *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 271 (1801), 657-660, quoted from Košenina/Wehrhahn 1991: 103. The reviewer is referring to Engel's *Ideen zu einer Mimik*.

14 "Ein[] geübte[r] Beobachter der Menschen". Review in: *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 6 (1796), quoted from *ibid*.

15 "Lebhaftigkeit und anschauliche[] Wirkung". Review in: *Neue allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* 87.1 (1804), quoted from *ibid*.

der Ausdruk schon so ziemlich bestimmt seyn. So wie diese selbst Zusammensetzungen der einfachen sind; so würde auch vermutlich ihr Ausdruk mehrere einfache Ausdrücke verbinden: und es käme darauf an, ob sich nicht gewisse Regeln, nach welchen diese Verbindung geschehen müßte, entdecken ließen.<sup>16</sup>

In particular, Engel aimed at depicting the ‘nature’, ‘the very essence’ of affects. It is quite revealing that he gave actors the advice not to strive for a mimesis of real feelings, but rather to aspire to mimic ideal feelings:

Nachahmung, Darstellung der Natur ist, wie man schon so oft erinnert hat und noch immer von neuem zu erinnern Ursache findet, ein Grundsatz, der nirgends hinreicht. Der Natur gelingt Manches in einer Vollkommenheit, daß die Kunst nichts weiter thun kann, als es sorgfältig aufzufassen und getreu wieder darzustellen; aber manches, auch wo sie am besten wirkt, erreicht bey ihr den Grad der Vollkommenheit nicht, den es sollte; manches geräth ihr falsch, manches zu schwach oder zu stark: Und da erfordert denn die Pflicht der Kunst, aus einer gesammelten Menge von Beobachtungen, oder nach Grundsätzen, die aus diesen Beobachtungen gezogen sind, die Fehler der Natur zu verbessern [...].<sup>17</sup>

To cut a long story short: Although there is much talk of ‘nature’ and ‘naturalness’ (‘Natürlichkeit’) throughout the 18th century, and in Engel’s writing in particular, there is nevertheless some rhetoric repertoire of feelings that can be taught and learned. Writing affects by describing facial expressions relies on a

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16 Engel 1785-1786/vol. 1: 27-28. “It seems unlikely to me that you should have considered the types of changes of the soul, which can be expressed by the body, as that infinite, indeterminate. There is undoubtedly a great number of mixed composite feelings; but if one could characterize the purer, simpler feelings and their characteristic expression, one could, as it seems, easily determine the expressions of composite feelings. Composite feelings are mixtures of the simpler ones, and their expressions would probably combine several simple expressions; it would depend on discovering the rules of their combination”.

17 Ibid.: vol. 1: 16-17. “Imitation, representation of nature is, as has often been stated and finds reason to be repeated anew, a principle that does not suffice. At times, nature succeeds in creating things of such perfection that art cannot do anything but faithfully imitate these things; but at times, even where it works best, nature does not achieve the necessary degree of perfection; some things turn out faulty, some too weak or too strong: And in this case the duty of art requires to correct the errors of nature, in accordance with collected observations or principles that are drawn from these observations [...]”.

readership that is able to interpret the applied grammar of feelings. Indeed, it involves a rather complex mental operation when affective states are not named explicitly or described, but can be traced back mainly by reading facial signs: One is then obliged to read symptoms. The protagonists in Engel's novel *Herr Lorenz Stark* pay very close attention to facial expressions and gestures that are of pathognomic meaning – and, in a way, the novel is teaching its readership to do the same, it obligates its readers to interpret facial expressions *as symptoms* of affective states. If the author wants his readership to understand these symptoms, he has to apply more or less conventional facial and affective expressions in his writing process; he has to choose a code of affective signs that is – with some probability – known to his readership. In fact, a certain conventionality of a 'language of emotions'<sup>18</sup> serves as the very basis of interpersonal as well as of literary communication. After all, we are talking of a novel, not a riddle.

In fact, one possible way of reading *Herr Lorenz Stark* is to read it as a 'doctor novel' that combines pathognomic or affective symptoms with medical or psychological symptoms. Stark's son-in-law is a family doctor; his wife (i.e. Stark's daughter) is referred to as "die Doctorinn".<sup>19</sup> Stark's son-in-law is not merely a doctor of the body, but also and most particularly a doctor of the human soul. He visits his patients "theils, um sich nach der Gesundheit, theils – oder wohl eigentlich und hauptsächlich – um sich nach der Gesinnung [...] zu erkunden".<sup>20</sup> The doctor's semiotics ("Semiotik des Doctors"<sup>21</sup>) are directed at the 'lovesickness' of his brother-in-law and his bride-to-be and his indication ("Indication"<sup>22</sup>) is based on pathognomic symptoms such as averted glances (e.g. "Niedersinken ihres bis dahin aufgehobenen Blicks in den Busen"<sup>23</sup>). Not only the doctor but also his wife, "die Doctorinn", is well versed in the art of reading affective symptoms ("Anzeichen"<sup>24</sup>). Indeed, this art of symptom interpretation is not the reserve of male scholars and professional doctors only, but is open to everybody, i.e. women. When drawing a parallel between the medical symptoms of a *facies hippocratica* and the affective symptoms of a person in love, the doctor's wife is claiming the latter as a female domain:

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18 *Languages of Emotion* was the name of a Cluster of Excellence at the Free University of Berlin (2007-2014).

19 The female form of "Doctor". At the time, it was common to address a woman by her husband's title.

20 Engel 1991: 59.

21 Ibid.: 17.

22 Ibid.: 39.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.: 83.

Sage mir doch: wie nanntest Du jüngst ein Gesicht, woran Du gewiß vorher weißt, daß Dein Kranker Dir sterben werde?

Ein hippokratisches etwa?

So ungefähr. Ja, so klang. – Nun, die Freiheit der armen Mädchen und Witwen, wenn sie im Abfahren begriffen ist, hat eben ein solches hip – hip – wie heißt es?

Hippokratisches Gesicht.

Richtig! – Und darauf verstehen nun wir Weiber – wir klugen, mein' ich – uns eben so gut, als Ihr Euch, Ihr gelehrten Herrn Doctoren, auf jenes.<sup>25</sup>

Scenes like these can be understood as an appeal to the reader to undertake interpretations of affective symptoms on his or her own.

Like Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg, who published the first German theory of the novel, *Versuch über den Roman* (1774),<sup>26</sup> Engel thought that the plot of a novel should focus primarily on the soul and the changing affective states of a protagonist, not on mere exterior events. But, let us recall, this paper began with the problem that by drawing another person's portrait, one is involuntarily drawing one's own portrait, that – according to the epistemology of the time – character portraits can be (involuntarily) corrupted by their author's characters and passions. This meant an aesthetic dilemma for Engel, who did not plan at all to depict *his* own affective state in the novel, but wanted to show the affective states of his literary protagonists instead. The writer found a technical solution to this dilemma.

In *Über Handlung, Gespräch und Erzählung*, a poetological text dating back to 1774, Engel had given his fellow writers the advice to switch to dramatic dialogue for representations of the soul: "Der Erzähler gehe [...], sobald es auf Schilderungen der Seele ankönmt, ins Dramatische über."<sup>27</sup> To put it more simply, Engel proposed the integration of dramatic – that is, dialogic – parts in a novel, as he believed that the form of unmediated dialogue would be much more

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25 Ibid.: 77-78. ““[...] Tell me, if you please, the name which you lately gave to that cast of face, by which you know before-hand with certainty that your patient will die?” / ‘A Hippocratic face. – Was that the name?’ / ‘Something of that kind. Yes, it sounded something like it. – Well, the liberty of poor maidens and widows, when on the point of expiring has just such a hip – hip – how do you call it?’ / ‘A Hippocratic face.’ / ‘Exactly so. – And on this point, we women – I mean to say, we sensible ones – understand these matters just as well as you learned doctors with respect to your patients. [...]’” (emphasis in original) Engel 1826/vol. 2: 101-102.

26 Cf. Blanckenburg 1965.

27 Engel 1964: 63. Foliation as in the facsimile edition.

capable of showing characters than mediated narrative.<sup>28</sup> He stated that dialogues were a mirror of the soul and he ascribed to dialogues a great ability to show characters and their affective states. He elaborated on an idea already put forward by Johann Jakob Sulzer that dialogues were the ideal form for displaying anthropological knowledge as well as for gaining psychological insights.<sup>29</sup> And, indeed, the novel *Herr Lorenz Stark* contains such an abundance of dialogues that it is considered to be a “dialogue novel” (“Dialogroman”).<sup>30</sup>

But why dialogues, of all literary forms?

To get a complete understanding of Engel’s poetics of dialogue one has to consult his former essay *Über Handlung, Gespräch und Erzählung* a bit further. Here, Engel differentiates between dialogue and narrative, between – what he calls – “Gespräch” and “Erzählung”. Engel states: “[D]er Dichter spricht entweder ganz in seiner eigenen Person, oder legt seine Gedanken andern in den Mund, sein Werk ist entweder fortgehende Rede, oder es ist Gespräch [...].”<sup>31</sup>

Unlike modern literary scholars, Engel does not differentiate between author and narrator. And this is of consequence, indeed. For Engel, there is *either* the voice of the author *or* the voice of a literary character, *either* the author’s speech *or* the character’s speech. According to Engel, while characters are speaking themselves, while they are “selbstredend”, the author is not present, “dann ist er nicht mehr Erzähler”.<sup>32</sup> As the word already implies, direct speech is *direct*; it is, according to Engel, unchanged and unadulterated by anyone else. This is touching on a distinction that Henry James would later describe as *showing* versus *telling*.<sup>33</sup>

However, direct speech is not only considered to be a mirror of the soul and passions of a literary protagonist because it is attributed to the literary protagonist exclusively (not to the author or narrator). The specific style of an utterance is also considered to possess physiognomic, or rather pathognomic, qualities. While the basic idea of style as the ‘expression’ of character can be traced back even to ancient Greece,<sup>34</sup> the term *physiognomy of style* was first coined in the

28 Cf. ibid.: 70.

29 Cf. Sulzer 1771/vol. 1: 473-476.

30 Cf. Seidel 2014: 207-225; Winter 1974. Cf. furthermore Tarot 1990: 241-287.

31 Engel 1964: 5. “The poet either talks entirely in his own person, or he puts his thoughts in another person’s mouth, his work is either continuous speech, or it is dialogue [...].”

32 Ibid.: 60.

33 James’ ideas were popularized by Percy Lubbock (cf. 1921).

34 Cf. Müller 1981.

18th century, (presumably)<sup>35</sup> by Lichtenberg. Quite ironically, it is Lichtenberg (of all people), the harsh critic of Lavater's physiognomy, who embraces the idea of a physiognomy of style. While Lichtenberg deeply mistrusts the semiotics of the physical body, he advises paying close attention to the 'body' of a text:

[W]enn du einen verzerrten Menschen von dir widriger Physiognomie siehst, so halte ihn nur um Himmels willen nicht für lasterhaft ohne die genaueste Untersuchung. [...] Allein einen klaren Satz der Physiognomik will ich dich lehren, es ist Physiognomik des Stils. Spricht jemand mit dir in der männlichen Prose Mendelssohns oder Feders oder Meiners oder Garves und du stößest auf einen Satz der dir bedenklich scheint, so kannst du ihn allemal glauben bis zu weiterer Untersuchung. Hingegen redet jemand mit dir im Wonneton der Seher, plundert und stolpert Dithyramben daher mit konvulsivischem Bemühen das Unaussprechliche auszusprechen, so glaube ihm kein Wort, wo du es nicht strenge untersucht hast.<sup>36</sup>

The belief in a physiognomy of style was wide-spread at the time. To list but a few names: Sulzer,<sup>37</sup> Karl Philipp Moritz<sup>38</sup> and Gellert<sup>39</sup> claimed to distinguish a person's character by his or her specific style. For these authors, style was *characteristic* in the very sense of the word.

But back to Engel. It is no coincidence that Engel is elaborating on the physiognomic and pathognomic qualities of direct speech; he is devising dialogues, or rather their style, as the mirror of the soul and passions of their originators. Engel writes:

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35 Cf. Mautner 1968: 150.

36 Quoted from Müller 1981: 102. “[W]hen you see a distorted human being with a repellent physiognomy, for God's sake, do not consider him to be vicious without the closest examination. [...] But one clear rule of physiognomy I will teach you, it is physiognomy of style. If anyone speaks to you in the masculine prose of Mendelssohn or Feder or Meiner or Garve and one sentence strikes you as questionable, then you may believe it without hesitation until further investigation. By contrast, if anyone speaks to you with the voice of a seer, puts forth dithyrambs in a convulsive effort to express the inexpressible, do not believe him a single word without strict examination”.

37 Sulzer 1774/vol. 2: 1047-1045.

38 Cf. Moritz 1793-1794.

39 Cf. Gellert 1751.

Die Erzählung [...] kann von dem jedesmaligen Zustande einer handelnden Seele; sie kann auch von dem ganzen genauesten Zusammenhange aller in ihr vorgehenden Veränderungen [sic!] nie eine so specielle, bestimmte, vollständige Idee geben, als das Gespräch. Es ist unglaublich, wie sehr sich die Seele den Worten einzudrücken, wie sie die Rede gleichsam zu ihrem Spiegel zu machen weiß, worin sich ihre jedesmalige ganze Gestalt bis auf die feinsten und delikatesten Züge darstellt. Der logische Satz, oder der bloße allgemeine Sinn, aus den Worten herausgezogen, ist immer das Wenigste; die ganze Bildung des Ausdrucks, die uns genau die bestimmte Fassung der Seele bey dem Gedanken zu erkennen giebt, ist alles.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, Engel is using metaphors deriving from the sphere of physiognomy and visual representation to make his point. While he compares an author's or narrator's utterance ("gesagte Idee") to a mere silhouette, he compares direct speech ("ausgedrückte Idee") to a colourful canvas: "[D]ie schlechthin gesagte Idee zeigt uns kaum den Schattenriß, kaum die äußersten Linien von dem Zustande der Seele; die so bestimmt ausgedrückte Idee ist das ausgeführte, lebendige, colorirte Gemälde selbst."<sup>41</sup>

And Engel pushes the metaphor of style as the mirror of the soul, the metaphor of physiognomic or pathognomic visibility even further. With reference to dialogues, he uses metaphoric expressions of visualisation and envisioning such as "vors Gesicht bring[en]"<sup>42</sup> or "vor Augen stellen".<sup>43</sup> For Engel, a dialogue is not a mere representation of a person's soul; rather, it is the very soul itself with all its feelings. This turns dialogues into perfect objects for anthropological observations, into data ("Fakta")<sup>44</sup> that can be assessed and reflected upon by the readership.

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40 Engel 1964: 57. "The narration [...] can never give such a specific, precise, exhaustive idea about the state of an active soul as the conversation; unlike the conversation, it can never give a complete and accurate account of the relations of all the changes occurring in the soul. / It is incredible how the soul is capable of moulding the words, how the soul is able to turn them into a mirror, which represents its entire figure down to the finest and most delicate traits. The proposition or the mere general sense, extracted from the words, is always the least; the whole form of the expression, which shows us the exact state of the soul, is everything".

41 Ibid.: 58. "The 'said idea' [=narrator's utterance, Y.M.] shows us hardly a silhouette, hardly the outermost lines of the state of the soul; the 'expressed idea' [=direct speech, Y.M.] is the completed, vibrant, coloured painting itself".

42 Ibid.: 74.

43 Ibid.: 75.

44 Ibid.: 79.

In summary, in a practical way, Engel recommends dialogues as a literary technique of ‘writing affects’, as a technique of presenting affective states of literary protagonists in a very direct and immediate form.<sup>45</sup> According to Engel’s poetics, dialogues are produced by the literary protagonists ‘themselves’. In other words: While dialogues reveal their author’s passions, their author is not the real author, but the fictional protagonists ‘themselves’.

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45 For the rhetoric heritage of Engel’s poetics of dialogue cf. Finsen 2004: 366-389.

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# How to Study Emotion Effects in Literature

## Written Emotions in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

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PIRJO LYTYKÄINEN

I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow.  
An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom  
hung over and pervaded all.<sup>1</sup>

Reading how Edgar Allan Poe's narrator-protagonist feels in the midst of the horrifying storyworld, the reader is affected. The emotion words and affective language in general have an impact on us and we react emotionally to his emotion, although the appropriate reaction is regulated by the context and the work as a whole. We all know from personal experience that the emotions of fictional characters or narrators as well as all the emotional contents of literary works affect us as readers. We presume that authors, when writing, not only present us with the factual or emotional realities of the fictional world but also endeavour to move us: they make us feel for, with or against the characters and, all in all, react emotionally to the world created by the text. This includes appreciating and enjoying the style and language through which the storyworld is presented to us. Interaction with the text also involves ways of reacting to the figure of the author that we feel in reading; all the choices made by the author create, in a sense, an emotional profile of the writer. All in all, the author writes to create an emotional response (which does not preclude other communicative intentions) and the reader reacts emotionally as well as intellectually.

Affective communication proceeds from the choices of the author in writing to the emotional effects produced in readers, and presupposes a common lan-

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1 Poe 1952: 128.

guage and common cognitive/affective frames.<sup>2</sup> Emotion effects are triggered in multiple ways by narrative, linguistic and stylistic features and the whole construction of fictional worlds. We may conjecture that any element of the story-world, narration or the language itself may participate in creating emotion effects. Furthermore, when we consider a literary text as a whole, we often have the feeling, like that of Poe's narrator in the epigraph above, of breathing an emotional atmosphere: while reading, we are immersed in a world coloured by a certain mood, be it sadness or joy, horror or just some kind of peaceful delectation.

In the following, I first outline my approach to the study of emotion effects. Second, I consider the question of emotional triggers, that is, types of textual elements that affect us and the way they produce emotion effects. To illustrate some of the categories involved, I turn to examples chosen from Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher". Discussing this concrete, emotionally loaded text brings up questions that have pertinence to literary texts in general. At the end, I focus on the concept of tone or mood and the particular mood of Poe's text.

## HOW TO STUDY EMOTION EFFECTS?

In any study of emotions, the first challenge is the terminology.<sup>3</sup> This varies from one study to another even within one field of study, not to speak of the deeper dividing lines between affective science and affect studies.<sup>4</sup> Without going deeper into this bewildering discussion, I will instead indicate here, how I use of the terms 'emotion', 'feeling' and 'affect' or 'affectivity' in this text. Here, these terms are understood in a very broad sense: affectivity is the most general term, referring to our tendency and capacity to be 'touched' or affected

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- 2 These frames include intra-literary frames or "literary tradition" and "prefiguration", to use Paul Ricœur's term from *Temps et récit* (volume II). Cf. Lyytikäinen 2012: 48 for a short presentation.
- 3 In English, the words 'emotion', 'affect', 'feeling', 'sentiment', 'mood', and 'passion' have been variably used to refer to the same or slightly different phenomena. In psychology, 'affect' is often the most general term, which contains subcategories such as emotions (or emotion episodes), moods, attitudes, interpersonal stances and affect dispositions (e.g. Frijda/Scherer 2009).
- 4 Vide e.g. Hogan 2016.

by phenomena in the world or inside our body or mind.<sup>5</sup> ‘Emotions’ or ‘feelings’ designate how we react – mentally and physically – to anything that affects us. I use these terms alternately although in many theories ‘feelings’ are seen as the bodily element of emotions. For the present purposes, however, it is enough to bear in mind that the variety of emotions encompasses what seem to be mere bodily feelings at one end of the scale and highly complex emotions that arise from and are accompanied by or imbued in our thinking (our judgments, beliefs, imaginings etc.) at the other.<sup>6</sup> These emotions may be short-term episodes or enduring processes with narrative structure.<sup>7</sup> I also refrain from drawing any clear line between subjective emotions and shared and collective emotions. Emotions connected to language use and literary communication always have a certain shared nature: when we speak we necessarily rely on general meanings rather than individually experienced emotions, we use shared frames and framing or patterns to make our feelings understood.

This has implications concerning the concept of the reader. We can speak of literary texts triggering emotions in individual readers, who may respond in all kinds of subjective ways, but it is equally legitimate to emphasize the writing and the composition of the text by investigating literary texts themselves, as we are confronted with linguistic signs and cognitive/affective frames used by writers. These signs and frames are the necessary condition for language understanding and it is pertinent to explore a literary text and its emotional impact at the level of language and, in the interpretation, focus on the authorial audience rather than real readers. This concept originates from Peter Rabinowitz and has been used by James Phelan, who conceptualizes this as a work’s ability to pull

5 Flatley (2008: 12) sees, in this vein, affect and emotion as two points of view concerning the same phenomena: “Where emotion suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, affect indicates something relational and transformative. One has emotions; one is affected by people or things”. A more fundamental grounding of affect and emotions as higher-order manifestations of a primordial affectivity is suggested in Colombetti (2014).

6 The complexity of emotions/affects emphasized by, e.g. Ben-Ze’ev (2000: 3-5) makes things even messier, not to speak of the relation between aesthetic emotions and real-life emotions discussed in connection with horror genres by Carroll (1990: 59-87). However, the general term ‘emotion’ will do as long as complex nuances are not required.

7 Although in psychology the idea of reserving the term emotion to designate only short-term episodes is common, this does not correspond to common usage nor is it useful when dealing with literature: with narratives, the great literary emotions are usually long-term processes (Goldie 2000: 4-5, 11-16).

readers into the authorial audience.<sup>8</sup> And, as Tero Vanhanen emphasizes, we can posit that the authorial audience also reacts to the emotional impact of the work in a way designed by the author. I agree with his conclusion:

If we accept that a proper understanding of the work is achieved not through a particular emotional response but through the *recognition* of what is the proper emotional response for the authorial audience, we can mitigate the problem of subjectivity when dealing with emotional response to literary works.<sup>9</sup>

This approach can be integrated into cognitive poetics if we accept that we have and acquire more or less automatized emotional scripts or frames just as we do with (other kinds of) cognitive frames.<sup>10</sup> This seems uncontroversial in light of the results of recent research on human cognition that show how emotion and cognition are entangled even in the human brain.<sup>11</sup> The cognitive study of literature investigates the general resources preconditioning interpreters' mental states and the meanings created by their use rather than those mental states in individuals. In experiencing literature, immersion and empathy (in the sense of *Einfühlung*, which used to be the term in older aesthetics) guided by the frames lead to emotion effects, but what we can investigate by studying texts (and their contexts) are the intended effects – writerly intentions as manifested in the text – and *not* the experience of real readers.

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8 Phelan 1996: 102. The hypothetical audience that the (real or implied) author is writing for, in the sense Rabinowitz (1977: 126) understands it, is supposed to be familiar with relevant everyday, historical, cultural and literary knowledge, like genre conventions, or, as I would formulate it, with the cognitive and cultural frames presupposed by the understanding of authorial intention.

9 Vanhanen 2016: 21-22.

10 Cognitive poetics as represented by, e.g. Stockwell (2002) and Tsur (2008) have themselves different profiles: the issue here is only to claim that insights from different areas of cognitive poetics are most certainly fruitful in the study of emotion effects.

11 The idea that “emotions and cognition are inextricably intertwined” (O’Rorke/Ortony 1994: 283) has gained ground in affective science. Cf. Colombetti (2014: xvii) for the corresponding idea in enactivist studies. Developments in neuroscience since Damasio (e.g. 1995, 2010), who emphasized the role of emotion in the rational functioning of humans but still initially held the view that cognition and emotion are implemented in separate brain areas, have gone further: recent neuroscientific accounts question this separateness.

Thus, the emotion effects investigated here belong to the affective sphere, which presupposes and is presupposed by our embodied cognition and our language, the latter providing the vehicle of shared emotions and cognition in general and in literary texts in particular. These are the effects that different elements of literary texts have on the authorial audience: the emotion-related experiences that the texts offer to a reader who accepts the reader position that the text's rhetoric implies. The elements of the text relevant to producing these effects are the triggers. Whether real readers react to the triggers, feel the appropriate emotions or want to take the stance required, is another matter. Real readers can react in many kinds of personal ways (although a reaction *to the text* presupposes that the text itself causes or enables these reactions) and they can very well understand the stance that the text offers them (as an authorial audience) but still refuse to take that stance.

What seems self-evident but still needs to be emphasized is that the ways in which a literary text engages with its audience are specific to textual interaction, and to quite a special field even within that sphere. Emotion studies often presuppose face-to-face settings and interaction and it is crucial not to forget what changes when we study literature. We do not enter into a direct interaction with other people by reading. We are dealing with verbal descriptions of emotions or other verbal evocation of emotions. This precludes direct reactions to other people's facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and all the other bodily markers of emotion. Everything we encounter in literature is mediated by language.

The verbalizing process itself may also have its impact on actual experiences of emotion: studies on this relationship point out that the verbal expression of emotions as such influences and changes the emotions experienced. As William Reddy emphasizes, emotion and (linguistic) emotional expression interact in a dynamic way and verbalizing emotions permits the formation of emotional habits and even emotional regimes.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, unlike typical non-fiction texts, literary texts do not primarily express the emotions of the writer but dramatize fictional emotions. Thus, we do not react primarily to the emotions of the writer

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12 On emotional regimes, Reddy 2001: xii and 124-128. Reddy maintains that “[a]ny enduring political regime must establish as an essential element a normative order for emotions, an ‘emotional regime’” (*ibid.* 124). Rosenwein (2007) has introduced the concept of “emotional community” which refers to groupings with shared emotions within a society. Cf. also Wetherell 2012: 19-20. This also makes it possible for fictional texts to shape the emotion systems or regimes of their audiences. The result, then, not only intensifies the experiencing of emotions but, on the contrary, can replace experiencing with expressing. Emotional regimes as well as social rituals require that emotions are expressed or performed), but not necessarily felt.

but to the emotions of fictive beings. What is more, literary texts construct whole storyworlds in which various things and objects affect us. All kinds of emotion-related items come into play. The narrator or literary characters may discuss various emotions or emotions as a category and we gain knowledge of emotions rather than being asked to feel them. The psychological analysis of emotions in literary texts has many functions, and philosophical conceptions of emotions are illustrated in literary texts. Tropes, embedded stories and discourses and many other elements are brought in. All in all, the possibilities are as varied as in real life. As texts, literary texts are unique precisely because they dramatize whole worlds and bring in a full gallery of fictional agents with their mindscapes that often affect us profoundly. Even in shorter forms and in lyric poetry, the literary form imposes an indirect relationship between the text and the writer of the text, and mediates the emotions.

By doing this, literary storyworlds complicate the question of whose emotions we react to if and when we react to *the emotions of others* while reading. It is crucial to reflect upon the subjects of emotions or emotion ascriptions in literary texts. We may, of course, react emotionally to anything described or to the descriptions themselves, but when we react to others' emotions in the literary context, it is usually to the emotions of fictional characters or character-narrators. It makes a difference that we do not encounter them directly; how we react to them is orchestrated by the styles of worldmaking, including all the narrative and stylistic choices made by (real) authors. How all this overtly or covertly evokes the 'back-stage' emotions of the (implied) author and relates to the mood of the text is a complex issue. I discuss mood at the end of my text but emphasize already here that our emotional reactions to fictional subjects are mediated by moods that relate to genres.

## WHAT TRIGGERS EMOTIONS IN LITERARY TEXTS

As already stated, virtually anything in literary texts can trigger emotion effects. In poetry it is easy to point out the affective role of even individual words, associations and rhymes. In the case of prose narratives, the primary focus is often on the fictional characters or narrators and their emotions. But, as in the real world, we can react affectively to anything we pay attention to in literary storyworlds. What is more, when dealing with texts, we can also react to the text and its texture and narrative forms themselves. As an authorial audience, we should take all this into account.

Even before entering the text proper, the audience is guided by the paratexts that are attached to the text itself, most importantly the title(s). Poe's title exemplifies this: "The Fall of the House of Usher" contains a key word that helps to set the tone and a horizon of expectations affecting the emotional response – "the fall" creates suspense and possibly excitement. A story of decay or destruction can be assumed: the fall of a house may be understood literally or it may allude to the extinction of a whole family line because the family name is mentioned. Referring to the popular 1997 film, we could speak of the "Titanic"-effect of many stories: the outcome is told beforehand, either by the title, the introduction or just by the fact that a myth, event or story familiar to the reader is mentioned. The effect of this knowledge on the affective orientation may vary, but it is clear that such an effect is intended when the story is structured in such a way as to give this orientation from the very start. Texts where the reader has to wait for a second reading to know the direction of the plot are structured with a different story logic.

Obvious and ubiquitous categories to be taken into account when dealing with the emotion effects of the storyworld are: 1) characters, 2) narrators, 3) plot and events and 4) fictional objects and settings. All these broad categories can involve us emotionally in any of the ways we encounter them in the real world and even in ways that we do not come across in the real world. Characters in particular prompt emotion effects in the authorial audience even if we are not encouraged to feel the same emotions as they do. We also have emotions towards these figures when they are not feeling, or not described as feeling, anything in particular: their appearance, acts and behaviour are all usually evoked to move us in one way or another. Although dealing with the emotions related to characters or narrators is often seen as straightforward and unproblematic, complexities arise. Modernist or postmodernist – to say nothing of what has been termed "posthumanist" – texts, have provided us with intriguing kinds of characters. The imaginary access to other people's or even animal minds, all kinds of counter-factual imagining, display of dream-like worlds with personified objects and hybrid or downright impossible beings may involve us in experiences that go beyond possible real-world experiences.

Emotional responses to literature are not restricted to how fictional people affect us. One reacts to all kinds of things and events as well as to people. But without underestimating the role of plot and events – for Aristotle the most important element of tragedy and its emotional effect<sup>13</sup> – I move on to objects, which are of vital concern in Poe's short story.

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13 *Poetics*, chapter 6; e.g. Halliwell 1987: 37.

In real life, any object that somehow attracts our attention is prone to affect us – make us feel something.<sup>14</sup> As Poe’s narrator affirms about the depressive setting in the short story: “there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of affecting us.”<sup>15</sup> The fact that natural objects and their combinations as such affect us emotionally is not only folk-psychology but also acknowledged by recent psychological research.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the descriptions of objects and natural phenomena in literary texts have similar effects to encounters with these natural objects or surroundings in real life. However, a significant aspect to bear in mind is the variety of narrative devices by which elements of the storyworld are imbued with affective power or denied that power even if they are somehow “naturally” prone to have this kind of power. Literary texts build on the “natural” frames but also manipulate the audience’s feelings by attaching valences or affective values to objects and settings. In literary works, any object or phenomenon described tends to function as an emotion-trigger. In stories like Poe’s *the weather*, for example, plays a significant affective role: it is understood to be part of the whole and part of the affective atmosphere.

At another level, we may focus on the discourses of emotion and concepts and metaphors connected to emotions that come up in literary works. Literary subjects present judgements and ‘information’ relating to emotions and use comparisons and metaphors or other tropes (involving conceptual blending and including affective trope-worlds). All this serves not only to give the audience food for thought or information about the thoughts of fictional subjects, but also to provide elements in constructing the affective make-up of the text.

Furthermore, the authorial audience is, in various ways, induced into affective states by the lexical choices, linguistic registers and the like. The politics of using or not using emotion words produces quite different emotional textscapes. Emotions can be named, but the most powerful devices to evoke them do not necessarily even include naming emotions. For example, descriptions and narration attributing emotions to characters encompass psychonarration, narrated monologue, interior monologue, and speech expressions by characters that possibly only imply their emotions (or show them without telling). Style, rhythm, points of view, distance as well as many other elements and their combinations have affective value without requiring the explicit mention of emotions or the use of emotion words. In modernist literature, this absence of explicit emotion and emotion words has been the rule rather than the exception, whereas in Poe’s short stories emotion words abound.

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14 To cite Varela/Thompson/Rosch 1991: 113: “All experience has a feeling tone”.

15 Poe 1952: 126, emphasis in original.

16 Cf. e.g. Ben-Ze’ev 2000: 88.

Everything related to the so-called material aspects of language and style as well as the formal features of narration counts in creating the overall network of emotion effects. Although it may be difficult to separate the worlds from the words, the shifting focus on one or the other aspect is possible. The double focus on words and worlds is also necessary to access the most general affective agency in the literary work: the mood or tone of the text (also referred to as atmosphere, *Stimmung* and attunement).

Turning to Poe's short story, it could be analysed by using any of the categories or levels mentioned: it is, from the beginning to the end, imbued with emotional expressions and depictions of characters and objects, it personifies the house, it contains shocking events, it comments on and intertextually relates the dominant emotion felt by the narrator-protagonist, it creates a strong and fascinating emotional atmosphere. In the following I illustrate how items falling into some of these categories function in Poe's text as emotion triggers and reflect how these categories are related. I conclude by discussing the role played by the last category (tone/mood), which refers to the most general and fundamental affective level in all literary texts.

## **THE INSUFFERABLE GLOOM – THE SUFFERING AND REFLECTING VISITOR**

We may navigate with the emotions of characters and narrators relatively automatically, but spelling out everything involved in fictional situations (or even in everyday real-life situations) is not simple. Some complexities come up even in seemingly straightforward attributions. Poe's narrator directly tells us about the emotion that is connected to the first perception of the house of the Usher family – the gloom that proves to become all-pervading during his stay in the house: "I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit."<sup>17</sup> Poe's character-narrator is telling (afterwards, "now") about the emotion (the insufferable gloom) that he experienced at the story time (as a character). Here we already have a complex narrative structure linked with the double role of the character-narrator. In the whole story, the often detailed and affect-laden characterizations of emotion purport to make the audience feel a similar sense of awe and gloom to that which the character felt, while the narrative distance and the analytical stance of the narrator, at the same time, create a kind of intellectual shield that permits a contemplation of

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17 Poe 1952: 125.

the emotional turmoil from outside rather than from within the storyworld. The audience can, in a way, oscillate between the experience of the character immersed in the scenes remembered and the narrator, safely away from the strange world of the House of Usher, reflecting afterwards upon the events that occurred there.

Poe's narrator, who constantly reflects on his own emotions, also makes comparisons with supposedly known and habitual emotions; e.g. he compares his insufferable gloom to the "usual" poetic sentiment: "I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible."<sup>18</sup> These judgements and information relating to the felt emotions are the result of after-thoughts. They also possibly serve several different functions. The quote above emphasizes, by the comparison with a traditional poetic feeling, the power and extraordinariness of the gloom suffered by the narrator and spreading throughout the atmosphere of the story. Furthermore, it functions, if taken as a meta-commentary, as a way of defining or introducing a new emotion into the gallery of literary emotions. Instead of an old-style poetic sentiment, Poe intends to introduce a new sensation pertaining to the horror genre he is creating.<sup>19</sup> It is supposed to be fascinating in a new way, to be stronger and more mysterious and, supposedly, less "poetic", whatever Poe means by that.

The same function pertains to another comment where a comparison with the romantic feeling of the sublime is made: "There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime."<sup>20</sup> The reader is supposed to know the sublime implied and to imagine something far more terrible. What this terrible feeling is, is determined only by negations: the message is that we must imagine something that goes beyond our present categories. The negative is a strong affective power.<sup>21</sup> The negativity is here fortified by adjectives like "insufferable", "unrelieved" and all the expressions which refer to unpleasant things and feelings. The word "unredeemed" also suggests the overcoming of the redemptive or cathartic sublime.

Poe's narrator, who both mediates his own feelings to the reader and functions as the stand-in for the affected reader, is free to dwell on the affects evoked

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18 Ibid.

19 This is not *the* horror genre defined by Carroll (1990), and Poe's genre has not necessarily the same kind of "art-horror" as the overall effect of the genre on the audience.

20 Poe 1952: 125.

21 Cf. Karttunen 2015: 32-53 for a sociostylistic perspective on negatives.

by the storyworld and keen, at the time of telling, to analyse and generalize upon his memories or experiences and feelings felt at the story time. He offers us his “theories of emotion”. This is a practice often found in (especially older) literary texts like Poe’s: narrators and characters not only present their own emotions or those of other fictional figures but make generalizations. And possibly more than that: these generalizations, at least in the case of Poe, relate to the genre of the text and function as metafictional elements commenting upon the genre.

## OBJECTS ASSAILING THE SENSES

Poe’s narrator in his character-role also functions as a proxy for the audience by seeing the objects that affect the audience. The audience feels the (vicarious) awe and horror mainly via the objects witnessed by the experiencing protagonist. What the narrator-protagonist fears and loathes is supposed to have a similar effect on the audience.<sup>22</sup> This has been an important strategy in horror narratives as well as in other genres where a strange or unknown world is opened up to the reader via a visitor who is also unfamiliar with this world (this also applies to the figure of Dante in *Divina Commedia*). In Poe’s story, the strategy is prominently used in the service of conveying emotions. The very first sentences of the story already delineate the strong depressive feeling provoked by the surroundings of the house and the weather conditions:

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.<sup>23</sup>

The adjectives and adverbs breathe an overall melancholy gloom that is then attributed to the house as well. We know from psychology that the mere mentioning of affect-laden words produces a measurable bodily effect and influences

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22 Carroll (1990: 17-19) argues that in horror narratives certain characters regularly have this function to guide the reader’s response. That this is not always the case is suggested by unreliable narration; e.g. representations of madness in literature can involve a narrator (or character) that feels awe and horror at everyday objects (a poem in Finnish literature has coined this “seeing horrors everywhere”). The audience is supposed to understand that the trouble is in the seeing rather than in the fictional world.

23 Poe 1952: 125.

the mental make-up of the person hearing or reading them.<sup>24</sup> How much stronger then is the effect of this whole array of dreary words and the possibility of imagining the whole setting with the depressing weather.<sup>25</sup> We may generalize that the functions of nature description, including the weather and the time of the day and year, in Poe's fantasy-stories – as well as in many other literary genres – are almost entirely affective: they are intended to provoke emotion effects in readers.

Although Poe's narrator hastens to name the emotion, the “gloom”, and analyses the emotion in the way indicated above, he also resorts to comparisons and personification of the house:

I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into every-day life – the hideous dropping off of the veil.<sup>26</sup>

Poe's story, in many ways, suggests that the house itself, with its “vacant eye-like windows”, is a living being that in a mysterious way controls and participates in the feelings of the main characters and forms an uncanny double to the master of the house, Roderick Usher: the melancholy house is a mirror-image of its owner. Such personifications, in themselves, may have a strong effect on the audience, even in the form of local metaphors. We may well ask how our animistic imagination relates to our emotional life. If we see our emotional life as a product and function of our social interaction with other people, it is clear that personifying objects makes them affect us more deeply.

What are, then, the functions of these statements within the emotional make-up of the text? Poe's use of significant objects and his reference to the power of objects show that he is very much exploring the ways in which he can provoke emotion effects by combining and describing natural objects. We must, however, add that he does not seem to trust the combinations in themselves, since his descriptions are so laden with affective words. Even his objectifying description of Roderick Usher abounds with expressions emphasizing the horror. His friend

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24 Oatley (cf. 2011: 113) refers to an experiment by Francesco Foroni and Gün Semin.

25 For imagination as/and simulation, cf. Hogan 2013: 1-26, and the short version Hogan 2016; Oatley 2011: 2-21.

26 Poe 1952: 125.

is so ghastly, wild and strange that he evokes something beyond humanity, a monster:

The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity.<sup>27</sup>

This allusion to monstrosity would delight Noël Carroll, who considers monsters to be necessary in the horror genre.<sup>28</sup> Here, the reference is to the imminent collapse of reason in Usher's mind. The narrator suspects that Usher is succumbing to madness and Usher himself seems to confirm this assumption by presenting the allegorical song/poem about the haunted castle that also functions as a *mise en abyme* of the theme of the story. This, as well as other descriptions in Poe's story, evoke the general mood or tone of the text at the same time as creating the storyworld and a vivid sense of its unreal reality. Mood effects are conspicuous in Poe's text and direct us towards something that is not an emotion in the sense of having a specific object but rather an overall emotional perspective which hovers over the fictional world.

## **CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF GLOOM AND FASCINATION**

How can we understand the concept of tone or *mood* when it refers to the general genre-constitutive or genre-dependent emotional atmosphere of the whole text? In the case of “The Fall of the House of Usher”, it is strikingly obvious that the very first sentences carry a great deal of affective weight and evoke the central atmosphere of horror, constitutive of the horror genre which Poe is here inaugurating. Generally speaking, the tone of the text, especially in the case of short fiction, is most often clearly set at the very beginning of the text. Of course, it also develops along the way and finally encompasses the whole text, creating the affective perspective from which the audience sees the storyworld. However, the

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27 Ibid.: 129.

28 Cf. Carroll 1990: 41-42.

beginning is essential in awakening the interest in the text and in setting the tone.<sup>29</sup>

In psychology the term ‘mood’ has been used to refer to ( fleeting or medium-term) states of mind in individuals, and we may ask how this concept relates to the mood of a literary text. It has been claimed – with good reason, I think – that the way in which the text moods function follows the logic of moods in individuals.<sup>30</sup> Poe is helpful himself: he describes this logic and, thus, seems to hint at his own poetics in “The Fall”. Poe’s narrator’s description of the constant mood of Roderick Usher assumes that the mood determines the attitudes and emotions towards everything: “[A] mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth upon all objects of the moral and physical universe in one unceasing radiation of gloom.”<sup>31</sup> The gloom that has invaded the mind of Usher colours his whole world. This observation, when interpreted on the meta-level, is pertinent to the way in which the whole text is constructed. Everything described in this story contributes to creating and strengthening the atmosphere of gloomy horror. Every phenomenon that the narrator pays attention to is seen through the filter of this dark melancholy. This contagious atmosphere seizes the narrator immediately on arrival, before he has met his friend. Not only the state of his friend but what he himself affirms to be a “superstition” about the house and its surroundings being haunted imposes itself on him:

I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity – an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn – a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.<sup>32</sup>

The role of the narrator as a mediator in between the mysterious storyworld and the normal world, which includes his rational posture as narrator with hindsight, contributes to the overall setting of the tone: however, it is the immersion in the gloomy atmosphere of horror that is the main interest of the story and the main line which creates mood effects.

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29 In his essay “Nathaniel Hawthorne” Poe (1952) has written that “a skillful literary artist” constructs his tales around “a certain unique or single *effect*” and continues: “If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step” (I thank Mark Shackleton for bringing this essay to my attention).

30 E.g. Flatley 2008.

31 Poe 1952: 131.

32 Ibid.: 127.

Although the logic of literary moods can be compared to the functioning of individual moods, it is also clear that there is more to this issue. A mood in this sense is not the emotional state of an individual subject and especially not any fleeting state of mind. Here we are referring to something that, in a sense, grounds the fictional world, and gives it the colouring and light through which it is seen, felt and thought. Mood as this kind of structure can be understood in terms of what Martin Heidegger called *Stimmung*. Matthew Ratcliffe emphasizes that moods in the Heideggerian sense are variants of a changeable sense of belonging to the world that is pre-subjective and pre-objective.<sup>33</sup> All states of mind and object-related emotions as well as all perceptions and cognitions of ‘external’ things presuppose this background of belonging. Moods also determine the kinds of possibility we are open to. A change of the ground mood can involve a radical alteration in how one finds oneself in the world. This opposes the common idea of moods as generalized emotion. Instead, mood is here something presupposed by the possibility of intentionally directed emotional experiences. All such experiences involve finding something significant in one way or another and experiencing it as mattering. And moods determine the kind of significance things can have for us, the ways in which they are able to matter.

Ratcliffe has developed the concept of “existential feeling”, relying on Heidegger’s ideas but expanding the range of emotional states to encompass a greater variety of moods and using the Husserlian concept of the horizon as well as adding a bodily dimension. Existential feelings are bodily feelings and experiences of the body as well as the world.<sup>34</sup> Ratcliffe is primarily interested in the changes in the sense of being of patients suffering from depression, but he briefly analyses a few examples from literature and film, e.g. Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia*, which can be compared to “The Fall”. As in von Trier’s film, the melancholia in Poe’s story pours out from the person suffering from depression and invades the storyworld as a whole. What is important in Ratcliffe’s methodology when used in analysing literary texts or other artworks is the holistic approach: moods here function as sets of rules of worldmaking that relate to genre-repertoires. What still remains to be explored is whether his approach also brings new insights to the analysis of emotion effects in literature.

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33 Ratcliffe 2015: 55-57: Moods as Heidegger understands them are neither subjective states of mind nor something in the world (objective); the translation ‘attunement’ actually better captures the sense. As modes of attunement, they are presupposed by the intelligibility of intentionally directed experiences, thoughts and activities (ibid.: 55-56). Ratcliffe 2008 uses the term “feelings of being”.

34 Ibid.: 55.

To return to Poe's story, it is necessary also to question the identification of the overall mood with the mood (state of mind) of the narrator. What has so far been left out of the discussion is the dual role of the narrator as both the immersed experiencer and the analytical narrator in relation to the mood of the text. As the experiencing character, he gradually succumbs to the mystery, superstition and non-reason in the storyworld: in a word, he is fascinated by the storyworld.<sup>35</sup> But, as the narrator, he is also the voice of reason and analysis, and is struggling (and failing) to understand the mystery. He represents the common sense, which fails in the face of mystery, and the rational world that the reader is supposed to leave behind to enjoy the story.<sup>36</sup> Curiosity, a (safe) sense of dwelling in the mystery and the forceful language put a spell on the reader, leading the way to a kind of dream state of freedom from the constraints of reason while the thrill of horror stimulates both the body and the mind. This effect is indicated to the authorial audience by exploiting deeply-rooted fears and nightmares about madness, illness and death as well as many references to relevant literary traditions such as Gothic and Dark Romanticism. But all this happens in the context of fiction, in which a knowledge of the rules of the game and a feeling of safety can be presupposed. In the mid-18th century, Edmund Burke had already spelled out the ambivalence of negative and positive emotions in art-horror,<sup>37</sup> but Poe's downplaying of the sublime changes the balance and introduces a more troubling combination that has come to mark contemporary horror genres in even more extreme ways.<sup>38</sup> In Poe's story, one's sense of reason is left perplexed and impotent, and the art-horror or its overall effect on the audience is troubling and does not elevate in the way the sublime is supposed to do.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of emotion effects is complex. Trying to analyse all emotion triggers and their effects even in a relatively short text like "The Fall" is virtually impossible. However, studying emotion triggers and their effects by showing a

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35 For the complexities involved in literary fascination cf. Baumbach 2015.

36 Carroll (cf. 1990: 57) notes how the horror genre depends on the Enlightenment distinction between nature (as reason) and the violation of nature or unnatural phenomena (as non-reason).

37 For Burke, the sublime produces "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" and it transforms the horror into "a delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror" (Burke 1990: 36, 123).

38 Vanhanen 2016 presents a comprehensive analysis of issues relating to this point.

variety of them ‘in action’ in Poe’s short story proved to be interesting and intriguing and illustrates how the overall attunement of the text works and how the individual elements and the overall mood link together.

Poe’s story is highly explicit and insistent in tone: more than is habitually found in most genres. Nevertheless, attuning itself is something that is essential to literature: more than the classical unities or any other structural coherence, it is the overall unity of tone that matters. As Poe puts it in his essay on Hawthorne, referring to his “effect” mentioned in note 29: “In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design.” Whereas Aristotle maintained that the plot in the tragedy should dominate and even the characters remain in a secondary place to attain the proper tragic effect of pity and fear, one could claim that it is not really the plot but the affective tone or general mood that matters. The emotion effects created by the author and experienced by readers who join the authorial audience would, thus, provide the text with the coherence which is the basis for the overall aesthetic experience, an experience which is a genre-dependent cognitive/affective complex.

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# Posthuman Nostalgia?

Re-Evaluating Human Emotions in Michel Houellebecq's

*La possibilité d'une île*

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In Michel Houellebecq's novel *La possibilité d'une île* (translated as *The Possibility of an Island*), the reader is confronted with a bleak future for humanity: the main characters are posthuman creatures who live in secluded compounds and seem incapable of understanding and feeling human emotions. The novel consists of two strands of narrative – the memoir of Daniel1, a comedian living at the beginning of the 21st century, and the commentaries by the clones Daniel24 and Daniel25, his successors in the distant future. Bearing in mind the context of Houellebecq's work as well as the posthuman(ist) discourse, this novel should be understood neither as a straightforward prognosis about the future of human beings nor as an unambiguous evaluation of human cloning. A consideration of certain recurring topics in Houellebecq's works and his stylistic characteristics highlights the specific scenario for the posthuman being developed by Houellebecq. Posthuman(ist) theories on the concept of the human being "after humanism", at the beginning of the 21st century, and its possible future developments help to position the novel's scenario within a wider theoretical context. In this article following, I discuss these contexts in order to analyse what could be called the nostalgic representation of emotions in this novel and the functions of writing and narrative connected to it.

Sexuality and love, desire and ageing bodies are recurring themes in Houellebecq's work. In *Extension de la zone de lutte* (1994) (translated as *Whatever*), for example, he discussed the significance of DNA decoding and the possibility

of making sexuality and sexual reproduction obsolete.<sup>1</sup> His novel *Les Particules élémentaires* (1998) (translated as *Atomised*) also centres on these topics – *La possibilité d'une île* can be seen as a continuation of this discussion: “Beginning where *Atomised* leaves off, *Possibility* ponders at first the problem of sex but it has become clear that it is not sex that is at issue but the difficulty of all human affective attachment and, in particular, love.”<sup>2</sup> While the ending of *Les Particules élémentaires* still points out that “there is hope of love”, “*The Possibility of an Island* is the death of this hope”.<sup>3</sup> Together, the two novels suggest a radical solution to the disenchanted lives under modern capitalism – “the eradication of the hope for affective renewal or regeneration”.<sup>4</sup>

But this “eradication” is not obvious at the beginning of *La possibilité d'une île*, as the novel seems to present a continuation of human life through cloning. Apart from the opening pages (which introduce further narrative levels that I am going to discuss in relation to the functions of writing), *La possibilité d'une île* consists of Daniel1's life account, which is presented in alternating chapters with Daniel24's commentary on the account, followed by Daniel25's account – when a clone dies, his or her successor is brought to life. Daniel1 recalls his life as a misanthropic and racist comedian, his failing relationships and how he became a member of the Elohimites, a sect trying to achieve eternal life through cloning. In the distant future, the clones Daniel24 and Daniel25 as well as other clones of Elohimite members live in secluded compounds. The main purpose of the life of each clone is to produce a commentary on their original's account. Towards the end of the narrative, Daniel25 leaves the compound in the vague hope of meeting other clones and finding a community. Discouraged after encounters with a horde of *homo sapiens sapiens* and the death of his dog, he prepares to live out his days and die alone.

Even though the novel seems to present cloning as a solution for the future of mankind, this solution “must be read with some question as to whether it is endorsement or condemnation”.<sup>5</sup> Houellebecq's style of writing conveys, as King stresses, a “Swiftian ambiguity”.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, his treatment of philosophical ideas in his novels remains ambiguous: in an article discussing Houellebecq's treatment of Nietzschean philosophy in *La possibilité d'une île*, Moore notes that it is impossible to discern a certain stance towards Nietzsche's theory

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1 Cf. Moraru 2008: 268.

2 Sweeney 2015: 152.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.: 153.

5 Ibid.: 163.

6 Cf. King 2006: 63.

of “eternal return”, as Houellebecq is “caught between irony and earnest sentimentality”.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this bleak scenario and the theories and reflections about the future of humanity connected to it should not be understood as unambiguous representations of opinions.<sup>8</sup>

This complex ambiguity is also notable in the novel’s treatment of human emotions, especially the discourse about love. Even though Daniel1 is portrayed as a cynic, towards the end of his story it becomes obvious that he mourns the impossibility of finding fulfilling love and nostalgically reflects upon the problem that his concept of love – especially in regard to monogamous relationships – “has become hopelessly outmoded”.<sup>9</sup> In the character’s opinion, only pets such as his dog Fox are capable of selfless love.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to Daniel1’s nostalgic reflections about love, the clones seem to be unable to understand and feel emotions. Daniel24 and Daniel25 write about their puzzlement concerning human emotions and the role they play for human beings. They are unable to grasp the meaning of emotions and their impact on humans’ lives. Daniel25 mentions that he would never know boredom, desire or fear to the same extent as a human being: “Je ne connaîtrais jamais l’ennui, le désir ni la crainte au même degré qu’un être humain.”<sup>11</sup> It could even be doubted that these three states all denote emotions, but as the character puts them in the same enumeration, they appear to belong to the same category for him.

Both clones mostly ascribe emotions to other beings – humans and animals – distancing themselves further from these terms. What is more, “love” appears to be the most enigmatic emotion for the clones, because it contains contradictory meanings, as Daniel25 mentions: “Malgré ma lecture attentive de la narration de Daniel1 je n’avais toujours pas totalement compris ce que les hommes entendaient par l’amour [emphasis in original, S.S.], je n’avais pas saisi l’intégralité de sens multiples, contradictoires qu’ils donnaient à ce terme.”<sup>12</sup> He can merely categorize it as a terrifying state and sees it as an important factor in the genetic economy of the species: “Naturellement, je ne pus m’empêcher de méditer une fois de plus sur la passion amoureuse chez les humains, sa terrifiante violence,

7 Moore 2011: 47.

8 Cf. ibid.: 162-163.

9 Sweeney 2015: 180.

10 Cf. ibid.

11 Houellebecq 2012: 440. “I would never know boredom, desire or fear to the same extent as a human being.” Translations, if not otherwise indicated, by S.S.

12 Ibid.: 414. “Even though I read Daniel1’s narration attentively, I had never completely understood what humans meant by *love*, I had never fully grasped the multiple and contradictory meanings they connected with this word”.

son importance dans l'économie génétique de l'espèce.”<sup>13</sup> The clones, who call themselves “néo-humains”, see this state of puzzlement as an intermediate phase of posthuman development – a full understanding of human beings and their emotions will lead to the arrival of the so-called “Futurs”: “Si nous voulions préparer l'avènement des Futurs nous devions au préalable suivre l'humanité dans ses faiblesses, ses névroses, ses doutes; nous devions les faire entièrement nôtres, afin de les dépasser.”<sup>14</sup> The only emotion that they see themselves capable of is sadness, but Daniel<sup>24</sup> emphasizes that he experiences only “a slight sadness”.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Daniel<sup>25</sup> even differentiates between “desire” and “sentiment” and expresses his doubt that posthuman beings could feel the former, stronger feeling for other beings, when he thinks about a female clone: “Sans aller jusqu'à éprouver pour elle ce que les humains qualifiaient du nom de *désir*, j'ai pu parfois me laisser brièvement entraîner sur la pente du *sentiment* [emphasis in original, S.S.]”.<sup>16</sup> This denial of emotions displayed by the clones lessens towards the end of the narrative, when Daniel<sup>25</sup> concludes that he has experienced love: “Je savais maintenant avec certitude que j'avais connu l'amour, puisque je connaissais la souffrance.”<sup>17</sup> The narrative seems to suggest that the aseptic life in the compounds leaves the clones in an unemotional state, distanced from human experience, and only by leaving their environment do they become capable of experiencing and feeling. Nevertheless, their confined lives are dominated by the obsessive discussion of human emotions, as their reflections and their writings centre on their human predecessors.

How can these characters and the nostalgic reverence to love be interpreted in the posthuman(ist) context? Posthumanism offers theoretical concepts for the possible future of the human being. It positions itself after humanism in the sense that certain premises of humanism are reconsidered, especially the anthropocentric focus and the idea of a human essence. This theory “emerges from a

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13 Ibid.: 435-436. “Naturally, I could not stop myself from meditating once more about the passion of love amongst human beings, its terrible violence, its importance in the genetic economy of the species”.

14 Ibid.: 170. “If we wanted to prepare the advent of the Futures, we first had to follow humanity in its weaknesses, its neuroses, its doubts; we had to make them entirely our own in order to surpass them”.

15 Ibid.: 157. “Je ne ressens rien d'autre qu'une très légère tristesse”.

16 Ibid.: 156. “I would not go so far as to feel for her what the human beings denominat-ed as *desire*, but I could sometimes let myself be driven to the edge of *sentiment*”.

17 Ibid.: 432. “Now I knew for certain that I had known love, because I knew suffering”.

recognition that ‘Man’ is not the privileged and protected center”<sup>18</sup> and its proponents discuss the boundaries between human beings and animals as well as the ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ aspects of human beings, and they consider the possible changes of human beings through biotechnological developments such as nanotechnology and cloning.<sup>19</sup> In *La possibilité d’une île*, two aspects can be analysed from a posthumanist perspective: firstly, the depiction of cloning in relation to individuality and the clone as a copy, and secondly, the theoretical connections to affect theories.

In Houellebecq’s novel, cloning leads to the abolishment of the individual and posthuman beings are presented as mere copies.<sup>20</sup> Moraru interprets this as the “horrific fate of cloning” as described by Baudrillard, as this development does not lead to the desired immortality of the individual, but erases the individual and makes the human being obsolete.<sup>21</sup> In this solipsistic existence, emotions have ceased to exist, “affection and affects at large are irrelevant because the neohuman cannot be ‘affected’ by anything other than his genome”.<sup>22</sup> Sweeney even describes this state of being as a bodiless existence: “In such a biotechnically managed totality defined by genetic similitude and asexual reproduction, there is no longer any need for the somatic presence of the body or any encounter with other bodies.”<sup>23</sup> The idea of overcoming corporeal restraints and extending human existence into cyberspace is precisely what posthumanist theorists – e.g. Hayles in her seminal text *How We Became Posthuman* – criticise as transhumanist dreams about the future. These neglect the centrality of corporeal existence for the human self-image and the human connectedness to other beings such as animals – considerations are central for a multiple, diverse concept of the human being that posthumanists aim at.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Sweeney criticises Houellebecq’s treatment of posthumanism as superficial, since he merely “uses the concept of posthumanism and the science underpinning it as a theoretical strategy with which to probe contemporary society” and “shows, at best, an inconsistent philosophical and ethical engagement with many contemporary theories of posthumanism”.<sup>25</sup> The depiction of cloning is centred on the trope of the clone as

18 Badmington 2011: 374.

19 Cf. Wolfe 2011: xv, Herbrechter 2012: 7-8.

20 Cf. Moraru 2008: 270.

21 Cf. ibid.: 289.

22 Ibid.: 276-277.

23 Sweeney 2015: 154.

24 Cf. Hayles 2008: 2-3.

25 Sweeney 2015: 161.

a copy – a well-researched and discussed literary topic<sup>26</sup> – and does not offer a new perspective. This lack of a new perspective is also evident in the discussion of affect in the novel, which only seems to present a state of “posthuman affect”.

Another aspect of the novel that can be considered from a posthumanist perspective is affect. In his essay on “posthuman affect”, Vermeulen notes that affect theory can be understood as a posthumanist theoretical approach, since it focuses on impersonal dynamic principles (in contrast to the subjective, personal qualities of emotions), going beyond human experience.<sup>27</sup> According to Vermeulen, affect theorists position themselves institutionally as coming after humanism and in their research, they centre on what precedes human life and experience – characteristics that are shared by posthumanism in general.<sup>28</sup> This development leads to a new emotional scenario that is postulated by affect theory: “[...] the *demise* [emphasis in the original, S.S.] of feeling that posthumanist thought seeks to enact generates second-order feelings that are less easily captured, defined, understood or reterritorialized onto the subject.”<sup>29</sup> This, in Vermeulen’s view, is connected to the experience of the sublime – but it produces an experience that cannot be reintegrated into human experience.<sup>30</sup> This state of being overwhelmed by emotions and leaving behind the emotional sphere of human beings is postulated at the outset of the novel. But the clones desperately trace human emotions and the final clone, Daniel25, tries to reintegrate and describe feelings in the sphere of human emotions. From the perspective of posthumanist theory, therefore, the novel does not develop a new scenario, but displays a nostalgic reverence to human emotions.

Even though the representation and discussion of emotions does reaffirm the human(ist) paradigm, the ending of the narrative seems to depict the disappearance of mankind, echoing Foucault’s famous dictum of mankind disappearing like “a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it also seems to suggest that humankind’s achievements in art and creativity are irrevocably lost and that all further endeavours in these domains are fruitless. But the functions of writing reflected upon in the structure of the novel and towards the end of the

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26 The clone as a copy and doppelgänger has, e.g. been discussed in: Caduff 2004, Aline 2005.

27 Cf. Vermeulen 2014: 122.

28 Cf. *ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*: 123.

30 Cf. *ibid.*: 123-124.

31 Foucault 1994: 387.

narrative can be interpreted as counterarguments to this death of mankind and its achievements.

Firstly, the importance of writing and written texts and readers are highlighted in the structure of the novel: the text begins with two introductory passages. In the first passage, which is about half a page long, a fictional author is introduced. He explains that a journalist once told him a fable about a man standing in a telephone box after the world has ended. The man is talking incessantly into the receiver, but it remains unclear if he is actually talking to someone else or rambling to himself. The journalist described this as the author's own mode of writing, which prompted the author to address her and other readers directly: "Soyez les bienvenus dans la vie éternelle, mes amis."<sup>32</sup> The second passage cannot be clearly attributed to a specific narrative voice (it could be interpreted as the last utterings of Daniel23, as the voice describes its failing consciousness and oncoming death). In this passage, too, readers are openly addressed, seemingly not specifically normal human beings, as they are addressed as "dead or alive" – which might mean "virtual or real".<sup>33</sup> These metaphorical hints at the ambiguous state of the text's addressees only appear at the beginning of the text and they are not commented on within the text. While explicitly invited into the text, the readers are also warned about the content, as the sentence "fear my words" appears twice within this introductory passage.<sup>34</sup> This confusion of narrative voices and the direct address of the readers foreground the fictional character of the text.

Secondly, towards the end of the novel, there are two metatextual passages about emotions in literature. In the first, Daniel25 is prompted to leave his compound after he has read the last poem of Daniel1 and dreamt about an island where love, not only sexuality, is possible – King interprets this scene as a clear sign of Houellebecq's "humanistic nostalgia for what society is losing".<sup>35</sup> But the scene also points to the influence of literature as an emotional trigger that prompts a reaction in the posthuman character. The second passage happens on his journey, when Daniel25 finds a message in a bottle from another clone with a page from a paperback attached to it. He recognizes it as an excerpt from Plato's *Symposium*. In the short passage, Aristophanes explains his concept of love. There is no explanation as to why this excerpt was chosen as an uncommented message or why Daniel25 would recognize it. Inserting this passage in the nar-

32 Houellebecq 2012: 9. "Welcome to eternal life, my friends".

33 Ibid.: 19. "Je ne souhaite pas vous tenir en dehors de ce livre; vous êtes, vivants ou morts, des lecteurs".

34 Ibid.: 17, 20. "Craignez ma parole".

35 King 2006: 63.

tive seems to hint at literature's valence for preserving and conveying human emotions across centuries and beyond the existence of the human being, even though Daniel<sup>25</sup> leaves the message behind and comments on its outdatedness. But it can also be understood as a critique of the philosophical tradition that understands love as a transcending movement beyond the longing for the material object. Daniel<sup>25</sup> sees this movement as the central fallacy in the development of human culture in the 20th century, as King points out: "Tied into this fallacy was the trans- and postsomatic character of the culture humans fostered in their attempt to 'get over' the body in philosophy, the arts, social arrangements and so forth."<sup>36</sup>

All in all, the discussion and representation of emotions within *La possibilité d'une île* is paradoxical: leaving behind the human sphere of emotion and moving into the sphere of posthuman affect seems to be impossible for the posthuman characters. This is highlighted through the depiction of the clones as copies and through their use of human techniques, since they continue to use writing as a tool for observation and reflection and retrace their predecessors' thoughts in their own writing. In their nostalgic longing to return to human emotions they condemn humans for their movement towards a posthuman development. Therefore, on the one hand, on the content level the representation of emotion in literature and the arts is criticised as a fatal idealization of transcending the human body and mindset. On the other hand, the novel contains several signals that highlight the fictional character of the text, making the reader aware that he or she is reading a critique about the possibilities of novels in the form of a novel – without being offered an alternative. The nostalgic insistence on human emotions within the narrative does not offer alternative scenarios for the (posthuman) future, but emphasizes that even though certain aspects of human life such as emotions might vanish, they continue to play an important role in the reflection about and the understanding of the human being.

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36 Ibid.

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# Writing Wounds



# Writing Disgust, Writing Realities

## The Complexity of Negative Emotions in Émile Zola's *Nana*

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RIIKKA ROSSI

The writings of literary realism and naturalism<sup>1</sup> are generally known as an epistemological project in pursuit of knowledge and truth. The positivist vocabulary of interpreting reality through empirical facts, reason, and logic reverberated in the nineteenth-century realist programme and inspired authors such as Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola to combine literature with the natural sciences, in order to document social species and even conduct experimental research within the frames of fiction.<sup>2</sup> Zola's provocative theory of the novel, *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), proposed an aesthetics of disinterested observation and objective truth, which resists romantic sentimentality and avoids an author's own emotional intervention in the narrative.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on rationally oriented elements in

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1 Realism is understood here as a transhistorical style of representation, aimed at producing an effect of reality in fiction. In this sense realism could be combined with various historical genres, including the naturalist novel with its techniques of realistic style but which is thematically embedded in the nineteenth-century scientific worldview and problems of modernity. As implied in Auerbach's (2002) analysis of Zola, critical naturalism features important elements of modern realism.

2 See the preface of *La Comédie humaine* (1842): Balzac explains his project of studying "social species" in the way a biologist would analyse "zoological species" and refers to specific biologists. Zola's *Le Roman expérimental* (1880) was inspired by Claude Bernard's experimental medicine.

3 As Zola argues in an essay on Flaubert, a naturalist author is distinctively "disinterested", invisible and avoids open intervention in the narrative. As Zola stated, an author should not show his own emotions, "one does not hear him laugh or cry with his characters." Translator R.R. unless stated otherwise. Zola 1881: 129.

writing realities has extended to theories of realism, which illustrate how realist texts use practices of detailed description, *doxa*, and authority to create the effects of reality while holding a pedagogical desire to transmit information,<sup>4</sup> and which demonstrate how realist fiction renders individual experience that cognitively and epistemically relies on real-world knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Realism, in this view, features an epistemological project framed and staged in aesthetic terms.<sup>6</sup>

Yet recent studies on emotions provide new insights that stimulate a reconsideration of realism's epistemological project in terms of affectivity. Linguists have shown that affect is a fundamental and all-encompassing element of language: the affective function overlaps even the referential function that is characteristic of realist literature.<sup>7</sup> Proponents of the philosophy of emotion have demonstrated the great intuitive power of emotions, which tend to influence people's views of the world, as well as their values and goals.<sup>8</sup> Emotions thus add plausibility, and even enhance the effect of the truth at which realism aims. The overlapping of the epistemological and the emotional is consistent with the enactivist approaches that emphasise the intersecting of the affective and the cognitive in human thought. As Giovanna Colombetti argues, what is cognitive is fundamentally affective: the mind, as embodied, is intrinsically or constitutively affective.<sup>9</sup>

These views resonate in the background of this chapter, which reflects on the complex question of writing emotions and writing realities in nineteenth-century literature by means of a case study exploring the poetics of disgust in Émile Zola's novel *Nana* (1880). By outlining the various aspects of disgust – natural, aesthetic and moral – and their overlapping categories in Zola's novel, I illustrate how emotion effects<sup>10</sup> contribute to the ideological and epistemological aspects in the Zolian project, which aimed at transforming reality by depicting “life as it is”.<sup>11</sup> Through reading Zola's *Nana* I consider the ways in which evoking and triggering disgust pertains to strategies of creating reality effects, and how the effects of disgust stimulate the moral imagination of readers and solicit critical

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4 Cf. for instance Barthes 1982, 2000, Hamon 1982.

5 Cf. Fludernik 1996: 28.

6 Jameson 2013: 5-6. However, in *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) Jameson considers affect to be an important narrative impulse for realism, related to its visually rich descriptions that engender sensory experiences.

7 Besnier 1990: 420; cf. also Wetherell 2012.

8 Cf. for instance Damasio 1996, Nussbaum 2001.

9 Colombetti 2014: xvii.

10 On the concept of the emotion effect, cf. Lyytikäinen's article in this volume.

11 On these aspects see Zola 1880: 24, 208.

views on the reality under discussion. By building on previous research on Zola's *Les Rougon-Macquart* as "crowd fiction",<sup>12</sup> I illuminate how Zola's *Nana* invites its authorial audience<sup>13</sup> to join the story-world community and to feel the complexity of emotion effects depicted and produced in this novel, from the ambivalent allure of disgust and the nauseating effects of excess to feelings of collective responsibility that open up the story-world's transformative potential.

In this chapter, the "writing of emotions" is used as a metaphor of style which refers to the poetic practices of producing emotion effects in texts. Yet this view is not limited to generic features or questions of structure alone but expands to concern the text-based emotional communication as a whole, in a specific historical context. The investigation of emotion effects targeted to the novel's hypothetical audience invites reflection on the authorial point of view, including the aesthetic and ideological premises of writing emotions.

## NANA OR THE ALLURE OF DISGUST

Un rire avait couru. Les messieurs très bien répétèrent: "Nana, ohé! Nana!" On s'écrasait, une querelle éclairait au contrôle, une clamour grandissait, faite du bourdonnement des voix appelant Nana, exigeant Nana, dans un des coups d'esprit bête et brutale sensualité qui passent sur les foules.<sup>14</sup>

12 Cf. Naomi Schor 1978.

13 I use the notion of authorial audience with reference to a concept deriving from the rhetorical tradition: the hypothetical audience or the hypothetical reader for whom the text is written and composed (cf. Rabinowitz 1977). The authorial audience differs from the actual audience, although the study of empirical readers' reactions may be helpful in reconstructing and analysing a novel's hypothetical audience – for instance, in Zola's case, the contemporary actual audience overlaps with the hypothetical audience of the novel. The concept of authorial audience, as used in this article, creates a position the empirical reader can adopt in order to understand the writing of emotions from the authorial point of view, in a specific historical context. What kind of emotional effects were meant to be triggered and why? What kinds of emotional messages were sent?

14 Zola 1996: 11. "People laughed, and several well-dressed gentlemen repeated, "Nana! Oh, my! Nana!" The crush was tremendous. A quarrel broke out at the box-office, the cries for Nana increased; one of those stupid fits of brutal excitement common to crowds had taken possession of this mass of people." Zola 1922: 7-8.

Despite the alleged rationality and dispassionate objectivity of realist discourse, realist works frequently witness strong emotional responses from reading audiences, often with negative valence. Starting with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), a novel that led to a real-life trial for obscenity, blasphemy and indecency, the history of realism has been fraught with a series of scandals, polemics, censorship and aggression. As Erich Auerbach remarks, many of the century's significant authors encountered vexation and even hostility from the public, and achieved general recognition only at the price of violent struggle.<sup>15</sup> The naturalist novel in particular attacked bourgeois culture and its favourite genre, using the novel form to shock, disturb and defy the bourgeois myths of order, decency and permanence.<sup>16</sup> Zolian aesthetics generated a scandalous, importunate kind of writing rather than objective documentation, which nevertheless stimulated the reading public's curiosity and fascination with the disgusting ravages of life.

The publication of Zola's *Nana* is emblematic of this allure of disgust. The novel evoked public outrage all over Europe, with accusations of immorality and pornography. Zola's programme became the object of mockery and moral indignation, inciting accusations of writing "ordurous" and "putrid" literature and provoking a series of caricatures in the 1880s: Zola the scavenger; Zola the director of a theatre of disgust; Zola cooking a soup of disgusting waste.<sup>17</sup> However, despite the vexation of conservative critics, *Nana* proved to be an immediate success. *Le Voltaire*, the French newspaper that first published the novel as a serial, launched a gigantic advertising campaign, raising the curiosity of the reading public. When Charpentier finally published *Nana* in book form in February 1880, the first edition of 55,000 copies sold out in one day.

Interestingly, the ambivalent combination of rejection and attraction featuring real-life responses to Zola's *Nana* extend to the novel's poetics of collective repulsion and desire. *Nana* is, of course, a novel about fatal sexuality and prostitution, incarnating a familiar *fin de siècle* stereotype, *La femme fatale*, the embodiment of male fantasies and fears over the female body. However, although depicting sexual obsession and illustrating contemporary fears of catastrophic sexuality, *Nana* is also a novel about fascination in terms of public interest and curiosity. Like the majority of novels in the *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, *Nana* pertains to Zola's crowd fictions, which depict communities and represent individuals by combining features of collectives. From the very beginning, *Nana* focuses on the crowd's collective perspective, capturing its voyeuristic fascina-

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15 Cf. Auerbach 2002: 500.

16 On the scandal of naturalism, cf. Baguley 1990.

17 On the reception of *Nana* cf., for instance, Mitterand 2001: 510-513 and Reverzy 2008: 190-193.

tion with the woman who has driven Paris into a frenzy. The crowd, *la foule*, with its changing fears and attractions forms a collective protagonist of a kind, the social mind of the novel,<sup>18</sup> depicting strata of urban society in the process of modernization, from the working-class to the rising bourgeoisie and aristocratic old power.

The crowd view is highly visible in the opening and closing scenes of the novel, for instance, which frame the story-world and map *Nana*'s ambivalent power of persuasion and rejection. The opening focuses on her spectator audience, gathered in the Théâtre des Variétés, feverishly waiting for her appearance.

Paris était là, le Paris des lettres, de la finance et du plaisir, beaucoup de journalistes, quelques écrivains, des hommes de Bourse, plus de filles que de femmes honnêtes; monde singulièrement mêlé, fait de tous les génies, gâté par tous les vices, où la même fatigue et la même fièvre passaient sur les visages.<sup>19</sup>

The opening has been featured as a prolonged narrative of striptease, gradually approaching Nana's figure, unveiling her body piece by piece.<sup>20</sup> Nana's entrance triggers a set of mixed emotions, however. Charismatic and powerful but singing off-key and acting badly, she evokes simultaneous feelings of curiosity, excitement and embarrassment. The allure of the female body finally converges into effects of shock and rejection: Nana uncovered silences the audience, even imbues a sense of terror: "Il n'y eut pas d'applaudissements. Personne ne riait plus, les faces des hommes, sérieuses, se tendaient, avec le nez aminci, la bouche irritée et sans salive. Un vent semblait avoir passé, très doux, chargé d'une sourde menace."<sup>21</sup> If the feeling of eroticism depends on detachment and delayed vision, the sudden proximity of Nana's naked body interrupts distanced seduction and solicits a shock effect.<sup>22</sup> In a sense, the opening exemplifies the natural-

18 On the concept of the social mind, cf. Palmer 2010.

19 Zola 1996: 13. "All Paris was there – the Paris of letters, of finance, and of pleasure, many journalists, some few authors, and several speculators, more kept girls than respectable women – a company, in short, that was a most singular mixture, composed of every kind of genius, tainted with every description of vice, where the same weariness and the same fever seemed inscribed on every face." Zola 1922: 9.

20 Cf. Reverzy 2008: 104-111.

21 "There was no applause. No one laughed now. The grave faces of the men were bent forward, their nostrils contracted, their mouths parched and irritated. A gentle breath, laden with an unknown menace, seemed to have passed over all." Zola 1922: 25.

22 On the erotic and pornographic in *Nana*, cf. Gural-Migdal 2012: 199-219.

ist unveiling of the uncomfortable truth: what triggers curiosity turns out to be disgusting.

The opening focus on the audience's emotional responses is illustrative of the novel's overall emotional disposition, which keeps a certain distance from Nana as a protagonist and draws the crowd's collective mind to the foreground. In some respects, the external view feeds the novel's topic of female objectification. Moreover, the emotion effects created at the beginning modify and adjust the reader's premises of interpretation by shaping perception and the organization of information in the text continuum. The beginning orients the reader to be aware of the collective's emotions and reactions, the morals and manners of the crowds concerned.

*Nana*'s famous ending, depicting a decomposing prostitute, concludes the novel's ambiguous allure of disgust. This closing scene and the beginning scene are symmetrical, the former rendering again the crowd's feverish curiosity about Nana. It describes her lovers and friends gathered around the Grand Hôtel and her mortuary chamber. It illustrates the crowd's mixed fears and attractions: despite the risk of infection, Nana's comrades and rivals desire to see her dead body, disfigured by smallpox.<sup>23</sup> The novel ends with an eyewitness view projected by the narrator:

Nana restait seule, la face en l'air, dans la clarté de la bougie. C'était un charnier, un tas d'humeur et de sang, une pelletée de chair corrompue, jetée là, sur un coussin. Les pustules avaient envahi la figure entière, un bouton touchant l'autre; et, flétries, affaissées, d'un aspect grisâtre de boue, elles semblaient déjà une moisissure de la terre, sur cette bouillie informe, où l'on ne retrouvait plus les traits. Un œil, celui de gauche, avait complètement sombré dans le bouillonnement de la purulence; l'autre, à demi ouvert, s'enfonçait, comme un trou noir et gâté. Le nez suppurait encore. Toute une croûte rougeâtre partait d'une joue, envahissait la bouche, qu'elle tirait dans un rire abominable. Et, sur ce masque horrible et grotesque du néant, les cheveux, les beaux cheveux, gardant leur flambée de soleil, coulaient en un ruissellement d'or. Vénus se décomposait. Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux, sur les charognes tolérées, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui remonter au visage et l'avait pourri.

La chambre était vide. Un grand souffle désespéré monta du boulevard et gonfla le rideau.  
– A Berlin! à Berlin! à Berlin!<sup>24</sup>

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23 "Smallpox" has been described as syphilis in disguise, alluding to the fin-de-siècle fear of venereal diseases. Cf. Reverzy 2008, 56.

24 Zola 1996: 411-412. "She went off and closed the door. Nana was left alone, her face turned upwards in the candle-light. It was a charnel-house, a mass of matter and blood, a shovelful of putrid flesh, thrown there on the cushion. The pustules had in-

Nana's features, deformed by infection, evoke the risk of pollution and disease contamination. This accurate portrayal of lethal illness is meant to generate an unpleasant mood of rejection in the reader. However, as has been shown in previous readings, the ending scene is highly allegorical. Nana, born in 1851 and dead in 1870, lives with the Empire. The female body serves as a metaphor for the nation, embodying the end game of the Second Empire, thereby anticipating the collapse of the nation: France on its way to the Franco-Prussian war, to a war to be lost.<sup>25</sup> Focusing on the dead body of a prostitute, the scene is pregnant with the collective gaze fixed on her, mirroring the allure of disgust amongst the crowd and their own state of corruption. The effect of disgust thus unveils moral judgement of Nana's sexual behaviour, and illustrates contemporary fears of the female body, the ambient society's hypocrisy, misogyny and contempt for the lower classes.

## POETICS OF DISGUST: EXCESS AND REJECTION

The ambivalent poetics of rejection and attraction inscribed in Zola's *Nana* is consistent with the very nature of the disgusting, which as an emotional state is productive of multiple meanings, contradictory valorizations and reactions.<sup>26</sup> Artistic representations employ the disgusting not only to trigger revulsion and rejection but also to elicit curiosity and suspense in audiences. The cultural history of disgust, extending from Antiquity to Kafka and contemporary horror films,

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vaded the entire face, one touching the other; and, faded, sunk in, with the greyish aspect of mud, they already seemed like a mouldiness of the earth on that shapeless pulp, in which the features were no longer recognisable. One of the eyes, the left one, had completely disappeared amidst the eruption of the purulence; the other, half open, looked like a black and tainted hole. The nose still continued to suppurate. A reddish crust starting from one of the cheeks, invaded the mouth, which it distorted in an abominable laugh; and on this horrible and grotesque mask of nothingness, the hair, that beautiful hair, retaining its sun-like fire, fell in a stream of gold. Venus was decomposing. It seemed as if the virus gathered by her in the gutters, from the tolerated carrion – that ferment with which she had poisoned a people – had ascended to her face and rotted it. The room was deserted. A strong breath of despair mounted from the Boulevard, and swelled the curtain. 'To Berlin! to Berlin! to Berlin!'" Zola 1922: 408.

25 Cf. Reverzy 2008: 112.

26 On the history and theory of disgust, cf. Menninghaus 2003.

demonstrates the ambiguous nature of this forceful emotion. Yet the naturalist poetics of ordure, with its decadent attraction to the macabre, foregrounds disgust, using and elaborating the different aspects of the disgusting, thus making disgust a central part of itself. Inspiration from the natural sciences brought a new kind of disgusting world under scrutiny. The naturalist focus on the instinctive and the primitive in us benefits from the natural and biological basis of the disgusting, fostering and favouring themes of sickness, decay and entropic degeneration that remind us of our own mortality and vulnerability.<sup>27</sup> Disgust pertains to the ways in which naturalist literature channels the readers' attention to the harsh realities represented, enhancing their effects through the disgusting's powerful emotional charge. Most people experience disgust as particularly and categorically real, often relating to concrete and organic things and accompanied by sharp physiological colouring.<sup>28</sup>

The central metaphor of Zola's *Nana*, the golden blowfly ("la mouche d'or") illustrates the multiple aspects of the disgusting. A bitter lampoon written by Fauchery, a journalist fallen for Nana, compares the prostitute to a golden blowfly, which flies in from the outskirts of Paris to contaminate high society. The metaphor builds on universal disgust triggered by references to animals, which are seen as contaminants due to their contact with rotten bodies.<sup>29</sup> However, while the blowfly affiliates with "natural" aspects of disgust and solicits effects of reality, the metaphoric blending with the prostitute expands into a series of abstract meanings. They project contemporary thought such as preoccupation with hygiene, disease control and connections between moral and physical cleanliness, parallels between the female body and social order.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, whereas naturalism leans on the disgusting's biological basis to trigger the effects of shock and confusion, its provocative poetics of ordure challenge existing conceptions of taste and beauty, defying the classical ideals of harmony and beauty and testing the very limits of the aesthetic.<sup>31</sup> As

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27 Cf. Rozin et al. 1993: 576.

28 Psychological research has featured disgust as an especially visceral emotion, which involves strong bodily reactions to stimuli that tend to have marked bodily characteristics. The classic stimulants are waste products, vile odours, offensive contaminants and other objects whose very appearance seems loathsome, nauseating and causes revulsion. Cf., for instance, *ibid.*

29 Cf. *ibid.*: 582.

30 On the theme of hygiene in Zola, cf. Gogröf 2013.

31 Naturalism's transgressions against the classical ideals of style include a stylistic transgression in terms of language: the naturalness of naturalist writing "contami-

discussed by Winfried Menninghaus, disgust has occupied a central role in aesthetics since the emergence of the discipline. It has served to articulate the difference between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic; the “aesthetic” is the field of a particular “pleasure” whose absolute other is disgust.<sup>32</sup> What is more, in this view the domain of the disgusting is not limited to contamination alone, in that pure sweetness and pure beauty can also prevent pleasure and solicit rejection: what is merely pleasant and beautiful becomes vomitive, *Ekel*. The “no” of the disgusting thus embraces the outer limits of human life in terms of both corruption and exaggeration.

The varied layers of the disgusting in Zola’s *Nana* extend to satiation-induced distaste and an aesthetics of excess which turns into bad taste and nausea. The novel’s motifs of sexual desire for and obsession with Nana are coupled with her obsession with objects and materiality. Nana is driven by her desire for luxury, a desire that turns into a decadent adoration of artificiality and kitsch. Her apartment is filled with sugary scents and perfumes; she loves sweets, imitation jewels and cheap bric-a-brac, which end up as waste.<sup>33</sup> As Nana achieves fame and fortune, the material obsession evolves into blind wastage. What is new, chic and delicate becomes repulsive. It is as if her life was contaminated by the overwhelming presence of objects: the wastage and food leftovers disgust her servants, sugar “poisons” the glasses, and jewels are lost.<sup>34</sup> Rampant living turns

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nates” classic, elevated style by incorporating vernacular expressions and l’argot into literary language. Cf. Dubois 1993, Reverzy 2008: 35.

32 As Menninghaus (cf. 2003: 26) points out, the eighteenth century’s foundation of modern aesthetics can be described negatively as a foundation based on the prohibition of what is disgusting.

33 The objects of “bibelot” inspire her even though she could afford more than junk: she feels nostalgic for the kitsch that represented luxury in her childhood, adoring vulgar objects behind the display windows: “les bijoux faux, le zinc doré”; “les sucreries d’un chocolatier, écoutant jouer de l’orgue dans une boutique voisine, prise surtout par le goût criard des bibelots à bon marché, des nécessaires dans des coquilles de noix, des hottes de chiffonnier pour les cure-dents, des colonnes Vendôme et des obélisques portant des thermomètres”. Cf. Zola 1996: 182-183; Zola 1922: 178-179.

34 “Mais ce qu’on perdait était pis encore, la nourriture de la veille jetée à la borne, un encombrement de provisions dont les domestiques se dégoûtaient, le sucre empoissonnant les verres, le gaz brûlant à pleins becs, jusqu’à faire sauter les murs; et des négligences, et des méchancetés, et des accidents, tout ce qui peut hâter la ruine, dans une maison dévorée par tant de bouches.” Zola 1996: 359. “But what was wasted was still worse – the food of the previous day thrown in the gutter, an incumbrance of victuals at which the servants turned up their noses, the glasses all sticky with sugar, gas-jets

into the sickening experience of nausea. The wastage saturates Nana's apartment on Rue Villiers, with its grotesquely decorated bedroom. Her "temple", with its handcrafted bed of gold and silver and a byzantine imitation altar, provocatively mixes objects of sexuality and religion, triggering effects of fear in her lovers.

The excess of life then results in overheating. Zola's crowds, living the splendour of Paris, succumb to feelings of dullness and stupor, experiencing a lethargic disgust-type of resignation and weariness, an existential nausea and disgust for life. Continuous satisfaction solicits feelings of boredom: "Ennui" and "s'ennuyer" are frequently used in *Nana*, referring to feelings of apathy and even invoking the disease of the century, *mal-du-siècle*. Nana herself achieves everything she desires but the constant satisfaction results in feelings of emptiness:

Cependant, dans son luxe, au milieu de cette cour, Nana s'ennuyait à crever. Elle avait des hommes pour toutes les minutes de la nuit, et de l'argent jusque dans les tiroirs de sa toilette, mêlé aux peignes et aux brosses; mais ça ne la contentait plus, elle sentait comme un vide quelque part, un trou qui la faisait bâiller.<sup>35</sup>

Zola thus discovers the protagonist's moods of tiredness: "la monotonie bruyante de son existence"; "la solitude", "le vide" and "l'ennui".

The disgust-triggering aesthetics of excess illustrates the tendency towards amplification that characterizes Zola's oeuvre in general and is particularly salient in *Nana*, the work David Baguley (1993) termed a baroque novel. Baroque grandeur and décor inspire Nana's frenetic story-world, building a metonymic continuity between life, theatre and the theatricality of life.<sup>36</sup> Stylistic choices further foster the themes of excess and extravagance. The narrative favours hyperbole and asyndeton as rhetorical devices, comprising repeated catalogue-

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blazing away, turned on recklessly, sufficient to blow up the place, and negligences, and spitefulness, and accidents, all that can hasten ruin in an establishment devoured by so many mouths." Zola 1922: 355.

35 Zola 1996: 280. "Yet, in the midst of her luxury, in the midst of that court, Nana was bored to death. She had men with every minute of the night, and money everywhere, even in the drawers of her dressing-table amongst her combs and brushes; but that no longer satisfied her, she felt a void somewhere, a vacancy that made her yawn. Her life rolled on unoccupied, bringing each day the same monotonous hours." Zola 1922: 276.

36 "Life as theatre" has been considered a central metaphor of the baroque period. Cf. Baguley 1993: 70.

like descriptive sections and lists.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, expansion of the descriptive elicits bewilderment in the reader, as revealed in Flaubert's letter to Zola written in February 1880: Flaubert, struck by "stupor", praised Nana's "Michelangelo-like" and "Babylonian"<sup>38</sup> character.

## DISGUST AND MORALITY

Le sujet philosophique est celui-ci; Toute une société se ruant sur le cul. Une meute derrière une chienne, qui n'est pas en chaleur et qui se moque des chiens qui la suivent. *Le poème des désirs du mâle*, le grand levier qui remue le monde. Il n'y a que le cul et la religion.<sup>39</sup>

The poetics of repugnance in Zola's novel ranges from contamination to overindulgence and excessive beauty, thus exemplifying the multiple layers of disgust, including natural and aesthetic categories of aversion. *Nana* circulates around disgust-related bodily topics from sexuality to degeneration, lethal illness and death, which have frequently been considered cross-cultural disgust elicitors.<sup>40</sup> However, although their biological basis can hardly be denied, emotions are also social and cultural, and the line between these categories is blurred and porous. Although disgust is humanizing, both natural and human, and is often manifested as an automatized reaction of rejection with regard to objects considered unpleasant, contaminated or distasteful, even spontaneous disgust has a complex

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37 Ibid.

38 Cf. Flaubert's letter to Zola, 15 February 1880. "J'ai passé hier toute la journée jusqu'à 11 heures et demie du soir à lire *Nana*. Je n'en ai pas dormi cette nuit et 'j'en demeure stupide'. [...] Nana est *Michelangelesque!* [...] Nana tourne au mythe, sans cesser d'être réelle. Cette création est babylonienne. *Dixi!*!" "Yesterday I spent all the day until half past eleven in the evening by reading Nana. I didn't sleep that night and I am stupid with it. [...] Nana is Michelangelo-like! [...] Nana turns into a myth, without ceasing to be real. This creation is Babylonian. *Dixi!*!" Cf. Flaubert (1926-1939).

39 Zola on *Nana* in his preparatory notes, quoted in Reverzy 2008: 165. "The philosophical issue is as follows; a whole society chasing arse; a pack after a she-dog, who is not in heat and who makes fun of the dogs who pursue her. *A poem of male desires*, the great lever which keeps the world moving on. There is only arse and religion."

40 Rozin et al. 1993: 584.

cognitive content involving learned habits and values.<sup>41</sup> In a sense, disgust always prompts moral appraisal in that it evaluates negatively what it touches, and thus proclaims the inferiority of its object. Everything disgusting, from crawling worms to rotten bodies, implies “no”, thereby turning the objects of disgust away from our presence.<sup>42</sup> As Martha Nussbaum (2006) argues, disgust is an emotion that has been used throughout history to exclude vulnerable people who embody the dominant group’s fears.<sup>43</sup> As the feeling of disgust moves easily from concrete objects to abstract entities, it easily leads to psychological contamination, meaning that pollution starts to circulate and transmit to neutral and harmless entities as well.<sup>44</sup>

For these reasons, disgust has been considered an ugly feeling – or as a morally suspect emotion *per se* – which blocks compassion and other ethical feelings.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, if disgust intrinsically solicits moral judgement, it has the power to acknowledge injustice by eliciting the rejection of unacceptable actions and behaviour. The evocation and representation of disgust in literary contexts tend to reveal morally problematic attitudes, strategies of discrimination and structures of power. This partly explains how its evocation contributes to the ideological objectives of realism, even enhancing its critical and emancipatory polities of transforming and reforming reality.<sup>46</sup> *Nana*, for instance, is indicative of society’s complex emotional disposition, which combines disgust and attraction with regard to female sexuality, prostitution and the lower classes. The novel’s authorial audience is invited to recognize the disgust evoked and to acknowledge the moral dilemma the emotion indicates. Given that “transparent” realist discourse tends to avoid open intervention and moral judgements by an external narrator, the construal of morals is delegated to the reader.

The transformative power of disgust stimulates reflection on the shock effects of naturalism and realism in general, and reactions of aggression and indignation among reading audiences. As much as the scandal of naturalism affiliates with topics considered vulgar or indecent, such as sexuality and prostitution, the novelistic portrait of the bourgeoisie and upper classes forms an integral part of

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41 As discussed by Miller (1997: 15): “It is culture, not nature that draws the lines between defilement and purity, clean and filthy”.

42 Menninghaus 2003: 2.

43 Cf. Nussbaum 2006: 14.

44 On psychological contamination, cf. Rozin 1993: 582-583.

45 Cf. Nussbaum 2001: 453-454; Ngai 2005: 340.

46 Zola, for instance, refuted accusations concerning the immorality of naturalism, insisting on its moral purpose: the somewhat oxymoronic blending of the harsh realities of pessimism and optimism.

literary shock effects intended to “épater les bourgeois”. The upper-class corruption and male weakness featuring in novels about adultery and prostitution seem to scandalize the contemporary readers as much as the female sexual transgression depicted. The case against Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, for instance, unveils the irritation caused by the novel’s violation of patriarchal masculinity. “The ridiculous” and “grotesque” portrayal of male persons who, in addition, are dominated by a woman, Emma Bovary, was listed among the novel’s transgressions against decent manners.<sup>47</sup>

The shaming of the powerful also contributes to the shock strategies in Zola’s *Nana*, which is essentially a novel of a society driven by sex, “la société se ruant sur le cul”, to quote Zola, mocking the male characters in particular. Male humiliation is encapsulated in the figure of Count Muffat: the Emperor’s chamberlain represents the highest stratum of society among Nana’s lovers, yet he is prepared to descend lower than anyone else to retain his dignity, fortune and aristocratic values. Nonetheless, while Muffat is torn by his obsessions and Nana’s capriciousness, he is also a victim of his own class, ruined by the hypocrisy of aristocracy and the austerity of a repressive religious culture. He becomes a nuisance at Court, even ending up as the object of the Empress’s disgust: “Il est trop dégoûtant.” Disgust circulates, and Nana, imitating the upper classes, adopts the Empress’s contempt for Muffat: “Tiens! tu me dégoûtes!” As a scapegoat for society’s failures, Muffat, in a sense, becomes Nana’s double, whose degeneration is symptomatic of the corruption and hollow values of the Empire.

Zola nevertheless avoids tendentiousness and simple juxtaposition in his account of gender, and ideological and moral views. His narrative generally favours ambivalence in characterization, mobility and the blending of positive and negative valorizations that result in complex characters. The figure of Nana is a prime example of this blurring of positions.<sup>48</sup> From the point of view of her lovers, she is a man-eater, even a devil in disguise as Muffat sees her; she is comparable with Rabelais’ gluttonous giant, Gargantua, and devours materials, men, everything she confronts. Standard readings of *Nana* frequently share this perspective, although to quote Zola: Nana, “une bonne fille”, “ne faisant jamais mal pour le mal”, is a poor girl who grew up on the outskirts of Paris, shaped by

47 In listing the weaknesses of Flaubert’s novel, M. Ernest Pinard’s summons refers to the ways in which male characters are humiliated; Charles is cheated by Emma, Homais and the priest are described as “grotesque figures”, and all of them are dominated by Emma. “Le seul personnage qui y domine, c’est Mme Bovary”, Cit. in Flaubert 1998: 427-430.

48 On Nana’s instability and ambiguity, cf. Reverzy 2008, 78-79 and Gural-Migdal 2003.

the society in which she lived, the wretched environments, her future determined by the fatality of the *félire*, the hereditary degeneration of the *Rougon-Macquart* family.

While the figure of Nana lacks the self-reflection typical of tragic heroes, Zola's novel features tragic power in the sense that it unveils cathartic potential.<sup>49</sup> Nana's transgressions against the alleged decency of bourgeois society turn into purgative actions, paving the way for a sense of collective responsibility and self-reflection that could even offer tools for promoting social change. Just as the blowfly can contaminate, spread disease or be used as a cure for infections, Nana-the-blowfly becomes a "Nana-pharmakos", capable of both poisoning and curing society.<sup>50</sup> The transformative power of Nana is also illustrated by the emotional resistance of the figure. She refuses to accept the shame and contempt that the ambient society attempts to impose on her; rather than feeling ashamed, she is flattered by Fauchery's lampoon, considering it as a mark of distinction. In the final scene Nana seems to be laughing at the society that is gazing at her, drawing attention to the allure of disgust amongst the crowd. The terrible bitterness of the deformed grimace on her dead face, "le rire abominable", is illustrative of the power of *Nana*, which is, to quote Roland Barthes, despite all its vulgarity, a civic book.<sup>51</sup>

## WRITING EMOTIONS, WRITING REALITY

Zola equated naturalist writing with experimental science in *Le Roman expérimental*. Nevertheless, the aesthetics of documentation should be understood as a gesture of provocation, a quintessential element of the naturalist programme. Far from simplistically mirroring reality in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Zola generates complex and multi-layered story-worlds, blending narrative registers, styles, genres and intertextualities.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, analogies with the work of scientists expand to include the poetics of representing and evoking emotions:

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49 On the tragic scheme in naturalism, see Baguley 1990. Barthes (1982: 90-91) considers *Nana* as an epic rather than a tragic novel, since the figure of Nana has no power of understanding like tragic heroes, remaining a pure instrument of decay.

50 On the "homeopathic" aspect of disgust, see Menninghaus 2003: 9.

51 Barthes 1982: 93.

52 Zolian texture even anticipates modernist aesthetics by producing a blurring of positions, a merging of perspectives, and forms of dissolution, ellipsis and abstraction. Cf. Harrow 2010: 61.

from the Goncourt brothers to Zola, metaphors such as “clinic of love” or “anatomy of passions” are deployed to illustrate the scientific study of emotions. Instead of renouncing emotions, realist and naturalist writing strives to move beyond romantic sentimentality and passion in terms of humoral composition to embrace the emerging understanding of emotions as complex neuropsychological conditions.<sup>53</sup>

As shown in the above reading of Zola’s *Nana*, naturalist writing generates an ambivalent poetics of negative emotions that deploys strategies of shock and disgust to enhance its critical potential. The great emotional amplitude of disgust effects contributes to the novel’s reality effect by drawing attention to and disrupting the banality of everyday experience; the effects of thrill, on the other hand, add to the reader’s engagement with and immersion in the story-world in question. The evocation and representation of disgust are further used to orient the reader’s moral judgement concerning the problems of the society depicted. However, instead of offering simplistic solutions to these social and moral dilemmas, realist and naturalist narratives tend to create contradictory story-worlds with changing ideological facets and ambivalent characters, evoking mixed emotional reactions and producing overlapping moral valorizations. This, on the other hand, is consistent with the poetics of representing realities: if reality as we experience it is multi-layered, rich and contradictory, artistic representations of it tend to be the same. In fact, the very complexity and ambivalence activate the reader to consider the world represented, thus enhancing the power of the text. It also seems that the critical potential of realism stems from its disturbing legacy and the impact of negative emotions rather than from a cathartic release or purification, as in Aristotle’s theory of tragedy. The authorial audience is challenged to encounter feelings of collective responsibility for the shared reality depicted. Zolian crowd fictions illustrate the way in which the community-building functions of fiction become entangled with emotions. Literature is communication. It uses affectivity to influence and transform reality, shaping our cultural imagination and inspiring collective emotions.

53 However, although contemporary emotion theories promoted by Ribot and Charcot evidently influenced Zola, he was simultaneously fascinated with the old theory of passions, as shown in the preface to *Thérèse Raquin* (1867). Balzac also hovered between realism and romanticism. Cf. also Hamon 2015: 95-96.

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# **Breaking the Ice, Freezing the Laughter**

## Authorial Empathy, Reader Response, and the Kafkaesque Poetics of Guilt and Shame

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This article explores the process of writing emotions through the lens of rhetorical approaches to narrative. It specifically focuses on one aspect of authorial empathy that so far has gained relatively little attention, namely, the process of writing negative emotions such as guilt and shame.<sup>1</sup> The concept of “authorial empathy” is used in this article to refer to the narrative imagination that guides an author’s writing practices, i.e. the choices of narrative techniques intended to evoke certain emotional responses in readers. The first part of the article outlines a theoretical and methodological approach that takes into account all three aspects of narrative empathizing: not only the author’s emotions but also the readers’ emotions and the rhetorical, textual strategies the author uses (more or less consciously) to evoke emotional responses in the reading audience.<sup>2</sup> In examining the rhetorical triangle that involves authorial empathy, this article discusses narrative progression, aesthetic distance and other elements that influence the artistic production of emotions and emotion effects.

After this short introduction to the theoretical framework, Franz Kafka’s short stories will be used to illustrate the ambivalent uses of authorial empathy. Kafka’s purpose – to generate a disturbed reaction in his readers – is manifested in a famous letter to Oskar Pollak, written in January 1904:

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1 Cf. Hogan 2011, Tenenbaum 2009, Friedländer 2013.

2 Cf. Phelan 2005.

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we are reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? [...] we need the books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.<sup>3</sup>

This article examines how certain of the rhetorical devices Kafka used travel from text to text, and how these devices are connected to the process of writing the emotions of guilt and shame. Kafka's "Brief an den Vater" ("Letter to his Father", 1919) is used as a starting point for analysing his story "Das Urteil" ("The Judgement", 1912). The article also offers some ideas as to how these same rhetorical and affective strategies are at work in the narrative design of "Die Verwandlung" ("The Metamorphosis", 1915) and in the novel *Der Prozess* (*The Trial*, 1925). Each of these "punitive fantasies"<sup>4</sup> ends with a scene of the protagonist's death, either through suicide or execution. All of these stories also guide and manipulate the audience's emotional responses in ways that are very similar to the affective strategies Kafka used in his "Letter to his Father". In Kafka's aesthetic game, artistic deception leads to the strategy of "freezing the laughter"<sup>5</sup> by abruptly ending the reader's detachment or by fooling readers into feeling pity and fear for his self-deceiving characters. The theoretical concepts underlying the analysis of Kafka's texts are introduced before investigating his use of rhetorical strategies in greater detail.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: AUTHORIAL EMPATHY, TEXTUAL STRATEGIES, READER RESPONSE

In a rhetorical approach to writing and reading emotions, form and affective impact are perceived as interconnected. Following James Phelan's model (2005

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3 Kafka 1977: 16; "Ich glaube, man sollte überhaupt nur solche Bücher lesen, die einen beißen und stechen. Wenn das Buch, das wir lesen, uns nicht mit einem Faustschlag auf den Schädel weckt, wozu lesen wir dann das Buch? [...] Wir brauchen aber die Bücher, die auf uns wirken wie ein Unglück, das uns sehr schmerzt, wie der Tod eines, den wir lieber hatten als uns, wie wenn wir in Wälder verstoßen würden, von allen Menschen weg, wie ein Selbstmord, ein Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns." Kafka 1999: 36.

4 Sokel 2002: 41.

5 Ibid.: 12.

& 2007), storytelling can be seen as a rhetorical act in which the narrative strategies designed by the author have consequences for the reader's emotional engagement with the narrative. Thus, the focus has to be on the feedback loop of emotions negotiated among aspects of authorial agency, textual strategies for evoking empathy (or empathic aversion) and reader response. Among the concepts used in this article is the term "authorial audience", which was introduced and developed by Peter Rabinowitz (1976 and 1987) and James Phelan (2005) in their rhetorical approaches to narrative. This concept refers to a hypothetical audience that responds to the text as designed by its (implied) author. In practice, real-life readers can become members of the authorial audience to whom the text's rhetorical purposes are communicated. The recursive relationship between authorial agency, textual phenomena and reader response also entails the possibility of shared readings among different flesh-and-blood readers, even though individual readers might find some authorial audiences easier to join than others.<sup>6</sup>

Rhetorical approaches to narrative have also acknowledged the effects that narrative progression has on readers' emotional involvement in reading narratives. Two different aspects of narrative progression are important from the perspective of this article. Firstly, the judgements readers make about characters and storytellers (narrators and authors) have consequences for how we experience and understand narrative form. Here, "narrative form" is understood to mean the elements, techniques and structures of narratives that elicit particular emotion effects.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, narrative form can be experienced only through the temporal process of reading and responding (emotionally, cognitively and ethically) to narrative. Narrative progression involves both textual dynamic, that is, the movement of narrative from a beginning through the middle to an end, and reader dynamics, meaning the reader's engagement with this movement, which both follows and influences textual dynamics.<sup>8</sup> Readers make (emotional) judgements about characters and narrators, and they continuously construct and reconstruct these judgements.

The rhetorical triangle of authorial agency, textual phenomena and reader response also determines the process of narrative empathizing.<sup>9</sup> Patrick Colm

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6 Cf. Phelan 2005: 18-19.

7 Cf. Phelan 2007: 3.

8 Cf. *ibid.*

9 According to *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, for instance, "[n]arrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it [...], in mental simulation during reading, in the aesthetics of reception when readers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it" (Keen 2013: s.p.).

Hogan's (2011) two-fold model, which separates the arousal level of empathy from the evaluation level of an empathizing response, explains this question further. Whereas the former type of empathy is triggered spontaneously by a perception, the imagination or an emotional memory, elaborative empathy "involves a self-conscious attempt to imagine the condition of the other person".<sup>10</sup> Both types relate to our immersion in fictional storyworlds. In other words, we become spontaneously open to parallel emotional experiences by mirroring responses to the fictional other or we attend to simulating, categorizing, modelling or otherwise understanding the character's emotional experience. According to Hogan, literature involves the possibility of cultivating openness to empathic experience in a setting that is devoid of the egoistic conditions of real-life emotions and situations.<sup>11</sup> However, the uses and consequences of narrative empathy can be more unruly than has thus far been acknowledged by scholars, ranging from positive to negative and neutral effects.<sup>12</sup> Narrative empathy may also be *strategically* employed by authors for purposes of emotional – and ideological – manipulation.

Narrative empathy involves an author's empathy, but rhetorically it emerges through a text's design. The complexity of the issue stands out, first of all, when we begin to investigate the *formal* aspects of narrative empathy. Previous studies on narrative empathy have often focused on listing certain techniques (e.g. a first-person narrative situation and narrative perspective) that might lead to an empathy-generating effect, including character identification. Yet, already more than half a century ago, Booth (1961) argued against the idea that there could be any single narrative technique that would inevitably result in particular rhetorical or emotional effects. Rather, the successfulness of every narrative technique is related to how well it serves the rhetorical, aesthetic or ethical purposes of an individual narrative. Thus, in discussing strategic empathy, we need to pay attention to the combination of techniques used. The approach laid out here draws on the idea that the analysis of empathy-generating effects always calls for interpre-

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10 Hogan 2011: 65.

11 Cf. *ibid.*: 68-69.

12 In recent narrative studies, there has been discussion on the potential of literature to enhance readers' social awareness. Some scholars have even talked about the moral growth of citizens through the development of moral sentiments such as empathy and sympathy. Cf. e.g. Nussbaum 1990 and 2001. As Suzanne Keen (2007) and other literary scholars have already argued, the widely celebrated "empathy–altruism" hypothesis, the idea of fiction reading as leading to altruistic real-life action, needs more evidence. Cf. Keen 2007: 65, 130.

tative inquiry from all points of the rhetorical triangle.<sup>13</sup> Rhetorical and emotion effects are a product of multilevel narrative communication designed by the author, and this communication involves both textual and reader dynamics.

A second aspect of narrative empathy that has been the subject of lively debate is the degree of aesthetic distance involved in the process of both writing and reading. The process of writing emotions, which is the focus of this article, is related to the extent to which a given story is derived from an author's personal experience.<sup>14</sup> From a literary scholar's point of view, however, the main interest in examining authorial empathy lies in the *process* of writing and in the *representation* of the emotion rather than in the actual emotion. As Hogan<sup>15</sup> defines this distinction, “[t]he crucial point here is that the depictive validity of a literary work does not derive from its source in some prior [author's] experience. It derives from its *production* of such an experience” (emphasis his). In studying the practices of writing, our main concern is to examine how an author's real-life experiences are *transformed* into aesthetic form. Next, this question is explored in the context of Kafka's practices of writing emotions.

## THE REWARD FOR SERVING THE DEVIL: LAUGHTER AND THE KAFKAESQUE POETICS OF GUILT AND SHAME

Kafka's authorship serves as an example of the ways in which authorial empathy can be used to manipulate an audience's tendency to feel with fictional others in order to evoke powerful effects of aesthetic shock, confusion and estrangement. In other words, this article shows how Kafka strategically uses empathy for rhetorical and aesthetical purposes and how the very process of writing emotions reveals certain aspects of this strategy. Thus, the focus is on the so-called “aesthetic emotions” (e.g. estrangement, wonder, disgust, pity or sadness, or sympathy) that do not necessarily motivate practical behaviours in the way that real-life emotions do. Yet they influence the ways in which readers make emotional and cognitive judgements of characters and events at the moment of first reading

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13 Cf. Phelan 2005: 5.

14 A text's genre (ranging from nonfictional autobiography, memoirs and history to fictional fantasy novels) of course influences the ways in which we evaluate the representations of emotions in the text. Also, the choice of narrative voice or situation (first-person narration vs. third-person narration) and of narrative perspective plays an important role in this respect.

15 Hogan 2011: 22.

(and potentially during the second reading). Instead of character identification, it is more accurate to talk about emotional *projection*: the reader's tendency to adopt the fictional Other's position temporarily during the reading process.

The analysis of authorial empathy in Kafka's work begins with a discussion of a letter that Kafka wrote to his father in 1919. This document and its affective and rhetorical elements deserve special attention because all reveal something important about Kafka's methods of perspectival role-taking in transforming his emotions into aesthetic form. After exploring the affective and rhetorical elements of the letter, the second part of the analysis will examine how the same narrative strategies are at play in "Das Urteil". The focus is on the role of the author's empathic role-taking, that is, his projection of the self onto a fictive being. What does the author's experience of losing the boundaries of the self during the writing process mean from the authorial audience's perspective? How is this experience transformed into a narrative design?

In his letter, Kafka confesses that his father was always his primary audience. His main goal in writing was to make a true connection with his father while simultaneously breaking free of the parental influence. He freed and healed himself through his work, even though the father's presence still haunted him, even on paper: "My writing was all about you; all I did there, after all, was to bemoan what I could not bemoan upon your breast."<sup>16</sup> According to Max Brod, Kafka's father never received the letter.<sup>17</sup> Kafka gave it to his mother to hand on, but she never delivered it to the father. The first part of Kafka's letter gives voice to the son. Through his eyes, Hermann Kafka is portrayed as an insensitive and self-satisfied tyrant who was only occasionally able to give the tenderness and care his son needed. The most frequently mentioned emotions in the letter are fear, guilt and shame. Capable of analysing the emotional dynamics of the relationship and family life from a more distanced position, the adult Kafka writes about the differences in the temperaments of father and son. Not having "the Kafka will", the worldly dominance, self-confidence or physical strength, the son is destined to appear as weak, ungrateful and cold in his father's eyes. This estrangement caused permanent damage to the son's mental health.<sup>18</sup>

After analysing the relationship with his father in a calm but affecting manner, Kafka then gives his father a voice. The father's hypothetical response in the second part of the letter points out the son's potential hypocrisy and self-denial in expressing his emotions. In his hypothetical answer, the father claims that his

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16 Kafka 1976: 576; "Mein Schreiben handelte von Dir, ich klagte dort ja nur, was ich an Deiner Brust nicht klagen konnte." Kafka 1965: 43.

17 Gray et al. 2005: 49.

18 Cf. Kafka 1965: 7-9.

son has been playing with words in his address to his parent, “at the same time trying to be ‘too clever’ and ‘too affectionate’”.<sup>19</sup> By repudiating both his and his father’s guilt, the son wants to free himself of all responsibility. In Kafka’s letter the father’s judgement of his son is related to the recognition of the young man’s self-deception. The son is unwilling to take part in the social obligations of family life, including getting married (Kafka and his fiancée Julie Wohryzek had just called off their wedding; Kafka had also twice broken off an engagement with Felice Bauer). In order to avoid the emotion of shame, the son blamed his father for his failed engagements. The third part of Kafka’s letter, its very ending, shows the son’s attempt to set the record straight so that both he and his father could live together and die peacefully: “[I]n my opinion something has yet been achieved that is so closely approximate to the truth that it may be able to reassure us both a little and make our living and our dying easier.”<sup>20</sup>

The very ambivalence in Kafka’s use of authorial empathy – both its tender and its dark potential – emerges in the design of his letter in a way that is comparable to his fictional stories. Sokel, among other Kafka scholars, has described Kafka’s narrative “jokes” as a deliberate, sadomasochist play on the audience’s emotional responses.<sup>21</sup> This interpretation is supported by the ideas Kafka expressed in his letter to Pollak in August of 1902. At times Kafka felt an urge to give in to “the wicked criticaster” living inside him:

And here comes a joke, a marvelous one, that makes God in His heaven weep bitterly and sends hell into hellish convulsions of laughter. It’s this: We can never have another person’s holy of holies, only our own – that’s a joke, a marvelous one. [...] You neither wept nor laughed. That’s how it is – you’re neither God in heaven nor the wicked devil. Only the wicked criticaster [...] inhabits you, and he is a subordinate devil whom, however, you should shake off. And so, for the good of your soul, I shall tell you the strange tale of how once upon a time..., may God bless him, was overcome by Franz Kafka.<sup>22</sup>

19 Kafka 1976: 584; “[...] gleichzeitig ‘übergescheit’ und ‘überzärtlich’ [...].” Kafka 1965: 61.

20 Kafka 1976: 585; “[I]st meiner Meinung nach doch etwas der Wahrheit so sehr Ange-nähertes erreicht, daß es uns beide ein wenig beruhigen und Leben und Sterben leichter machen kann.” Kafka 1965: 63.

21 Cf. Sokel 2002: 76.

22 Kafka 1977: 4; “Und nun kommt ein Witz, ein ganz vortrefflicher, bei dem der liebe Herrgott bitterlich weint und die Hölle ganz höllische Lachkrämpfe bekommt – das Allerheiligste eines Fremden können wir niemals haben, nur das eigene – das ist ein Witz, ein ganz vortrefflicher. [...] Du hast weder geweint noch gelacht, Du bist eben weder der liebe Herrgott noch der böse Teufel.

Kafka himself laughed uncontrollably whenever he read his stories aloud to his friends. Yet in his textual game, the “hellish convulsions of laughter” were always accompanied by feelings of tender sadness – the presence of an inner, bitterly weeping god. An awareness that “[w]e can never have another person’s holy of holies, only our own” is also cause for existential despair. Yet this awareness brings relief and the possibility of liberation. For Kafka, his protagonists’ dying scenes, for instance, were a source of intense pleasure, comparable to the experience of writing: “[...] such dying scenes are a secret game, in fact, I am happy to be in my dying protagonist”,<sup>23</sup> he claimed. Readers too are invited to take part in his aesthetical game of losing the self in the fictional Other, of transgressing and escaping the boundaries of the self. In this respect the method of writing emotions resembles Kafka’s ruthless honesty in viewing the shortcomings of his own character, including his tendencies of narcissistic self-absorption. As Kafka wrote in his letter, we truly need the “books that affect us [...] like a suicide”.<sup>24</sup>

One of Kafka’s punitive fantasies is the story “Das Urteil”, which he wrote in a trance-like state in a single eight-hour session one night in September of 1912. In his diary, Kafka describes his writing experience as an ecstatic self-abandonment that led to an “absolute opening of body and soul”.<sup>25</sup> According to Max Brod, Kafka once told him that he had a strong ejaculation in his mind when he wrote the story’s last sentence.<sup>26</sup> The feelings of self-transcendence and sexual pleasure were accompanied by the sensation of omnipotence, of being in control. What is especially interesting with regard to this process is its connection to the narrative innovation Kafka himself considered to be his breakthrough in writing “Das Urteil”. This story (which is dedicated to “Felice B.”) introduces the technique Kafka used in the other works of his mature period. In the tale, there is an utterly objective narrator. The third-person narrator’s perspective almost melds into that of the main character. By diminishing the distance between the third-person narrator and the main character, the stories eliminate the

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Nur der böse Kritikus [...] lebt in Dir und das ist ein untergeordneter Teufel, den man aber doch loswerden sollte. Und so will ich Dir zu Nutz und Frommen die absonderliche Geschichte erzählen, wie weyland..., den Gott selig habe, von Franz Kafka überwunden wurde.” Kafka 1999: 13-14.

23 Translation Sokel 2002: 210; “[...] sind solche Schilderungen im geheimen ein Spiel, ich freue mich ja in dem Sterbenden zu sterben.” Kafka 1951: 320-321.

24 Kafka 1977: 16, emphasis E.N.

25 Translation Sokel 2002: 71; “vollständigen Öffnung des Leibes und der Seele” Kafka 1951: 294.

26 Brod 1960: 158.

distance between the protagonist and the reader. Since the narrator's perspective becomes almost identical with that of the character, the authorial audience too is forced to share the protagonist's condition of being a prisoner of his brain. "Das Urteil" is also a text which has striking resemblances to Kafka's letter to his father written seven years later.

Let's examine for a moment the narrative progression of "Das Urteil" before analysing the story in the context of the letter. At the beginning of the tale, we encounter a young merchant, Georg Bendemann, who has just finished writing a letter to a friend who has immigrated to Russia. Georg is about to marry "a young woman from a well-to-do-family", and he is uncertain whether it is appropriate to write about his happiness to this childhood friend. The authorial audience is invited to consider and reconsider the sincerity of Georg's guilt and his concern for his friend. At first, the audience's emotional and ethical judgements of the protagonist are affected by his seemingly sympathetic attitude towards his friend. As the first stage of the story approaches its end, however, readers tend to recognize more clearly Georg's use of his friend's situation as a narcissistic boost for his own self-esteem. The protagonist keeps making comparisons between his and his friend's situations in business and in personal life. All these comparisons seem to be very flattering to Georg.

The middle part of the tale consists of Georg's conversation with his father. Georg is convinced that he is genuinely concerned with his father's well-being: he undresses him and carries him to bed and covers him up. At the same time, however, readers are once again guided to see the protagonist's self-serving attitude. The more tender feelings are mixed with the son's condescending thoughts about his new role in the father's business. The suppressed emotions of guilt and shame emerge the moment the father accuses his son of not telling him the whole truth about his departed friend. At first, the father denies the friend's existence altogether. Then he makes strong accusations about the ways in which Georg has treated his friend. He blames his son for betraying the friend because his fiancée, Frieda, has lifted up her skirts. Paralyzed by this sudden blow, Georg loses control of his mind. The discussion between father and son culminates in the father's condemning his son to death by drowning. Even more surprising is Georg's instant acceptance of his father's judgement at the close of the story. Declaring his love for his father and his late mother, Georg rushes to his death by falling into an "endless stream of traffic".<sup>27</sup>

Owing to the unexplained, irrational nature of Georg's guilt and shame, the authorial audience's primary responses to the story are surprise and confusion. The effect of confusion derives partly from the audience's inability to make firm

27 Kafka 2000: 72; "ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr" Kafka 1954: 22.

emotional and ethical judgements about the characters.<sup>28</sup> The protagonist's sudden loss of his sense of self guides the reader to reconsider the accuracy of the protagonist's previous judgements as well as the reader's own judgements of the character. The father's self-contradictions appear equally problematic. He is revealed to be a jealous and vengeful parent. Georg's self-surrender potentially restores some of the readers' sympathies, but the narrative tension of the story never resolves. Like Kafka's other stories, this tale lacks a resolution that would bring the reader relief and enlightenment at its close.

The emotional effect of "Das Urteil" stems from a narrative design which is astonishingly similar to the design of Kafka's letter. Kafka's rhetorical strategies in his writing seem to be very close to the strategies Kafka describes in his letter as his father's methods of bringing him up:

Your extremely effective rhetorical methods in bringing me up, which never failed to work with me anyway, were: *abuse, threats, irony, spiteful laughter, and – oddly enough – self-pity*. I can't recall your ever having abused me directly and in downright abusive terms. Nor was that necessary; you had so many other methods [...].<sup>29</sup>

Kafka uses similar, indirect means of "abuse" in tricking his readers into adopting the characters' perspective and then destabilizing the basis for this sympathizing projection. In Kafka's stories we often meet self-deceiving characters whose rejected wishes and desires are revealed only after readers have been invited to feel pity and fear for the suffering Other.

From this perspective, the second part of Kafka's letter – the father's hypothetical answer to his son – is the most interesting. As in "Das Urteil", in Kafka's letter the father's judgement of his son is related to the recognition of the son's self-deception. The conflict between the two selves in "Das Urteil" is rendered through the use of the two male characters in the story, Georg and his more ascetic friend. Through the father's condemnation, the son is able to avoid resolving his conflicting desires: for Kafka himself, his desire to gain independence through marriage, on the one hand, and his desire to maintain the bachelor's (and the writer's) freedom, on the other. The father's hypothetical condemnation

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28 Cf. Phelan 2011.

29 Kafka 1976: 563, emphasis E.N. "Deine äußerst wirkungsvollen, wenigstens mir gegenüber niemals versagenden rednerischen Mittel bei der Erziehung waren: Schimpfen, Drohen, Ironie, böses Lachen und – merkwürdigerweise – Selbstbeklagung. Daß Du mich direkt und mit ausdrücklichen Schimpfwörtern beschimpft hättest, kann ich mich nicht erinnern. Es war auch nicht nötig. Du hattest so viele andere Mittel [...]." Kafka 1965: 18.

of his son in the letter brings to mind the sudden exposure and unmasking manifested in Georg's cry to his father: "And so you've been lying in ambush for me!"<sup>30</sup> In the final part of Kafka's letter, which shows the son's attempts at reconciliation, corresponds to Georg's confession of love for his parents at the end of "Das Urteil". The pleasure of dying is manifested in the close of "Das Urteil" as Georg stumbles into the stream of traffic (the German word *Verkehr*, "traffic", also means intercourse).

Existential feelings of guilt and shame are manifested in the all-encompassing threat of some invisible authority, which emerges in almost every story Kafka wrote.<sup>31</sup> Guilt and shame, which Kafka describes in his letter as the main elements of his emotional life, are transformed into an organizing tone or mood in his stories. In the Kafkaesque poetics of shame and guilt, aestheticized emotions haunt the authorial audience as an atmosphere of the uncanny in the storyworld, which elicits both cognitive and emotional confusion in the audience. In the allegorical readings of Kafka's stories, the presence of a (paternal) authoritative power has been approached from multiple perspectives: juridical and social, religious and spiritual, existential and psychological. The psychological interpretations, of course, have been inspired by Kafka's letter to his father in which Kafka himself refers to the themes he used in his writing.

One of these references is a quotation from *Der Prozess*, which Kafka provides in describing his father's effect on the development of his nervous temperament: "I had lost my self-confidence where you were concerned, and in its place had developed a boundless sense of guilt. (In recollection of this boundlessness I once wrote of someone, accurately: 'He is afraid the shame will outlive him')."<sup>32</sup> We can find these words at the end of *Der Prozess* where Joseph K. is finally executed; helpless, "[l]ike a dog".<sup>33</sup> To make the network of references even more complex, Kafka uses this same expression in writing about the end of his life in his letter to Max Brod: "My future is not rosy and I will surely

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30 Kafka 2000: 71; "Du hast mir also aufgelauert!" Kafka 1954: 21.

31 According to Tenenbaum, existential shame and guilt in Kafka's work derive not from actual wrongdoings but from internalized self-doubt and insecurities. Kafka's characters are all afraid of facing some aspects of themselves, which influences their abilities to make choices. Cf. Tenenbaum 2009: 120.

32 Kafka 1976: 572; "Ich hatte vor Dir das Selbstvertrauen verloren, dafür ein grenzenloses Schuldbewußtsein eingetauscht. (In Erinnerung an diese Grenzenlosigkeit schrieb ich von jemandem einmal richtig: 'Er fürchtet, die Scham werde ihn noch überleben.')." Kafka 1965: 37.

33 Kafka 1998: 231; "[w]ie ein Hund" Kafka 1990: 312.

– this much I can see – die like a dog”.<sup>34</sup> Shameful death, which simultaneously provides strange pleasures of self-sacrifice, defines the essence of the emotional components of both the author’s self-analyses and his work.

Kafka uses a similar metaphorical struggle in the narrative design of the allegory “Die Verwandlung”. Here, family relations become a trial that ends with the death of the unfit son. Likewise, in Kafka’s letter, the father–son relationship is described as a combat between a human being and a parasite, a vermin, who sucks the blood of others in order to continue living:

I admit that we fight with each other, but there are two kinds of fighting. There is chivalrous fighting, in which the forces of independent opponents are measured against each other, each one remaining alone, losing alone, winning alone. And there is the fighting of vermin, which not only sting but, at the same time, suck the blood, too, to sustain their own life. That is after all what the professional soldier really is, and that is what you are. You are unfit for life; but in order to settle down in it comfortably, without worries and without self-reproaches, you prove that I have deprived you of all your fitness for life and put it in my pockets. What does it matter to you now if you are unfit for life, now it is my responsibility, but you calmly lie down and let yourself be hauled along life, physically and mentally, by me.<sup>35</sup>

Even though the parallels between the structure of the letter and “Die Verwandlung” are not as explicit as in the case of “Das Urteil”, the allegory shows similar rhetorical strategies. In “Die Verwandlung”, the effectiveness of the allegory is based on using the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, as a metaphor that becomes flesh during the narrative. The narrative progression of the allegory – and the readers’ emotional reactions along the narrative path – follows Gregor’s estrangement and his shock as he gradually becomes more conscious of the limitations of his

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34 Kafka 1977: 24; “Mein Weg ist gar nicht gut und ich muß – soviel Übersicht habe ich – wie ein Hund zugrunde gehen.” Kafka 1999: 51.

35 Kafka 1976: 585; “Ich gebe zu, daß wir miteinander kämpfen, aber es gibt zweierlei Kampf. Den ritterlichen Kampf, wo sich die Kräfte selbständiger Gegner messen, jeder bleibt für sich, verliert für sich, siegt für sich. Und den Kampf des Ungeziefers, welches nicht nur sticht, sondern gleich auch zu seiner Lebenserhaltung das Blut saugt. Das ist ja der eigentliche Berufssoldat, und das bist Du. Lebensuntüchtig bist Du; um es Dir aber darin bequem, sorgenlos und ohne Selbstvorwürfe einrichten zu können, beweist Du, daß ich alle Deine Lebenstüchtigkeit Dir genommen und in meine Tasche gesteckt habe. Was kümmert es Dich jetzt, wenn Du lebensuntüchtig bist, ich habe ja die Verantwortung, Du aber streckst Dich ruhig aus und läßt Dich, körperlich und geistig, von mir durchs Leben schleifen.” Kafka 1965: 61.

new condition. At the beginning of the narrative, Gregor wakes up one morning trapped in the body of a vermin. However, he is still able to feel and think like a human being:

When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He was lying on his back as hard as armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly, sectioned by arch-shaped ribs, to whose dome the cover, about to slide off completely, could barely cling. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, were waving helplessly before his eyes.<sup>36</sup>

Through mental projection, the authorial audience is invited to share the protagonist's state of not-knowing, of not understanding what is happening to him. However, the scenes in the tale also invite the audience to feel disgust and empathic aversion as they encounter the protagonist. These effects are intensified by representing the protagonist's physical sensations, which reinforce the audience's emotional response. The portrayal of Gregor's discomfort is aimed at generating a similar embodied response of unease in the audience. The story's estranging effect is also created by portraying Gregor's self-alienation as he hears his peculiar voice and observes the awkward movements of his body as if he were a prisoner of his foreign body ("[he heard] his own voice answering, unmistakably his own voice";<sup>37</sup> "[...] white dots which he had no idea what to make of"<sup>38</sup>). Such details as the white spots on Gregor's belly and the brown fluid coming out of his mouth are highly repulsive. What was Kafka's purpose in describing these details?

It is true that Kafka's use of authorial empathy can be seen as having ethical dimensions. The horror and isolation of Gregor's situation may be seen as serving Kafka's rhetorical purpose of enlarging empathic solidarity beyond the hu-

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36 Kafka 1996: 3; "Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt. Er lag auf seinem panzerartig harten Rücken und sah, wenn er den Kopf ein wenig hob, seinen gewölbten, braunen, von bogenförmigen Versteifungen geteilten Bauch, auf dessen Höhe sich die Bettdecke, zum gänzlichen Niedergleiten bereit, kaum noch erhalten konnte. Seine vielen, im Vergleich zu seinem sonstigen Umfang kläglich dünnen Beine flimmerten ihm hilflos vor den Augen." Kafka 1960: 1.

37 Kafka 1996: 5; "[E]r seine antwortende Stimme hörte, die wohl unverkennbar seine [...]." Kafka 1960: 4.

38 Kafka 1996: 4; "[Er] fand die juckende Stelle, die mit lauter kleinen weißen Pünktchen besetzt war, die er nicht zu beurteilen verstand [...]." Kafka 1960: 2.

man species to all sentient beings. Even vermin can be sensitive creatures with feelings. The estranging effect, generated by the introduction of the fantastic and the supernatural into the mimetic storyworld, thus may work as a pathway, leading us to see reality anew through the Other. Be that as it may, the reader's projection also "traps" him or her in the character's consciousness. The authorial audience is invited to feel Gregor's agony, isolation and helpless suffering as, little by little, he loses his human qualities.

Yet in a sense Kafka's authorial audience is *fooled* into feeling pity and fear for the character.<sup>39</sup> As in many of Kafka's stories, in "Die Verwandlung" the audience's hermeneutic task is to recognize the disguise of the protagonist's self-delusions, even the comical aspects of his self-loathing. Previous studies on Kafka's story have pointed out the resemblances between Gregor's metamorphosis and the fantasy of the protagonist Raban in another of Kafka's tales, "Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande" ("Wedding Preparations in the Country", 1907/1908).<sup>40</sup> Raban imagines sending his human body into a social situation so that he might stay in bed. He thinks of transforming into a giant beetle. Similarly, Gregor's struggles in his new condition serve as an expression of his desire to escape his responsibilities as a travelling salesman and the provider for his family. This analogy is emphasized in Gregor's thought after he has attempted to rise from bed: "'Oh God', he thought, 'what a grueling job I've picked!'"<sup>41</sup> This weird leap from the realm of the fantastic to the mimetic storyworld reveals the function of the transformation as a metaphor that brings Gregor's secret desire to life and enables him to escape his situation and gain freedom without the painful recognition of his own guilt and shame. Dying becomes his ultimate liberation.

## CONCLUSION

Kafka's writing is deeply troubling. He employs authorial empathy in order to manipulate the audience's feelings by calling upon readers' human tendency to feel with others, then leaves them without a stable basis to analyse intellectually what has happened. As Emily Troscianko (2013) has pointed out, Kafka's work is among those fictional texts which are fundamentally enactive and cognitively

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39 Cf. Sokel 2002: 76.

40 Cf. e.g. Greve 2011: 52.

41 Kafka 1996: 3. "'Ah Gott', dachte er, 'was für einen anstrengenden Beruf habe ich gewählt!'" Kafka 1960: 2.

realistic: they contain evocations of visual perception (narrative perspective) and emotion that establish a compellingly direct connection with the reader's imagination. Yet these texts also leave the reader baffled by their violation of our folk-psychological assumptions. Kafka himself often expressed not only his amusement, but also his confusion in reading his own stories, asking someone else to tell him what they really meant. The tales seemed to lie beyond his control, just as his characters were forced to adjust to an irresistible restlessness and the destruction of his storyworlds.

In Kafka's existential, modernist allegories, the art of indirect communication from the author to the authorial audience is affected by the tendency of allegory to insist on a search for meaning, but at the same time this strategy frustrates the readers' attempts to obtain certain knowledge. Despite their dark undertones, Kafka's tales often have a liberating function, which is revealed through the reader's encounter with the uncanny. In Kafka's stories the triangle between authorial agency, reader response and textual phenomena comes back to aspects of self-loss, immersion and the ethics of strategic empathizing. Kafka's authorial purpose seems to be rooted in his deliberately difficult communication itself, inviting the audience to join him in the quest for human knowledge. By refusing to give definite answers, Kafka forces the readers of his narratives to see their own conditions mirrored in the situations of his protagonists.

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# Hiding One's Feelings

## 'Emotionless' Rhetoric in Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* and Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung*

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TOM VANASSCHE

In his analysis of Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung (The Investigation)*, Christopher Bigsby claims that Weiss intended to write a "dry and emotionless" text, and that he wished to avoid a "purely emotional response".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Mark Anderson, in his overview of documentary tendencies in German literature during the 1960s and 1970s, claims that *Die Ermittlung*, despite its "clear political motivations"<sup>2</sup> uses a "rigorously unemotional, highly formalized [...] language".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he implies that this text, as well as Alexander Kluge's *Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945 (The Air Raid on Halberstadt on 8 April 1945)* and Günter Grass's *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke (From the Diary of a Snail)*, is "objective [and] cold".<sup>4</sup> Contradicting this view, Stefanie Harris argues that although Kluge's texts may be accurately described as a "cold medium", they do not per se take an unempathetic stance towards victims of extreme violence.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, I attempt to explain why *Die Ermittlung* has been considered "unemotional", and suggest reconsidering this notion. I suggest that Weiss's use of modernist techniques renders the question of emotionality in *Die Ermittlung* complex, and that a seeming lack thereof does not imply an emotionally neutral attitude on behalf of its author. Another author whose prose has been described

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1 Bigsby 2006: 161; 167. He offers no sources to substantiate these claims, though.

2 Anderson 2008: 132.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.: 140.

5 Harris 2010: 304. The idea of "hot" and "cold" media is Marshall McLuhan's.

as “detached”, or “cold”, is Raul Hilberg.<sup>6</sup> Like Peter Weiss, he was a German-speaking Jew<sup>7</sup> and able to flee the anti-Jewish legislation and persecution in his home country before the outbreak of the Second World War. As such, both authors have a similar perspective on the Shoah from a cognitive point of view: partly informed by semantic, partly by episodic knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, the discrepancy in age (Hilberg was 13 when his family fled in 1939, Weiss 19 in 1935) constitutes an important cognitive difference at the times of the events but may be less relevant when looking for traces of emotionality in their texts, which were both written during the 1950s and published in the early 1960s:<sup>9</sup> *The Destruction of the European Jews* is Hilberg’s repeatedly revised doctoral thesis and *magnum opus*.

Peter Weiss’s *Die Ermittlung (The Investigation)* is a ‘hybrid’ text: it is based on the proceedings of the 1963-65 Frankfurt Auschwitz trial and its media coverage (to the extent that Weiss has been accused of plagiarism) but also includes fictional elements. It is, however, possible to examine the function of this fictionalisation – the literary establishment of an emotional code – by taking two (contemporary) autobiographical texts, *Abschied von den Eltern* (*Leavetaking*) and *Meine Ortschaft* (*My Place*) into account.

The benefits of this selection is that one looks at texts whose authors may have had a similar perspective on the Shoah but who published in entirely different contexts. Moreover, Weiss’s texts may have strong factual claims but show obvious signs of fictionalisation. The same cannot be said of Hilberg’s *magnum opus* and autobiography. These crucial differences compel us to consider issues like authorial self-staging and corresponding emotional codes. Why should one be looking at “emotionless” strategies in order to dig for personal feelings, when other texts offer us direct and unambiguous clues as to those feelings? Ultimately, a comparison of the emotional codes in different genres (documentary theatre, monographs, autobiographies) may shed light on questions of poetics: who is ‘entitled’ to certain rhetorical strategies (sarcasm, polemics, “coolness”) in order

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6 Bolkosky: 2003: 22.

7 Weiss was born in the German Empire but never held German citizenship; Hilberg was born in Vienna. Both came from secular backgrounds.

8 Semantic knowledge is, according to Winko, propositional knowledge of the world (i.e. knowledge gained by education, reading, the media), whereas episodic knowledge sprouts from first-hand experiences. Thus, both Hilberg and Weiss hover between both modi: their survival is due to their exile (but both have lost several family members to the genocide). Cf. Winko 2003: 79.

9 In the case of Hilberg, this was the period during which he conducted his doctoral research; for Weiss see Spielmann 1982: 40.

to depict the Shoah? And what does this indicate about the cultural significance of this event in different cultures of memory?

The starting point, however, is a theoretical perspective on the difference between emotion and feeling in order to develop a hermeneutic methodology.

### **Theoretical background: differentiating feeling and emotion**

In her extensive overview of the several research paradigms in emotion studies, Simone Winko paraphrases the insights from the psychology of emotions, claiming that emotion is a holistic notion containing subjective experience, a corporeal state, and an expression of the experienced. By contrast, feeling is a constituent of emotion: the subjective (personal, biographic) experience.<sup>10</sup> Eric Shouse's trichotomy consists of affect, feeling and emotion, corresponding respectively with pre-personal (i.e. biochemical neurological processes), personal and social levels.<sup>11</sup> As such, he writes: "We broadcast emotion to the world; sometimes that broadcast is an expression of our internal state and other times it is contrived in order to fulfil social expectations. [...] Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned."<sup>12</sup> Winko and Shouse seem to be in accord as to the concept of feeling, but not entirely on the concept of emotion. Notwithstanding, they agree on the fact that there is a clear distinction between the personal experience of an emotion and its communication. Therefore, there is potentially a strong distinction between the actual feeling at the moment of writing and the emotion perceived by the audience.<sup>13</sup> "Emotionlessness" does not equate to "feelinglessness".<sup>14</sup>

The question is: how do we find out whether a text is veiling its author's feelings? Several disciplines (within linguistics and history) suggest looking at the connection between metaphor and emotion: either a metonymical relation<sup>15</sup>

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10 Cf. Winko: 2003: 73.

11 Cf. Shouse 2005: s.p.

12 Ibid.

13 The perception of the texts cannot be discussed here; suffice it to point out that the reception of *Die Ermittlung* in 1965 was highly politicised (denounced and heralded as anticapitalistic) but did not analyse the play in the broader context of Weiss's literary oeuvre. Cf. Weiß 1998: 53-68.

14 This translation is admittedly not the most elegant. "Gefühllosigkeit" would be translated as numbness, but the difference between feeling and emotion gets lost in this translation.

15 Cf. Scheer 2012: 218: metaphors "merging [...] the body and mind".

or one with a *tertium comparationis*.<sup>16</sup> In the texts under scrutiny, bodily metaphors are lacking, however, which may explain why *Destruction* in particular has been described as “cool” or “distanted”. Nonetheless, an implicit-lexical reading method takes both co- and context – i.e. the texts under scrutiny and autobiographical paratexts – into account.<sup>17</sup> Including such paratexts, and the authors’ biographical backgrounds, is hermeneutically valid in this case, since the texts under scrutiny have strong factual claims – it would be notoriously more problematic to read fictional texts with these backgrounds in mind, even in the case of concentration camp survivors, as the reception of Tadeusz Borowski’s prose has shown.<sup>18</sup>

## 1. RAUL HILBERG

Hilberg’s text describes the proliferation of anti-Judaic legislation and rule-by-decree leading up to the mass shootings and gas chambers in Eastern Europe in a sarcastic fashion, using various – admittedly isolated – rhetorical figures that seem to disguise deeper feelings. These figures include, but are not limited to, litotes, antiphrasis, blunt statement, and depersonalising similes and tropes. Consider the following examples:<sup>19</sup> “The Slavs had *no particular liking* for their Jewish neighbors, and they felt *no overpowering urge* to help the Jews in their hour of need.”<sup>20</sup> “A few weeks later, Wöhler organized a forced labor system for the Moldavian Jews – *the German army’s parting gift to the Rumanian Jews*.<sup>21</sup> “Lohse was *a little late* [in forbidding members of civil administrations in Eastern Europe to take part in the shooting of Jews].”<sup>22</sup> In these cases, the litotes resp. antiphrasis can easily be read as accusatory descriptions of mindsets, attitudes and (in)actions, without resorting to a polemic discourse. Note that in the

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16 Cf. Winko 2003: 105-106.

17 In Hilberg’s case, one could also consider his appearance in Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, but I cannot dwell on this matter in the present paper. The apparatus for establishing the interview’s emotionality would need to be established – body language and prosody would presumably offer good keys.

18 Cf. Franklin 2011: 27-28.

19 The emphasis in every example to follow is mine, unless explicitly mentioned otherwise.

20 Hilberg 1985: 307.

21 Ibid.: 794-795.

22 Ibid.: 379.

first example, the sarcasm lies particularly in the inclusion of modifiers – without these, the phrases may or may not be read as litotes. This is also true for the third example, where Lohse is seemingly depicted as benign but failing to save the Jews.

However, in certain instances the text demands from the reader a slightly bigger interpretative effort, similar to the one the historian confronted with the obscuring language of the Nazi documents has to undertake: “For the deportees one-way fare was payable; for the guards a round-trip ticket had to be purchased.”<sup>23</sup> Not only do such petty descriptions in both Nazi documents and *Destruction* indicate the genocide’s bureaucratic nature, they also disguise the victims’ fate – which is obviously known to the reader of *Destruction* and to the historian, but which the perpetrators wished to obscure. Both in the ironic figures of speech (litotes and antiphrasis) and in these petty details, *Destruction* mirrors – sarcastically – the language of Nazi bureaucracy.<sup>24</sup>

Given the fact that *Destruction* was Hilberg’s life project,<sup>25</sup> one should take several editions in several languages into consideration, all the more because the focalisation implied in certain tropes becomes inverted in translation. Comparing the table of contents of the English versions (1961 and 1985) with the German versions (1982 and 1990), one notices that the actions of *Einsatzgruppen* are described with the metaphor of a sweep. This means that the perpetrators’ perspective is (unwittingly?) adopted, because the *tertium comparationis* is the supposed stain that Jews form on a society and that needs to be cleaned. In short, it dehumanises the victims and implies the fulfilment of a goal on the part of the perpetrators. However, the German editions describe the same actions as *Tötungswelle*, i.e. “a wave of killing”. This translation embraces (again, unwittingly?) the Jewish perspective, since the *tertium comparationis* is the inevitability of the German onslaught. It also implies a passive undergoing rather than the activity implied in the sweep metaphor, and dehumanises the perpetrators by using a metaphor usually associated with natural catastrophes.

Apart from subtle rhetorical differences due to translation, the time gaps between versions allow probing into the evolution of the emotional code of “cool-

23 Ibid.: 410.

24 Think of terms such as “Endlösung der Judenfrage”, “Sonderbehandlung”, “Umsiedlung nach Osten” etc. Obviously, use of such terms had strategic reasons – secrecy – but also expressed the desire to rid Germany/Europe of a perceived problem. Our very labelling of expressions as antiphrasis (in this context at least) is rooted in a political and ethical perspective.

25 Cf. Hilberg’s preface to his autobiography *The Politics of Memory*. Cf. Van Den Berghe 1990: 110.

ness". It should perhaps not surprise that the tendency is to retain these figures, and to stick to a similar "coolness" in the updated sections. For example, the 1982 and 1985 editions contain considerable elaborations in Hilberg's conclusions about the Jewish reactions to German violence. In this way, a few metaphors and similes depersonalise the German perpetrators, either by depicting them as a machine-like force ("the all-consuming destruction process"<sup>26</sup>) or as ravenous predators: "The Jews attempted to tame the Germans as one would attempt to tame a wild beast."<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in the expanded section on the Netherlands, the 1985 edition sarcastically describes the Jews transported to Theresienstadt instead of Auschwitz as "beneficiaries of German generosity"<sup>28</sup> – the sarcasm lies in the contrast with Hilberg's description of Theresienstadt *not at all* being as mild a place as common perception would have it, and in the fact that a considerable number of those Jews were ultimately transported to Auschwitz anyway.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, the tone becomes more accusatory throughout the years: with regard to the Slavs (cf. *supra*), Hilberg initially wrote that they "perhaps felt no overpowering urge to help the Jews in their hour of need".<sup>30</sup> This "perhaps" is no longer found in the 1985 edition.<sup>31</sup>

The increase of such sarcastic and accusatory rhetoric in subsequent editions suggests deeper-lying feelings, particularly since a similar discourse is found in Hilberg's autobiography, especially when describing the fate of his family members who remained in Europe.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the fact that Hilberg ends his autobiography with a quote by H.G. Adler, authorises Adler's perception of Hilberg's drive and failure to definitively come to terms with the Shoah:

What moves me in this book [*Destruction*, T.V.] is the hopelessness of the author. [...] He already has the viewpoint of a generation, which does not feel itself affected directly, but which looked at these events from afar, bewildered, bitter and embittered, accusing and critical, not only vis-à-vis the Germans. [...] At the end nothing remains but despair and

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26 Hilberg 1985: 1038.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*: 594.

29 Cf. *ibid.*

30 Hilberg 1961: 201.

31 Remarkably, the 1990 German translation does not take this into account, and retains the "vermutlich" from the 1982 edition.

32 Cf. Hilberg 1996: 24-25.

doubt about everything, because for Hilberg there is only recognition, perhaps also a grasp, but certainly not understanding...<sup>33</sup>

## 2. PETER WEISS

As mentioned above, the hybrid nature of *Die Ermittlung* complicates the question of emotionality even more than 'standard' factual or fictional texts. After all, its composition of largely non-fictional testimonies by Auschwitz survivors in a court room – inherently emotional speech acts<sup>34</sup> – renders the traditional notion of authorship problematic. This means that one cannot analyse its rhetorical build-up in an attempt to unveil any feelings the play's author may have experienced – rather, it seems that the latter's selection of testimonies and (paradoxically!) the instances of fictionalisation offer better cues. Yet here as well ambiguity prevails: the lack of punctuation and omnipresence of enjambments – which cannot be entirely preserved on stage – may be associated with the Brechtian epic theatre and its aims to frustrate any emphatic identification with the characters on stage, but may also remind the reader of the song verse in ancient Greek drama, which was used for personal expression.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, the reader is confronted with a strong contrast between the inherently emotional survivors' testimonies and the literary practice of alienation. Anderson is correct in asserting that Weiss "required audiences to do a double take, reconciling monstrous crimes with mundane personal details".<sup>36</sup> The double take, however, also applies to the text's emotionality.

It seems that other criteria may be more relevant for *Die Ermittlung*: particularly, I would suggest taking two interpolations into account. The first is a reference to the Sermon on the Mount (as found in Matthew) and is fictive, i.e. it cannot be traced to any testimony before court:<sup>37</sup>

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33 Ibid.: 202-203. Van Den Berghe offers a similar interpretation, albeit for different reasons. Cf. Van Den Berghe 1990: 120.

34 Cf. Bigsby 2006: 167-168: "it is precisely the unemotional recitation of fact that generates the emotion".

35 I thank Ingeborg Jndl for this insight. The argument is strengthened by Devin Pendas's correct remark that *Die Ermittlung* is modelled on ancient Greek drama; cf. Pendas 2006: 4.

36 Anderson 2008: 132.

37 Cf. Meyer 2000: 123-140; Weiss 2005: 258-259.

Only the cunning survived  
only those who every day  
with unrelentless alertness  
took and held their bit of ground  
The unfit  
the slow-witted  
the gentle  
the bewildered and the impractical  
the ones who mourned and the ones  
who pitied themselves  
were crushed<sup>38</sup>

Clearly this is an inversion of the Beatitudes, which offer hope. The fact that it is fictive does not mean it is fictional. Rather, it must be read as an interpolation by Peter Weiss, which offers his perspective on the hopeless situation of the concentration camp inmates – according to Weiss, it took a cynical attitude to stand the barest chance of survival. The text thematises emotions as much as it represents or evokes them, but the relation is not (nor can it be) a one-to-one correspondence.

The second interpolation is the play's Dantesque structure, which reinforces the notion of an infernal and hopeless situation of the inmates in Auschwitz.<sup>39</sup> There is absolutely no *Paradiso* to be found in *Die Ermittlung*; at best the trial might be considered a secular *Purgatorio*. Also telling is the fictional ending of the trial, which ends with a rhetorical victory for the defendants – not with a conviction. These poetic liberties may just as well have articulated Weiss's (partly politicised) feelings.

The complexity of the hybrid nature of *Die Ermittlung* compels us to look for other traces in Weiss's oeuvre. These may be found in two autobiographical texts, *Abschied von den Eltern* and *Meine Ortschaft*, assuming that these are factual texts. There is a dispute within literary studies as to whether or not autobiographies ought to be labelled as factual or not. Philippe Lejeune speaks of an autobiographical pact between author and reader, since it is impossible to distinguish the autobiography on formal (narratological, rhetorical, discursive) terms

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38 Weiss 2006: 146; for the original German excerpt, cf. Weiss 2005: 42.

39 Cf. Lindner 1990. References to Dante are also found in contemporary Allied newspapers, (cf. Chéroux 2001), in Hannah Arendt's *The Concentration Camp* (1948), and in Primo Levi's prose. The trope of Auschwitz – or the concentration camp in general – as Hell was already well-established by the time of *Die Ermittlung*'s premiere.

from fictional texts with first-person narrators.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, there is a widespread practice of interpolation and poetic liberty in autobiographical writing.<sup>41</sup> Again, however, these instances of interpolation are fictive, not fictional. There need not be a logical disruption between fictive instances and a factual pact with the reader – provided the author relies on the reader's hermeneutic capacities to distinguish these fictive from the (assumingly) predominant non-fictive elements. For this reason, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* cannot be used as a factual counterpart to *Die Ermittlung* as, in accordance with Holdenried, this novel is a “Wunschautobiographie”,<sup>42</sup> i.e. a wished-for autobiography, in which the fictive elements outweigh the factual references to Weiss's life. For the same reason, it seems that using *Abschied von den Eltern* as a counterpart is justifiable, even though Robert Cohen demonstrates Weiss's extensive use of fictionalisation strategies.<sup>43</sup> There are, however, various passages which had already featured in Weiss's earlier prose and which are deemed autobiographic.<sup>44</sup>

### **Abschied von den Eltern**

The centrality of the Shoah for Weiss's self-perception can already be found, albeit *ex negativo* and between the lines, in his autobiographical *Abschied von den Eltern*. The text depicts a narrator, supposedly identical with Peter Weiss, who is isolated in three regards.

Firstly, there are lacunae within his own memory, which are admitted with regard to his earliest memories.<sup>45</sup> Contrary to the common practice of interpolation,<sup>46</sup> the author/narrator admits that his memory shows lacunae – which in turn ought to strengthen the text's authenticity.

Secondly, the narrator's family is depicted as fragmented, falling completely apart after the death of both parents.<sup>47</sup> However, the narrator also explains how his childhood had been marked by the distance to his parents, apparently originating in their lack of autobiographic narration.<sup>48</sup> The young narrator makes up

40 Cf. Lejeune 1975.

41 Cf. Holdenried 2000: 31.

42 Cf. *ibid.*: 249.

43 Cf. Cohen 1993: 41-44.

44 *Ibid.*: 44.

45 Cf. Weiss 2014b: 21. For the original German text, cf. Weiss 2014a.

46 Cf. Holdenried 2000: 31.

47 Cf. Weiss 2014b: 37.

48 The exception to the rule is his mother's eager telling about how she met the narrator's father, but even this story is “impenetrable”. Cf. *ibid.*

for this silence by looking for clues but ultimately imagining their lives before his birth: “From the fragments I found in the attic, I was able to piece together a family history.”<sup>49</sup> The most salient instance concerns his father’s experiences in the First World War: “The battlefield. The shots of the machine gun. [...] My father with a bleeding stomach, moaning among others in the field hospital. And then my mother appearing. [...] In the picture world of my mythology she holds him in her arms.”<sup>50</sup> Whether the young narrator imagines his parents in this fashion due to overnight eavesdropping or to already predominant mediatised war imageries (or a combination of both) remains unclear, but the boy extrapolates these images into a fantasy where he takes the role of a senior officer:

When I lowered my face to the edge of the countryside it was if I were there myself. [...] With cold passion I marked off the countryside, arranged the positions of the troops. [...] After the great battles when the mangled corpses had been buried and the wounded had been brought to the hospitals, I made little expeditions.<sup>51</sup>

The discussion of whether or not this passage is to be read in a Freudian fashion (more specifically, the son’s killing of his father<sup>52</sup>), or rather as the combination of childish play and juvenile fascination with war, is not central to the argument. What is essential is that the narrator, although having *no* first-hand experience – which in the German original is expressed in the conjunctive II – simulates knowledge of this experience, casting himself in a role which is simultaneously active and distanced, namely as a commander overlooking and directing the battle. Note that this also translates in an ambivalent description of his feelings, i.e. “cold passion” – passion, at least in Western cultures, traditionally being described with metaphors of heat or fire.

Finally, the narrator depicts his isolation within society, particularly when describing his childhood and youth. Without explicitly thematising Weiss’s “Jewishness”<sup>53</sup> or foreign nationality, its rhetoric depicts an authoritarian, militarily inspired society and subtly anticipates the genocide – which arguably

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.: 38.

51 Ibid.: 39.

52 Weiss did show a profound interest in psychoanalysis; cf. Holdenried 1991: 272 and 2000: 40, 248. Evers offers an interesting variant on this scheme: only after the death of Weiss’s father is the author (not *per se* the narrator) able to replace this silent veteran/father with a heroic soldier. Cf. Evers 2008: 220.

53 The only exception is being told that he cannot join the Nazis due to his being Jewish. Cf. Weiss 2014b: 58.

originated in that authoritarian society<sup>54</sup> – and Weiss's exile during the war years.

Friederle, a schoolboy whose father is the Weiss family's landlord, is described as behaving “imperiously”<sup>55</sup> towards the narrator; he is a bully whose violent and humiliating actions towards the narrator<sup>56</sup> can be read as a prelude to German (Nazi) violence and the humiliation of Europe's Jewish populations.<sup>57</sup> This interpretation seems to be strengthened when one reads that from the landlord's family only one son, a former highly decorated officer, is still alive.<sup>58</sup> When we accept this interpretation, the narrator's heavy stomach in retrospect is not only explained by his personal experience (i.e. the childhood bullying) but also by his knowledge of the fate he escaped.<sup>59</sup> This leads him to avoid meeting Friedrich/Friederle, even though he has been given his address, claiming to know “what he was like”.<sup>60</sup> Notice that this claimed knowledge is similar to that articulated in his war games as a child: second-hand at best; only this time the mass killing is merely implied, and the narrator does not cast himself in a participatory role. Both the subtext (the bully as future Nazi; the Nazi as grown-up bully) and the narrator's supposed superior knowledge of Friedrich's character implies that Friedrich was involved in acts of genocide or war crimes, but the narrator's

54 Jones offers a critical analysis of the role of socialisation in pre-war Germany (which, he argues, is sometimes invoked as exculpatory in current lay assessments). Cf. Jones 1999: 117. Nonetheless a more recent (fictional) artwork which draws an unspoken line between the authoritarian, pre-1914 German society and totalitarianism is Michael Haneke's *Das weiße Band – eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* (2009), although the director insists the link between authoritarian, religiously strict education and totalitarian ideology is not limited to the German context. Cf. (the TV interview with) Kluge 2009.

55 Weiss 2014b: 29.

56 Cf. Ibid.: 29-30, 31, 32, 33.

57 I realise that my interpretation of the Nazi-as-bully paradigm might be anachronistic, however: although Paul mentions the demonization and pathologising of the Gestapo and SS before the Eichmann trial, I have not found any indication that the bully paradigm (which has certainly been present in educational approaches during the last decades) had already found articulation. Cf. Paul 2002: 20. It might only have been hinted at in literary criticism, e.g. in Berghahn's interpretation of Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zögling Törleß* (1906). Cf. Berghahn 1963: 28-29.

58 Cf. Weiss 2014b: 29.

59 Cf. Ibid.: 25-26.

60 Ibid.: 29.

refusal to meet Friedrich, which is based on this assumption, paradoxically renders any settling of the matter impossible.

Yet the anticipations of Nazism and genocide are not restricted to biographic instances, they are also present on a more structural level: school is described as a place of natural and social violence, with storks attacking each other; and man inflicting damage upon pigs and butterflies – lethal in the first case, seemingly sadistic in the latter.<sup>61</sup> This violence is also reflected in the school's militarily inspired architecture.<sup>62</sup> Such peripheral descriptions of violence prelude the punitive measures handed out by the teacher, which the pupil (more reflexively than consciously, it seems) tries to evade:

I was hauled up by the ear onto the podium and placed in front of the blackboard, and what I had to demonstrate to the teacher and class was how one kept one's palm out under the raised cane. It was a difficult exercise, for my hand would not stay still under the cane, it always jerked back.<sup>63</sup>

If we accept the premise that the narration anticipates – between the lines – the fate of the Jews in Germany, the narrator's attempt at withdrawing from German violence can be symbolically read as the precursor of his emigration. Yet his attempt is, in the end, futile: the hand does get whipped.<sup>64</sup> The symbolical meaning of this being-hit cannot be the subject's destruction – for Weiss survived – and must therefore indicate another pain. This pain is probably that of being destined for destruction *tout court*, which is explicitly expressed in *Meine Ortschaft*.

## **Meine Ortschaft**

Whereas the writing of *Abschied von den Eltern* took place several years before that of *Die Ermittlung*, and the two texts – at least theoretically – may therefore contain traces of different feelings, *Meine Ortschaft* was written after a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau and in the larger context of the Frankfurt trial.<sup>65</sup> The thematic and temporal proximity to *Die Ermittlung*, therefore, indicates a bigger correspondence as to Weiss's feelings during the writing processes of both texts. Moreover, there are – to my knowledge – no indications that this text contains

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61 Cf. ibid.: 32.

62 Cf. ibid.: 30-31.

63 Ibid.: 33.

64 Cf. ibid.: 33.

65 Cf. Bigsby 2006: 160.

any elements of fictionalisation, and hence offers a more direct access to Weiss's feelings.

One place alone, where I spent just one day, remains. [...] It is a place for which I was destined and which I evaded. I myself learned nothing in this place. I have no other connection to it beyond the fact that my name stood on the list of those meant to be relocated there forever.<sup>66</sup>

The entire account is marked by similar contrasts. Firstly, there is the explicit juxtaposition of past and present. In analeptic excerpts, Auschwitz is described as the “end of the world”,<sup>67</sup> only to be contrasted with descriptions as a place of learning (the presence of a school class<sup>68</sup>), but also as a touristic destination, including commercial practices.<sup>69</sup>

Secondly, the vicinity of said commercial enterprise stands in clear contrast with the remnants of genocide: “Immediately behind the barracks [where post-cards are sold, T.V.] low walls of concrete, above them a slope overgrown by grass, rising to the flat roof with the short, squat, square chimney. The map of the camp tells me that I am already standing in front of the crematorium.”<sup>70</sup>

Thirdly, there is a rather subtle contrast between a purported lack of feelings and an implicit-lexical code which suggests the opposite, not unlike the emotional code in *Die Ermittlung*. It should be noted that all three types of contrasts are not isolated phenomena but overlap with and even reinforce each other. The following excerpt combines the first and the third contrasts: “I have come here of my own free will. I was not unloaded from any train. I was not driven into this terrain with truncheons. I come here twenty years late.”<sup>71</sup> Here, the idea of doom escaped (cf. *supra*) is resumed and shaped in a *kyklos*: the first sentence highlights Weiss's situation in the 1960s, the second and third the fate of the German Jews, while the final sentence can be read as the synthesis of past and present: an

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66 Weiss 2008: 4-5. The page numeration is only relevant within the article, since – at least in the online version of the journal – page numerations are not percurrent. For the original German text, cf. Weiss 2005.

67 Ibid.: 5.

68 Cf. *ibid.*

69 Cf. *ibid.*

70 Ibid.: 5-6.

71 Ibid.: 6.

expression of survivor's guilt.<sup>72</sup> This reflection, however, finds its pendant upon the narrator's entering of the crematorium: "Without thoughts. Without any impressions beyond the fact that I am standing here alone, it is cold, the ovens are cold, the wagons are stiff and rusted."<sup>73</sup> Similarly, the anaphora finds a rhetorical pendant in the ellipsis used in the gas chamber's description: "I walk slowly through this grave. Feel nothing. See only this floor, these walls. Register."<sup>74</sup> Upon leaving the building: "At the end of the room a cast iron door with a peephole, behind it a narrow staircase, leading into the open air. Into the open."<sup>75</sup> In his introduction Hillman justly remarks that the German original "ins Freie" has a double meaning: 'into the open', but also 'towards freedom'.<sup>76</sup> The emotionality is again explained by the contrast between past and present, yet with a cynical conclusion: "There stands a gallows."<sup>77</sup> Even though the narrator can leave the gas chamber alive, the text relentlessly evokes violent death.

The fourth contrast is that between knowing, i.e. how the deportees were unloaded, killed and burnt, and not-knowing, i.e. not being able to imagine their agony. Compare "had read and heard a lot about it"<sup>78</sup> with "A living person came, and what happened is closed off from this living person".<sup>79</sup> This trope is a widespread one, and it is due to both philosophical analyses<sup>80</sup> and survivors' testimonies, which highlight the problem of putting the events to words.

The (non-)experience of the Shoah is, in short, the pendant for the (non-)experience of the First World War – at least from Weiss's/his narrators' point of view. In both cases, the big outlines of the events are known (reduced to clichés?), but whereas to Weiss the First World War seems imaginable to a certain degree, the Shoah remains aloof: "Ashes remain in the earth, from those who died for nothing, who were torn away from their home."<sup>81</sup> Despite our vast scientific and cultural knowledge, it defies understanding.

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72 Moreover, it seems to me that Winko overlooks repetition (here in the form of the anaphora) when listing the rhetorical devices particularly prone to expressing emotion. Cf. Winko 2003: 135-136.

73 Weiss 2005: 6.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.: 3.

77 Ibid.: 7.

78 Ibid.: 8.

79 Ibid.: 13.

80 Cf. Horkheimer/Adorno 2010; Arendt 1948.

81 Weiss 2008: 13. Evers notices that the paradigm of the "un-tellability" of WWI does not stand the test of empirical research, and that this paradigm may be instrumental-

## Comparisons and conclusions

Apart from these text-internal contrasts, *Meine Ortschaft* shows similarities to *Die Ermittlung*, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and *The Politics of Memory*. *Meine Ortschaft* has political implications similar to those of *Die Ermittlung*, namely that the Shoah was not only a matter of the SS or NSDAP, but also implemented by bureaucrats, judges, and capitalists: “the death sentences were pronounced, by men who today live an honest existence and enjoy their bourgeois honors.”<sup>82</sup> The narrative’s conclusion may be more understated, but no less condemning: “Now he is just standing in a world that has perished. Here he can do no more. For a while total silence prevails. Then he knows it is not over yet.”<sup>83</sup> The implication is that the political system that enabled genocide has not vanished after the military defeat, and that it has gladly rehabilitated the war criminals it had produced.

The main similarity with Hilberg’s writings is the (infrequent) use of cynical antiphrasis, as in the following example: “Those men who were allowed to live a while longer went to the right.”<sup>84</sup> The choice of the modal verb “durften” constitutes an antiphrasis in two senses: firstly, it (sarcastically) connotes life as a privilege bestowed, rather than a basic right – reinforced by the arbitrariness and temporariness of this privilege; secondly, it implies that this short period in the camp is a better fate than being gassed upon arrival.<sup>85</sup>

Obviously, the crucial difference between Hilberg’s and Weiss’s texts is the amount of fictional content: *Destruction* and *Memory* show no signs of fiction; *Die Ermittlung* does so very clearly. As a consequence, the implicit-lexical analysis of *Destruction* has more explanatory power about Hilberg’s feelings than *Die Ermittlung* has about Weiss’s, for the simple reason that narrators in factual texts – if one assumes factual texts have narrators in the first place – coincide

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ised to discredit certain forms of testimony in the case of the Shoah. These remarks, however, are not echoed in Weiss’s texts under scrutiny here: the question of how these experiences reach collective and cultural memory is not thematised. Cf. Evers 2008: 221-222.

82 Weiss 2008: 9.

83 Ibid.: 14.

84 Ibid.: 11.

85 The second implication can be read as antiphrasis, or not. Reading it as antiphrasis would correspond with the rhetorical question Miklós Nyiszli poses: “Who then – of our parents, brothers, children – was more fortunate, he who went to the left or he who went to the right?” Nyiszli 1993: 57. As outlined before, certain political and ethical opinions underlie our labelling of certain tropes, especially in this sensitive context.

with the author of said texts.<sup>86</sup> This also explains why the section on *The Politics of Memory* is remarkably shorter than that on *Abschied* and *Meine Ortschaft*: Hilberg's autobiography recuperates the emotional code of *Destruction*, and ends by motivating it. Weiss's autobiographical texts are rife with paradoxes and contrasts, and his emotional codes build upon a pre-existing discourse of trauma and non-representation.

In concluding, so-called “emotionless” rhetoric clearly does not indicate “feelinglessness”. In general, however, it is easier to plausibly demonstrate that an author experiences strong feelings at the time of writing, even if he supposedly tries to hide them. Defining and qualifying these feelings is a different matter. The stimulus-response schema offers one explanation for this problem. According to this behaviouristic interpretation of feeling, the same stimulus may evoke different responses.<sup>87</sup> The simultaneous experiencing of distinct (but not contradictory) feelings further defies any definite attempt at qualifying feelings.

Equally, this does not necessarily mean that Hilberg wished to mask his feelings completely: it may simply indicate an adhering to his professional discipline's standards vis-à-vis objectivity and emotional communication, even if he probed at the limits of these standards. Ultimately, however, whether or not his “emotionless” rhetoric was an attempt at concealing his feelings remains uncertain, but this need not be problematic. It ought to be seen as an emotional code, to be found in certain registers, and which may have influenced other authors. It would be more fruitful to look for instances of this emotional code synchronically and diachronically, i.e. in contemporary discourses, but also in the historiography of the last decades.

By contrast, Weiss builds on an already-existing emotional code to depict and articulate the hopelessness of Auschwitz. Judging by his autobiographical writings (especially *Meine Ortschaft*) it seems safe to assume that these were not just politicised emotions but very personal feelings as well. Hilberg and Weiss seem to share a certain cynical outlook on both the possibility of the Shoah and the post-war politics of silence; an outlook which primarily points to a sense of personal involvement and suffering.

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86 The argument pro or contra cannot be developed here; I recommend the reader consult the following texts: Genette 1991; Cohn 1999, especially Chapter 7; Fludernik 2013.

87 For a concise overview of stimulus-response theories, cf. Mellmann 2006, especially Chapter 1.

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# Writing Wounded

## Reading Djuna Barnes's Writership as Affective Agency

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LAURA OULANNE

In a letter to poet Edwin Muir, Djuna Barnes (1892–1982) declares: “[...] I’m not a ‘writer’; once in every twenty years or so, the wound bleeds, that’s all.”<sup>1</sup> This statement is one of her many striking one-liners, which have amused readers and intrigued researchers. As Julie Taylor points out, it portrays writing as “an intensely personal endeavor” for Barnes, which becomes puzzling when combined with her resistance to biographically oriented readings of her work, as well as the way her texts seem to share a high modernist aspiration toward an impersonal universality.<sup>2</sup> Taylor’s work with this metaphor is inspiring and accurate, but a few things yet remain to be said about Barnes, wounds, writing and feelings.

In the light of writing and emotions, how should a literary researcher consider herself informed by such a statement? Of course, it is only one sentence, albeit a dramatic one. Scholars writing after the heyday of biographism are also accustomed not to put too much weight on what an author has to say about her writing. However, in this case it is quite tempting to literally take the author at her word, which quite a number of researchers of Barnes’s fiction have done. Here the word in question would be “wound”. It evokes immediate bodily pain, but also, etymologically considered, the returning pain of the past: *trauma* derives from the classical Greek *τραῦμα*, wound. There is biographical evidence that Barnes suffered some kind of sexual violation as a child, although the details remain unclear.<sup>3</sup> She grew up in a polygamous family with controversial atti-

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1 Letter from 26 October 1957; quoted in Taylor 2012: 1.

2 Ibid.: 5-6. Barnes especially rejected the labels of “lesbian writer” or “woman writer”.

3 Cf. Ibid.: 7; Herring 1995: 55-58, 268.

tudes towards sexuality, married and separated very young and had a problematic, physically close relationship with her grandmother. Later in life, Barnes had many unhappy love affairs, the most famous of these with artist Thelma Wood, unavoidably present in her novel *Nightwood* (1936). She sometimes refers to her writing as a claim for justice for the wrongs committed by others, and as a way to process trauma.<sup>4</sup> All this biographical information, as well as comments such as the one above, build an image of Barnes's writing as permeated by trauma and pain. In addition, however, we have her stories, novels, plays and poetry, which slightly complicate the case. As Taylor has shown, they resist biographical and "deep psychological explanation", and their relation to trauma is not one of simple covert repetition, but of creative and performative rewriting and possible reparation.<sup>5</sup>

Some have tried to yoke the life and the fiction together, however. Biographer Philip Herring is grasping for some kind of truth behind the fictional works, as he cites another letter of Barnes's: "I can't imagine spending years writing fiction, things made up entirely out of thin air, and without a foundation in some emotion."<sup>6</sup> This he follows with his own interpretation: "Invention was not a priority because in remembering her past she found no end of emotional subjects. She simply couldn't have invented fiction more compelling or bizarre than her life had been."<sup>7</sup> Barnes, in her comment, contrasts fictionality and made-upness with something she calls "a foundation in some emotion". It is Herring who draws the parallel between emotion and life: according to him, the emotions that grant the text a factual foundation are ones found in the writer's biography.

Such interpretation seems inescapably narrow – yet Barnes, as a readerly *feeling* of some sort of agency behind the text, remains present in the event of reading. When reading her work from the perspective of "writing emotions", it is this affective presence that needs to be dealt with; but how to do this without hastening to draw a parallel between the writer's life and her work? This essay discusses the readerly construction of Barnes's writerly agency. The logic of hidden-but-discoverable authorial emotions does not do justice to Barnes's work, but neither is it possible to completely disregard the author as an agent. We need to admit that the author as an imaginary, *affective* agent is present in the event of reading, but that we do not have access to her original, inner emotions, and that guessing at them is not necessary to be affected by a work of fiction. This is why

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4 Cf. Herring 1995: 168, 281.

5 Taylor 2012: 18, 8-9.

6 Barnes to Emily Coleman 14 December 1935, quoted in Herring 1995: xvi.

7 Ibid.

the title of this essay says “reading Djuna Barnes’s writership”: I claim that to approach Barnes’s “emotional foundations”, we simply need to read, both her writing and her extraliterary statements.<sup>8</sup> In the following, I will first clarify some conceptual and theoretical starting points related to *reading*, *affect*, and *agency*, then discuss two examples from Barnes’s short fiction, and finish by returning to the introductory quotations, on which I hope the reading of fiction will shed new light.

## HOW TO READ THE WRITER AS AN AFFECTIVE AGENT

As the focus of this essay is on how the sense of the writer emerges in reading, a brief look is needed into how this kind of reading is conceptualized. Combining Monika Fludernik’s concept of ‘figuralization’ with enactivist phenomenology<sup>9</sup> and psychological text-processing studies, Marco Caracciolo suggests that it is not so much the reader’s consciousness but a fictionalized, virtual version of the reader’s body that can be projected into the fictional world. This phenomenon he calls “the fictionalization of the reader’s virtual body”.<sup>10</sup> The virtual body is rooted in the experiences of the reader’s actual body: the embodied experiences of moving, perceiving and being in the world enable readers to enact the experiences attributed to fictional characters.<sup>11</sup> Caracciolo limits his discussion to the enactment of characters’ movements in space and does not, for instance, separately discuss affective experience. However, the same idea could extend to that direction as well, since affective experience is also embodied experience, and it is often through the described gestures, movements and bodily feelings that a character’s affective state is conveyed in an immersive way (more so than through naming it, as for instance “excitement”, “joy”, “sadness” and so on).

8 I will also prefer the term ‘writer’ to ‘author’, to highlight both the process-like, materially inclined aspect of *doing* involved, as well as to be able to think of this action as paired with that of *reading*.

9 The enactivist branches of phenomenology and cognitive science entail a view of the organism *enacting* its cognition in a dynamic relationship to its lifeworld, instead of passively receiving and processing information from a separate outer world. Views of this kind usually also imply, as opposed to Cartesian dualism, that cognitive functions are essentially embodied. See for instance Varela et al. 1991; Noë 2004; Colombetti 2014.

10 Caracciolo 2014: 160.

11 Cf. *Ibid.*

To go one step further, the aim here is to experiment with the proposal that there is a similar process involved in the way readers imagine a writerly agent beyond the text. The writer's body could be seen as one of the fictionally constructed bodies inviting the reader's enactment, besides characters and narrators. Even though this body is not described in the text, and in that sense is not experiential, it is there in flashes of a sense of an agency making choices of words and events, moving characters, giving and withholding information and so forth. It might – but it need not – come close to the narrator of the text. This model differs from the 'implied author' introduced by Wayne C. Booth<sup>12</sup> in that it underlines the readers' capacity to imagine the author as a lived and affective material body that we can grasp through our own livedness and materiality, *in addition to* construing a purely textual projection. Readers will also undoubtedly make assumptions and deductions on the basis of what they know about the writer's life, which may lead to deliberation of authorial intentions, and further into biographically oriented interpretations. The intention here, however, is not to go down this path, but to focus on the kind of affective presence the text invites its reader to enact. As Yanna Popova has written, "what matters in literary reading is not a recovery of the intention of a real person (the author) but the reader's projection of one: the fact that a reader engages in a hypothetical attribution of meaning to an agency in the text".<sup>13</sup>

The claim that this presence of the writer is *affective* also requires some explanation. I am using the concept of 'affect' in the sense of a not-so-clearly definable *feeling*, a tone, often to refer not to any particular kind of affect but to the general domain and activity of feeling, moving and being moved. As such, it is distinct from what is usually referred to as an *emotion*, even though there is also considerable overlap in the definitions – and even though 'emotion' is the term used by Barnes in the quotation above. One way to think of the difference would be the following generalization: affects occur somewhere in between bodies, whereas emotion is usually seen as arising from an individual subject, as a result of a cognitive process, which is often an appraisal of a given situation.<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Flatley puts the difference in the following words: "Where *emotion* suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indi-

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12 Cf. Booth 1961.

13 Popova 2015: 64. Popova does not, however, emphasize the embodied or affective aspects of this projection.

14 There are, also, exceptions to this, as for instance, in the study of "collective emotions". However, the concept of affect allows for even wider scope of in-betweenness, reaching beyond intersubjectivity, in that it is also capable of encompassing nonhuman 'bodies'.

cates something relational and transformative. One *has* emotions; one is affected by people or things.”<sup>15</sup>

Using ‘affect’ like this binds this discussion to a certain theoretical tradition. The definitions that I follow stem mostly from the Spinozist-Deleuzeian account of affectivity. For Deleuze, affect is “any mode of thought which doesn’t represent anything”.<sup>16</sup> Brian Massumi’s preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* offers a more precise but concise definition of affect as a “prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act”.<sup>17</sup> Massumi and Flatley convey two significant sides of the concept of affect in this account: its connection with *agency* and a shift of location away from the individual and towards relationality. When studying Barnes’s writing, this means both encounters and movements between bodies in the fictional world and relations between author, text and reader as affective bodies – not, for instance, the study of the *representation* of certain emotions.

Finally, the account of affect described above points toward the definitions of ‘agency’ put into use here. Marco Bernini has successfully drawn attention to writerly agency as “distributed”, extending from the individual into multiple agencies in the material world (including the “materiality of words”).<sup>18</sup> However, his focus is on theorizing authorial *intention*, and does not encompass affectivity. To reach toward the affectivity of writing and its presence in reading, I turn to theories of agency that take one step further from the notion of “material agency”<sup>19</sup> employed by Bernini, namely, the posthumanist and/or new materialist views presented by Karen Barad and Jane Bennett. The two have a lot of common ground but also some differences; however, this does not necessarily imply that they would be in conflict with one another.

Barad constructs her account of distributive agency on the basis of quantum physics. In this case, its distribution means that agency always happens in constellations involving more than one agent. However, the agents interacting in these constellations, which she calls “phenomena”, actually emerge in and through them and do not pre-exist their “mutual entanglement”<sup>20</sup> as distinct from one another. Consider the writer, the text and the reader, and all of the other agencies involved in reading a story, for instance: the materialities of language,

15 Flatley 2008: 12, emphasis in original.

16 Deleuze 1978.

17 Massumi 2013: xv.

18 Bernini 2014: 350.

19 Bernini 2014; cf. Malafouris 2008.

20 Barad 2007: 32-33.

the book, the context and so on. A written story needs the printed or otherwise materially present form to be read, and a reader to read it; the reader becomes a reader only in the act of reading; and the reader's sense of writerly agency emerges in the phenomenon of reading.

Barad does not refer to affect, but it does make sense to view these kinds of phenomena as affective. In Jane Bennett's thinking on the agency of the nonhuman, affect has a central role. Bennett conceives of agency in *assemblages*, "confederation[s] of human and nonhuman elements", in which the force of the confederation is more than the sum of its parts, and which results in the capacity to affect.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in Bennett's account, it is rather the effects, not the agencies involved, which emerge as a result of the constellation.

The following discussion of Barnes's writership draws on Barad in suggesting that even the agents themselves are emergent properties of a phenomenon, in this case the phenomena of reading passages of Barnes's fiction and her extraliterary comments. However, Bennett's account makes it possible to focus on such processes as affective. There is considerable overlap in the concepts of 'phenomenon' and 'assemblage', although they are not identical. For the sake of clarity, I will use 'phenomenon' to refer to the broader activities of reading involving the performative construction of writership, whereas by 'assemblage' I mostly denote constellations of characters and things in the fictional world, with whose help I discuss the affective dynamics and the sense of writerly agency involved. In the following, I wish to pin down some singular occurrences of a rather murky, ambiguous and momentary *sense* of writerly agency that a text, in this case Barnes's short stories, invites its readers to enact – while keeping the more broadly considered makings of that agency itself as an ontological backdrop.

## MOVING THINGS: WRITERLY AGENCY IN THE *TABLEAUX VIVANTS* OF BARNES'S SHORT STORIES

This essay focuses on two stories rich with descriptive passages displaying material abundance characteristic for Barnes's work. There are a few reasons for selecting just such passages for closer analysis. For one thing, descriptive passages seem to be as close as we get to affects and emotions in Barnes's prose. Usually narrated in third person, her stories do not tend to use forms of psycho-narration or other modes of reporting characters' emotions. Some of her work

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21 Bennett 2010: 21, 23.

does feature the presentation of affective experience in free indirect discourse, but more often even this device is left out and replaced by mere diegetic description of a character's actions and scarce instances of dialogue. Furthermore, there seems to be a preference for the stillness of a *tableau* over dynamic action, which is a striking feature especially in short fiction, as it likens whole stories to still lifes, arrangements of objects.<sup>22</sup> These arrangements are never completely static, however. In the manner of assemblages, they are an arena for emerging affect and agency – like a *tableau* particularly *vivant*. Both the descriptions of action and the descriptive *tableaux* do indeed get their form in assemblages consisting of human characters and the things surrounding them, which highlights the nonhuman, thing-like and impenetrable elements in them. This does not, however, diminish the affective intensity of the stories.<sup>23</sup> In such a context, the authorial agency emerges as a skillful arranger comparable to a visual artist, which Barnes also was.

Another reason for a focus on abundant descriptions is that they express the style of *grandeur* and dramatic exaggeration that also characterizes Barnes's extraliterary comments and appearance, which have been discussed as a kind of performance comparable to her art – she even wrote journalism under the pseudonym "Pen Performer".<sup>24</sup> This style of expression can also be read in the more mimetic instances of witty and enigmatic dialogue in her fiction, but limiting the discussion to them would not admit a similar focus on distributed agency.

The first story discussed falls somewhere in the middle of the scale from *tableau* to action. "A Boy asks a Question" (originally "A Boy Asks a Question of a Lady", 1923; revised version 1929) is a brief account of a meeting between Carmen la Tosca, an actress spending her holiday in a village, and a local boy, who approaches her with a vague but troubled question related to the general nature of love. The narrative proceeds in third person from a description of the character of Carmen and her setting towards a brief dialogue and an abrupt ending typical of the stories: "And that very afternoon, Carmen la Tosca rode off,

22 Barnes's earliest short stories, such as "The Jest of Jests" and "A Sprinkle of Comedy" (1917) display a different preference as regards action: they emphasize the element of *plot* and especially plots of intrigue, and even parody them. Cf. Plumb 1986: 52. They usually feature a very surprising turn of events and elements of slapstick comedy. However, the early stories, too, have a preference for opaque characters and a tendency to highlight the story as skillful arrangement (thereby highlighting an authorial presence as well), in which they resemble the *tableaux* of the later stories.

23 Cf. Oulanne 2016.

24 Cf. Taylor 2012: 1, 12; Caselli 2009: 1, 21, 27.

with her entire *entourage*.<sup>25</sup> The narrator is quite intrusive, for instance in commenting on the introduction of Carmen in parentheses: “with a name like that, what could she be but an actress?”<sup>26</sup> The sudden ending and its wording invite a heightened sense of the agency of the writer: the character is taken away and the story ended *by* someone with the power to do it. Looking simply at one story, that someone could be said to be the narrator; but especially the context of the whole volume and its succession of comparable, drastic endings introduces also the sense of a continuing, writerly agency beyond different narrators.

At the heart of the story, there is a description of Carmen’s breakfast:

Carmen la Tosca breakfasted in bed, and late. Having caught herself out of sleep in a net of bobbin-lace, she broke fast with both food and scent, lazily dusting her neck and arms with perfumed talc, lolling on the bed (which stood between two ovals of pear-wood, framing versions of Leda and the swan), ripping through the wrappers of Puerto Rican journals and French gazettes with the blade of a murderous paper-cutter, and finally, in the total vacancy of complete indulgence, her hand sprawling across a screaming headline, would stare out into the harsh economy of russet boughs, pranked out in fruit.<sup>27</sup>

The description features slow characterly action, but it is almost of a metaphorical kind: Carmen is “catching herself out of sleep”, lazily “lolling”, and her hand is “sprawling across” a headline – we do not know if she reads it at all. The flood of things appeals to all (five) senses: there is the feel of bobbin-lace and dusting the neck, the rather abstract food and scent along with perfumed talc, the aurally striking onomatopoeia of “ripping through the wrappers of Puerto Rican journals and French Gazettes with the [...] murderous paper-cutter”, and with all this, the visual stimulus of both the whole assemblage and the specific reference to visual arts, the oval paintings. Together they form an entangled mixture of multisensory experiences in which the senses themselves are not clearly separable but come together in the haptic harshness of the boughs, the smell of food, the sound of ripping open a wrapper.

Both the presentation of things in this assemblage and the slight actions involved invite the reader’s sensory and affective engagement. Carmen, like the majority of Barnes’s characters, is opaque as to her thoughts and feelings (“no one knew her”<sup>28</sup>), but she still undeniably functions in the narrative as a feeling body into which the reader’s virtual body can be projected. As I claim elsewhere,

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25 Barnes 1997: 350.

26 Ibid.: 344.

27 Ibid.: 346-347.

28 Ibid.: 345.

the projection might spill over the borders of the human character and into the sensuously appealing things taking part in the assemblage, the surfaces touching one another.<sup>29</sup> As we are able to share the sensory experience of such things, it is enough to evoke them to make us enact an imaginary experience of sensory pleasure in the character.

Where, then, is the writerly agency lurking in a passage like this? The feelings evoked by the passage and the whole story seem to be mixed, dominated by a general ambiance of leisurely pleasure. However, the boy's question (what it is that has made his elder brother cry, and whether he will end up crying also) and the subsequent interaction add some darkness and tension. The combination of an older woman in bed, a child and the theme of love and suffering gestures toward the Oedipal scheme, especially if the reader is aware of the frequency of these motifs in Barnes's fiction; and access to biographical information might bring forth further associations with incest. In light of such considerations, it would be easy to see the multisensory pleasures of breakfast as both secondary and superficial, as covering for the actual, darker affective content of the story. However, to do justice to what actually happens in the fictional assemblage, we cannot disregard the pleasure, either. The clue really seems to be on the surface or between the surfaces, in the constellation in which the feelings, darker and lighter, emerge.<sup>30</sup> In the readerly experience, it is likely that pain and suffering become incorporated as parts of a plentiful, pleasurable whole; and we cannot say which feeling is the truer one: they are profoundly entangled in their material expressions.

Such entangled assemblages invite us to imagine and enact a version of an embodied Barnes-like agent moving the words as if they were objects like paper-cutters and laces, playing with feelings, characters and story structures: making gestures. Gesturing is a fitting analogy here, in the case of the virtual Barnes both as the extraliterary performer making comments about writing and as the writerly agency present in her fiction, as it evokes the dimensions of action and embodiment. Furthermore, there is no law as to how much one can gesture in one direction or another. An expression of luxury and pleasure as a gesture need not necessarily be balanced by a dark underside, and similarly there may be an abundance of suffering. The feelings evoked are only grounded in the materiali-

29 Cf. Oulanne 2016.

30 This kind of mixture might evoke the notion of *jouissance*. Cf. Barthes 1973. However, Taylor has convincingly demonstrated the necessity of not conflating pleasure and happiness with the more difficult and dark tones of *jouissance* in Barnes's *Ladies' Almanack* (1928). Cf. Taylor 2012: 147-148. The term may indeed carry unfortunate theoretical baggage, and will not be adopted here, either.

ties of the fictional assemblages, as well as the materialities involved in the phenomenon of reading, and these allow for both pleasure and pain.

The ability of writerly gestures to accommodate excess also becomes clear in another story, with descriptions of two fictional rooms:

Everything was disorderly, and expensive and melancholy. Everything was massive and tall, or broad and wide. A chest of drawers rose above my head. The china stove was enormous and white, enameled in blue flowers. The bed was so high that you could only think of it as something that might be overcome. The walls were all bookshelves, and all the books were bound in red morocco [...].

It was a beautiful room, Madame, ‘*traurig*’ as she said. Everything was important and old and gloomy. The curtains about the bed were red velvet, Italian you know, and fringed in gold bullion. The bed cover was a deep red velvet with the same gold fringe: on the floor, beside the bed, a stand on which was a tasselled red cushion, on the cushion a Bible in Italian, lying open.<sup>31</sup>

These assemblages are encountered in two separate bedrooms, in the story “Cassation” (originally published as “A Little Girl Tells a Story to a Lady”, 1925, revised version 1929). It is one of a cycle of three stories all focalized and narrated by Katya, a young woman of Russian origin leading a cosmopolitan life. In Berlin, she meets a mysterious older lady, Gaya, who invites her to stay with her in a luxurious house, and later, after a year, to take care of her disabled child and stay “forever” in the house without going out. This Katya refuses, leaving and returning only once, to find Gaya succumbed to some kind of madness beyond language, comparable to the inert state of the child. The ending is once again also a departure: Gaya says “go away”, Katya goes and concludes: “Things are like that, when one travels, *nicht wahr*, Madame?”<sup>32</sup>

As we can see, in addition to the similarity of the original titles, “Cassation” also shares several thematic and structural features with “A Boy Asks a Question”: encounters that seem meaningful, but whose meaning is not completely disclosed to the reader (denying the moment of epiphany typical of short stories); a sense of stagnation as opposed to action (while the actions of “telling” and “asking” are present in the original titles), with the exception of the endings; a preference for foreign-sounding, specialized or archaic words (*entourage, nicht wahr, cassation, gazette...*); a bed, a character on a bed, and the whole surrounded by an array of things with the air of luxury. In “Cassation”, however, the role of the character as agent is perhaps smaller than in “A Boy Asks a Question”,

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31 Barnes 1997: 384-386.

32 Ibid.: 392.

and the human component in the assemblages comes mainly in the form of Katya's focalization. And as Katya is also the narrator, the writerly agency does not seem to identify with this fictional position as clearly as in the previous story. In any case, this amount of repetition on different levels prompts the sense of shared writerly agency behind the texts.

The excerpts from "Cassation" are teeming with mixed feelings, even more explicitly than in the first story. "Melancholy", "gloomy" and "*traurig*" are direct references to emotions, which participate in the affective coloring of the whole assemblage. However, not everything in this assemblage is reducible to the gloomy ambiance. Red velvet and morocco, blue-and-white china, gold bullion and fringe, the cushion and the bible bring forth both sensuous and culturally defined qualities with affective potential of their own. The evocation of the soft feel of velvet bed covers and morocco book covers is combined with the associations of fine materials in red and gold to both status and pleasure: royal or papal interiors and garments as well as the lush privacy of boudoirs or even brothels of the 19th century and beyond. When reading onward from the "gloom" evoked in the first sentence, it is plausible that a reader will experience affective shifting towards something again governed by sensuous pleasure, through an embodied projection of the reader's virtual body into the narrator's experience of the space. Yet the darker tones do not completely disappear either. The most frequent word in the passages is "everything", and the predominant feeling might be that of excess and abundance, extending in every direction: things are either "massive and tall" or "broad and wide", never small or middle-sized, as if Goldilocks had entered a cabin with only the large bear present, or Alice had just drunk the shrinking potion.

In this story, the luxurious coverings do indeed hide something: a disabled child is kept in the house, lying on the first high bed, like a dark secret or a black hole into which Gaya later is sucked. However, Barnes does not leave it at that. Once again, the image of a bed is combined with an older woman, this time also associated with mother (earth) by her name, and a younger woman (in the title, a "little girl").<sup>33</sup> There is also a "declining"<sup>34</sup> husband looming about in the house, although no one seems to be particularly interested in him. The potential Oedipal drama between these players is never realized, however. In "Cassation", it is descriptions of very slight movements, of hands touching fabrics, taking off and putting on clothes, touching the pages of the bible, that remain most poignant, like an intimate ritual, or like a dream (Katya herself describes having become a

33 Or two older women, if we also consider "Madame", the narratee.

34 Ibid.: 386.

“*religieuse*” in the house).<sup>35</sup> There is no sense of narrative suspense related to discovering the “secret”, and no tragic culmination in the revelation: in the end, Katya enters and leaves what was to become her prison “quite easily by the door, for all the doors and windows were open”<sup>36</sup> and finds the mother and child on the bed. The writer seems to be showing everything: and that “everything” is indeed golden and gloomy, red and soft and *traurig*, all at the same time, and there is actually nothing to discover because there is nothing to hide.

Some of the subject matter of both “Cassation” and “A Boy Asks a Question”, is undoubtedly made of the stuff of Barnes’s biography. There are motifs she keeps repeating in all her writing: mother and son/daughter figures engaged in love, seduction and power, weak and peripheral men, beds and bibles, fine fabrics and decadent pleasures. However, our understanding of the affective content of the stories *and* of the writer’s agency, from a readerly perspective, is to remain thwarted if we limit ourselves to explaining it in light of what we know of Barnes’s past, the wounds we imagine her to have carried. Barnes as a virtual, enacted, gesturing agent behind the story gives us both pleasure and pain in abundance.

We have experimented with a readerly position that brackets suspicion and conceives of the writer’s agency as an embodied presence making gestures. The meaning of the work itself becomes something of an affective gesture, and the text an affective body moving readerly bodies, with the writer’s virtual body as a prime mover. This does not mean that *symbolic* meanings would not exist in Barnes’s work – they most definitely do, and are present in this reading as well. An attention to symbolic meaning is necessary to make sense of the stories, and, as we will see, also of Barnes’s commentary. However, what has been avoided here is the conflation of the “deeper meaning” with the author’s intention and agency, and the search for the original emotion. In the following, it remains to show that this is the readerly position from which we can also provide a more encompassing reading of Barnes’s metaphor of the wound.

## RECLAIMING THE WOUND

Read in the context of the totality of Barnes’s oeuvre, the wound need not point merely toward pain experienced by the writer’s actual body. Rather, the word could be seen as an affective agent like the paper-cutter, Carmen la Tosca, the

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35 Cf. *ibid.*: 387.

36 *Ibid.*: 392.

velvet bed cover, the china stove or the bible, which need not be separate from considering its symbolic meanings. Symbols and metaphors, being assemblages of their own kind, also need some materiality for their meaning to emerge: the materialities of the pictorial or linguistic form they take, the materialities involved in the phenomenon of their interpretation, as well as the way metaphorical thinking in general draws on our embodied experience.<sup>37</sup> In the context of the quotation about writing, the word choice comes across as a dramatic and accentuated gesture. It is capable of evoking some kind of embodied enactment of pain. Taylor compares the wound in the comment to the image of a bleeding tree in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, which in turn is used in Cathy Caruth's influential study as a metaphor for the repetition inherent in trauma.<sup>38</sup> However, in the context of affective abundance created by Barnes's fiction, the sensation of pain is accompanied by a bundle of other feelings and meanings.

Barnes often uses Christian, more specifically Roman Catholic, iconography, which can also be seen in the excerpts from "Cassation".<sup>39</sup> A wound that sometimes bleeds also resonates with statues and paintings that are found miraculously weeping blood, as well as the phenomenon of stigmata, and the image of the "Sacred" or "Bleeding Heart", a symbol for Christ's love for humanity, which is explicitly evoked in another story.<sup>40</sup> The wound thus comes to embody a type of animism and its bleeding to signify the *coming to life* of something inanimate. An occasionally bleeding wound also evokes menstruation and female genitals, and thus is likened to reproduction and creation.<sup>41</sup> The association between wound and life need not suppress the sense of pain involved, or to cause us to rush into an abstract celebration of life and creativity. For instance, Suzanne Bost has shown how pain and illness are mingled with understandings of life and creation in Catholic traditions.<sup>42</sup> This has potential to change the reading of the

37 Cf. Lakoff/Johnson 2003.

38 Cf. Taylor 2012: 10; Caruth 1996, 2.

39 In another letter, Barnes discusses her secrecy as an attempt to let a wound heal, and jumps to mention "The wound in the side of Christ" and, as interpreted by Caselli, ends up arguing that the wound, whatever it is, needs to stay open as public testimony of a wrongdoing. Barnes to Emily Coleman, 30 November 1937; cf. Caselli 2009: 195-196.

40 "Aller et Retour" (1924); Barnes 1997: 363, 366.

41 Wounds and femininity also come together in Naomi Schor's influential essay on "female fetishism" Schor 1995; elsewhere, I show how Barnes's version of fetishism is also defined by the logic of "everything" instead of lack and recompensation. (Cf. Oulanne Forthcoming).

42 Cf. Bost 2010: 60-76.

whole quotation to something along the lines of “I am not a writer, but every once in a while I come painfully to life – and writing happens.”

This way, the comment becomes a simultaneous renunciation and claiming of agency, in which the meaning of agency itself undergoes a change. Barnes commits a performative gesture of handing writership over to “the wound”. However, in light of Barad’s thinking, we can see her as emerging as an agent and an author only in the event of the enunciation of her words. If we follow this line further, it is not at all far-fetched to say that a wound could be involved as an agent in the phenomenon of writing. In the other quotation, Barnes renounces “writing fiction” and claims emotional foundation for her writership. In a sense, we could “take her at her word” – and understand the foundations to involve, but not to be limited to, her imaginary body as a feeling agent. This body would become performatively moulded in such utterances, as well as in the fiction. When complemented with some cultural understanding surrounding wounds and put in the context of Barnes’s fiction, we get a vision of writing profoundly connected to trauma, but in a relation that constantly makes something new and different, something affectively manifold grow out of it.

## To CONCLUDE

Daniela Caselli notes how Barnes’s body, clad in an impressive black cape she was usually seen wearing, “haunts the criticism”.<sup>43</sup> It does seem like we cannot get rid of the writer-as-a-body, but letting her be part of the reading does not need to mean speculation about the experience of a biographical body. The agency behind Barnes’s stories seems to create a play with meanings and feelings, which is not left floating in a relativist void but remains grounded in actual and virtual materialities. The writerly body is the one moving things, but the things move the readers, and readers need to enact these movements to make sense of them. Not all agencies should be set on the same plane: the author and reader are different *in kind* from book and pen and paper, as characters are different from paper-cutters and tassels – although there is also a difference between paper-cutters and tassels. Yet the human agents become not only affected by these things but constituted as writers and readers in contact with them.

Barnes’s gesture of renouncing writership and attributing it to a wound has potential to move readers in many ways, inviting a multitude of images, meanings and sensations that tend toward the abundance of her fiction. “A foundation

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43 Caselli 2009: 15.

in some emotion” cannot be read simply as an invitation to discover the original, conceptualizable emotion, be it sadness, bitterness or happiness, in the writer’s actual life. Barnes’s writing opens its doors and windows and presents us with assemblages that say, “this is all there is.” Such gestures might make an educated reader suspicious: surely something must remain hidden, too? This is quite true, in the sense that all the elements cannot be exhaustively explained and made sense of. However, were we to understand literary sense-making as a process of going through an experience with the story, being moved by its materiality and its symbolism, as we should here, we could say that Barnes does really show “everything”. While doing this, the writer performatively creates herself as the provider and organizer of this abundance. Through her commentary, she shows that all of it emerges, as it were, from a wound. In the act of writing, pain and pleasure are intertwined, and trauma becomes *also* a creative force. Another flashy statement attributed to Barnes shows a lighter take on the subject, while keeping agency and writing close to materiality: “Keep on writing. It’s a woman’s only hope, except for lace making.”<sup>44</sup>

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44 Chitty 1985: 93; quoted in Herring 1995: 235.

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# Love under Threat

## The Emotional Valences of the *Twilight* Saga

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In Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, the first of the four volumes of the *Twilight* saga, the heroine Bella Swann muses on the effect her mysterious classmate Edward Cullen has on her: "His fingers were ice-cold [...] But that wasn't why I jerked my hand away so quickly. When he touched me, it stung my hand as if an electric current had passed through us".<sup>1</sup> These electrifying effects clearly are emotional. They call forth a physiological response in Bella that is based on changes in bodily expressions and action tendencies. These effects occur very fast and uncontrollably. Moreover, they make Bella aware that this meeting is significant to her life and wellbeing.

Bella's infatuation with Edward is both exhilarating and perilous: she is obsessed with a man who may kill her any minute. She is enchanted and spell-bound by Edward: his looks, voice, smell, touch as well as his mind and talents. Sibylle Baumbach defines such a response as fascination consisting of a mixture of wonder and admiration as well as terror and trepidation.<sup>2</sup> She argues that fascination is an emotion because it triggers physical effects in the body and immobilizes it. It also suspends rational decision-making. In combining attraction and danger, fascination is a seductive pleasure.

Given that the *Twilight* saga is a vampire romance, its every page is infused with emotion. In the romance novel genre, fascination provides the grounds for the romantic choice of a partner, a process involving a number of stable elements of the generic plot structure. Choice is slowly consolidated through these stages and turned into commitment. The generic conventions of romance shape, steer,

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1 Meyer 2006a: 38.

2 Cf. Baumbach 2015: 11.

and even dictate the emotions of characters. Lauren Berlant argues that all genres are distinguished by the affective contract they promise.<sup>3</sup> Such a contract addresses both characters in the fictional world as well as implied and real-life readers. As its name indicates, the romance novel's generic contract centers on delivering an optimistic and reassuring experience of love. Typically, it promotes an idealizing script of the good life that combines intimate relationships with morals and economics. It advances enduring affection and emotionally fulfilling intimacy in couples and families; moreover, it rewards such commitment with economic security. In placing my examination in the context of genre, I rely on Pamela Regis' formulation of the plot elements that shape the treatment of relationships in the romance novel.

The *Twilight* saga has an audience exceeding over a hundred million readers. As John Cawelti argues, bestsellers are typically viewed as fantasies shaped by the specific cultural and historical contexts of their production and consumption. According to this view, such cultural fantasies simultaneously express and evade components of readers' social and collective reality. They voice anxiety-provoking issues while at the same time providing fantasy resolutions to them.<sup>4</sup> Eva Illouz has coined the term "emotional style" to describe various linguistic, scientific, and interactional techniques to apprehend and manage the emotions these fantasies call forth. Such techniques address the ways in which we organize our emotions concerning the self and its relation to others as well as imagining the self's potentialities.<sup>5</sup> They play a key role in structuring the fantasies bestsellers convey.

Berlant specifies that cultural fantasies in general strive to express conventional scripts for the "good life". They promote persistence in pursuing the activities spelled out in the scripts of these fantasies as a means of achieving the good life. It is in this sense that they are infused with optimism. These fantasies promise to enable readers to attain the "satisfying something" needed to establish a meaningful relationship to the world that they cannot generate on their own. This nebulous "something" – for example, an emotion, a thing, a circumstance or a characteristic – provides the fantasizer with the missing piece that would allow her to achieve the fullness of the good life script. Berlant argues, however, that many of our cherished cultural fantasies have become self-defeating in that they no longer feed a genuine sense of optimism. That is, they cannot inscribe and sustain a hopeful view of personal and collective transformation toward which subjects strive. Instead, they are infused with cruel optimism: what we desire

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3 Cf. Berlant 2011: 66.

4 Cf. Cawelti 1976: 35-36, see also Illouz 2014: 21-22.

5 Cf. Illouz 2007: 6-7.

actually turns into an obstacle to our flourishing. The objects that incited our attachment actively impede the aims that brought us to them initially.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay I examine how the *Twilight* saga's notion of love is linked with its emotional style. I treat emotional style as primarily addressing the various ways in which romance-novel conventions manage emotions. I analyse this style from three different perspectives. First, I examine the characters' moments of fascination as gateways to the concept of love on which the saga relies. Second, I pay attention to the most typical motifs of romance in order to demonstrate how they organize and shape the representation of emotions. I ponder the degree to which these motifs still are capable of sustaining the genre's optimism about intimate relationships. Finally, I consider how these representations are linked with our contemporary understanding of love. Throughout, I draw on romance-genre research and analyses of the changing historical and sociocultural contexts of love.

## LOVE AS THRILLING MAGNETISM

The eight indispensable elements of the romance novel are in place in the *Twilight* saga: “the initial state of the society”, “the meeting of hero and heroine”, “the attraction between them”, “the declaration of love”, “the barrier(s) to their union”, “the point of ritual death” when the union seems impossible, “the recognition” of the means to overcome the barrier(s) and “the betrothal”. These scenes may take place in any order; they may be multiplied, repeated, merged together or reduced.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as the genre favours passionate heroines,<sup>8</sup> readers are expected to experience vicariously what the seventeen-year-old protagonist-narrator Bella is going through.

Three elements often employed in the beginning of the romance novel – “the initial state of society”, “the meeting”, and “the attraction” – demonstrate how fascination shapes Bella's relationship with Edward. At the start, both the community and characters desire change, and this is the stage that first inscribes the optimistic stance of the romance genre. The coveted change is associated with culturally scripted fantasies of the good life. Bella's family is dysfunctional; her divorced parents are incapable of supporting her emotionally or financially. Given the Swann family's modest finances, whatever future Bella wants to have,

6 Cf. Berlant 2011: 24-25.

7 Cf. Regis 2003: 30-38.

8 Cf. Radway 1984: 55.

she must carve it out for herself. As for Edward Cullen, he believes that being a vampire equals being damned. He is convinced that life no longer holds happiness for him. From the communal perspective, there is an ancient violent conflict between vampires and the local Quileute tribe who metamorphose into werewolves. This strife is revived when the Cullen family of vampires settles permanently in Forks. Consequently, the saga's opening describes a setting in which change is needed. This situation turns "the meeting" of the primary couple into an intense experience, as is seen in the following excerpts: "I was consumed by the mystery Edward presented. And more than a little obsessed by Edward himself."<sup>9</sup> "About three things I was absolutely positive. First, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was a part of him – and I didn't know how potent that part might be – that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him."<sup>10</sup>

Typically, this stage opens up possibilities for the primary couple. Because the Cullens have a good social standing and are cultured and rich, dating Edward promises personal growth, a supporting familial context and upward mobility for Bella. Although Bella repeatedly protests that she is not interested in the accoutrements of the Cullen life style, nevertheless, the emotions Edward calls forth in her are inextricably linked with these prospects. No wonder then that a physical and mental magnetism keeps Bella riveted with Edward. In particular, Edward's charisma draws Bella to him. Baumbach explains that charisma is a personal magnetism, an exceptional quality of an individual personality, suggesting that he or she is gifted with supernatural, superhuman, or extraordinary powers or qualities.<sup>11</sup> This description is literal in Edward's case because he *is* a supernatural and superhuman creature.<sup>12</sup> This specific characteristic is tied up with the optimistic fantasy script of the romance novel, because when the charismatic person evokes fascination, the experience changes the admirer. This person "feels magically transformed and elevated, [her] imagination aroused. [She] sees visions of gods, supernatural creatures, mythic events".<sup>13</sup> Again, this feature is literal, as Edward opens up a supernatural world for Bella. Therefore, we need to consider what role the promise of a supernatural metamorphosis plays in the optimistic fantasy of the *Twilight* saga.

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9 Meyer 2006a: 57.

10 Ibid.: 170-171.

11 Cf. Baumbach 2015: 58.

12 A charismatic person is thought to be able to read the mind and moods of every person he meets (*ibid.*), another feature characterizing Edward, for his vampire talent is mindreading. The only mind he cannot read, however, is Bella's.

13 Ibid.

The real possibility of being killed by Edward entices Bella. He could accidentally destroy her simply by hugging her. This feature ties in with fascination in that it is a borderline experience. Fascination “arises from the combination of two opposing forces and marks the concurrent awakening of deep attraction and intense repulsion”.<sup>14</sup> Danger keeps the grander scale of things in Bella’s view. This element of deathly danger accounts for Bella’s intensive emotional engagement. Edward resembles the Byronic hero in that his threatening nature makes him much more interesting and enticing than any conventional suitor.

The *Twilight* saga illustrates practices and values of courtship and marriage that are intimately linked with concepts of love. It is worth noticing that Bella denies that love in any way involves a choice: “Love didn’t work that way, I decided. Once you cared about a person, it was impossible to be logical about them anymore”.<sup>15</sup> At another point she muses that “[L]ove is irrational [...] The more you loved someone, the less sense anything made”.<sup>16</sup> Portraying falling in love as overwhelming and irrational fascination subscribes to an age-old model of so-called “enchanted love”, that, according to Illouz, consists of the following features: enchanted love is experienced as a unique event, which erupts brutally and unexpectedly in one’s life; it is inexplicable and irrational; and it operates as a deep commotion of the soul. This type of love is also felt to be fateful in the sense that you cannot choose it: it chooses you even against your will.<sup>17</sup>

Fascination and enchanted love are not the same, but they are united by the intensity of the subject’s emotional experience. Such an emotion is part and parcel of the romance novel’s optimism, for intensity guarantees its genuineness. This encounter takes over the body as well as stymying the senses and reason. The love object is unique and definitely beyond comparison. The force of the emotions calls forth a willingness in the lover to sacrifice oneself for the love object. Fascination differs from enchanted love in that the dangers it evokes are always real. This danger rivets the fascinated subject, making him or her determined to face the threats the object embeds. In the *Twilight* saga, this face-off with the deadly menace of fascination potentially transports Bella into another ontological realm, for she would remain “alive” as a vampire. Thus, her death would include loss, but also the possibility of a new beginning, another feature that fits the optimism of the generic script.

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14 Ibid.: 3.

15 Meyer 2006b: 304.

16 Ibid.: 340.

17 Cf. Illouz 2007: 89-90.

In the romance genre, fascination leads to the “declaration of love” stage, the placement of which varies.<sup>18</sup> Given that the *Twilight* saga relies on “the love at first sight” model, this stage takes place early on. No matter where it is placed, this stage centers on the act of choosing, even despite what the protagonists may claim. As was already stated, Bella thinks her infatuation lies outside rationality and choice. Yet Illouz stresses that attraction, passion and love cannot but be culturally and socially shaped, because our context always affects these emotions in multiple ways. She explains that what she calls the “architecture of romantic choice” is a cultural mechanics that steers us in our evaluation of the love object. The ways in which we draw on our emotions, knowledge and reasoning in perceiving a potential love object as well as in decision making are organized by this architecture. Such consultation shows that the socio-cultural environment systematizes even our most intimate choices. The architecture of romantic choice is framed by the “ecology of romantic choice”, that is, the social environment that steers us to make certain kinds of choices.<sup>19</sup> Today, this ecology emphasizes choice as a category of an individual’s cognition and (self-)reflexion because we hold that we realize our individuality in the act of choosing a love object. This act is proof of our freedom, rationality and autonomy: it is a right and a form of competence.<sup>20</sup>

Fascination places the fascinated subject in between conceptual categories.<sup>21</sup> It makes him or her waver between categories, making the act of choosing difficult. Such a state feeds into the “barrier” stage of the romance novel. As a generic element, “the barrier” refers to a series of scenes at different points providing either internal or external reasons – or both – why the protagonists cannot establish a permanent relationship.<sup>22</sup> As regards the ecology and architecture of romantic choice, these difficulties are revealing of the socio-cultural room for maneuver of choice. They are especially tangible whenever the heroine has more than one suitor to select from. Making a choice plays a weighty role in romance novels because the heroine must distinguish the “right” suitor from the “wrong” one. So it is in the *Twilight* saga, too, for besides the vampire Edward, also the werewolf Jacob woos Bella.

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18 Cf. Regis 2003: 34.

19 Illouz 2012: 19.

20 Cf. ibid.: 18-19.

21 Cf. Baumbach 2015: 22.

22 Cf. Regis 2003: 32.

## BARRIERS TURN INTO IMPASSES

The obstacles of the romance plot place intimate relationships in a context surpassing the individual. They may deal with any psychological problem or any economic, social, cultural, familial or geographic circumstance.<sup>23</sup> The conventions of the romance novel favor pitting two men as rivals for the same woman and vice versa. These male and female foils of hero and heroine illustrate rejected character traits as well as negative relationship models.<sup>24</sup> Hence a typical feature of the “barrier” is the heroine’s challenge to distinguish among the suitors the “right” one. The character foils, however, do not always provide genuine triangular relationships, because the rival is often an obviously weaker alternative.<sup>25</sup> In the *Twilight* saga, Edward meets his match in the werewolf Jacob. They are true rivals, as the division of the audience into “Team Edward” and “Team Jacob” as the “right” decision for Bella illustrates. Unlike Edward, Jacob is of a sunny disposition, friendly, and easy-going. By being kind, loyal and attentive, Jacob kindles Bella’s feelings, making her ponder whether she should choose him. Significantly, Jacob also evokes fascination, for in his werewolf form he is gorgeous, strong and fast, but also unpredictable and quick-tempered. His wolf brother, Sam, exemplifies what a werewolf may do once his emotions fuel up: Sam has badly disfigured his beloved’s face in the heat of the moment.

In the saga, the “barrier” is grounded in ontological difference, requiring that Bella negotiate between such categories as human/inhuman, human/animal, mortal/immortal, spirit/flesh, and salvation/damnation. These combinations of allure and danger affect Bella’s choice making. Fascination’s element of danger implies that she may be fatally mistaken about the character of the love object. Both suitors might unintentionally kill Bella. If she chooses Jacob, she will have to live with that threat for the rest of her life, for werewolves are impulsively violent. If she chooses Edward, and if Edward bites her with the intention of changing her into a vampire, there is nothing to guarantee the success of this measure. With both men, Bella will have to keep secret the real character of her partner, hiding large sections of her life from ordinary humans. What Bella makes clear, however, is that no ordinary guy will do for her. While the romance novel conventions invariably paint the romantic hero in idealizing colors, it is nevertheless significant that the *Twilight* saga rejects a human male as a potential partner. To be sure, this preference is in keeping with the genre of fantasy, but it

23 Cf. Regis 2003: 32.

24 Cf. Radway 1984: 122, 131-133.

25 Cf. *ibid.*: 122-123.

nevertheless raises the question of whether only supernatural creatures are able to sustain the optimism of romance.

Because Edward holds that vampirism means the loss of one's soul and damnation, he forsakes Bella in *New Moon*. He wants to save her from himself. Obviously, terminating the relationship forms an insurmountable "barrier", one that leads to the element of "ritual death". Regis defines the latter as the point when there seems to be no means to lift the obstacles and, hence, the union of the couple appears impossible.<sup>26</sup> The *Twilight* saga combines the "barrier" and "ritual death" elements together. After Edward forsakes Bella, she slides into a catatonic state, as is evidenced by the four "chapters" running from October to January with no text of any kind.<sup>27</sup> Significantly, the "barrier" stage acquires tones of what Berlant calls "an impasse", deriving from a profound crisis that entails bearing an extended vulnerability for an undetermined duration.<sup>28</sup> As there seems to be no way out, the crisis situation slowly changes into a daily routine.

In the romance novel, the obliteration of the "barrier" is linked with "recognition," that is, new information making the desired union possible. This element includes any number of things that the heroine recognizes, ranging from changed external circumstances to growth as a person.<sup>29</sup> In *New Moon* the abandoned Bella hears Edward's voice in her head whenever she is in danger. In order to make him speak to her, she jumps off a cliff, only to be saved by Jacob. Bella's suicidal jump makes Edward consult the Volturi, a law-instituting group of vampires, about killing him. Bella, however, saves Edward's life at the last minute. These multiple brushes with death lead to the "recognition" element that she experiences as "an epiphany".<sup>30</sup> It is Bella's manipulation of the internalized image of Edward that eventually leads to the events enabling this realization. Thus, the love relationship would not develop if it were not for her provocation.

Edward loved me. The bond forged between us was not one that could be broken by absence, distance, or time. [...] As I would always belong to him, so would he always be mine [...]

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26 Cf. Regis 2003: 35.

27 This section is located between the pages 84 and 93. It neither has page numbers nor is mentioned in the Contents of *New Moon*. It only records the names of the months.

28 Cf. Berlant 2011: 62.

29 Cf. Regis 2003: 36.

30 Cf. Meyer 2006b: 526.

“You love me,” I marvelled. The sense of conviction and rightness washed through me again.<sup>31</sup>

Bella’s epiphany defuses her sense of inferiority that formed a key internal obstacle. She understands that fascination and enchanted love surpass the individual, enabling her to rise above whatever personal shortcomings she has. In accordance with the optimistic script of the romance genre, the goal of love is elevation and transcendence. Yet in spite of this newfound conviction, the “barrier” between the couple is not lifted. Bella’s father is strongly against Edward. The Volturi now form a dangerous threat as do also the werewolves. But most importantly, the ongoing bickering and disputes between Edward and Bella poses “a barrier.” Not only do these remaining “barrier” elements anchor the saga in the contemporary ecology and architecture of romantic choice but also they imply that “barriers” are on the point of permanently turning into “impasses”. While the notion of a barrier implies a temporally finite state, an impasse presents an unsurmountable dead-end. In an impasse, agents must come up with new means of dealing with the confounding situation. What characterizes this situation is that there is no going back to what was before, but neither is there the possibility of overcoming the impasse. What do characters do in situations that test their potential for achieving the good life expressed in the romance script?

## NEGOTIATING LOVE AND MAKING COMPROMISES

Bella’s epiphany about mutual commitment takes place early in the saga, in its second volume. Even so, their relationship continues to be plagued by discord and insecurity. That the couple continues to have “issues” suggests that things have not reached a generically satisfactory point. Instead, the crisis situation persists. The following example provides a typical illustration of moments of disharmony between Bella and Edward. This scene takes place in *Eclipse* and thus comes much later than Bella’s epiphany:

[Edward’s] face was hard and his posture tense. He glared at me wordlessly. [...] “Bella,” he whispered. “Do you have *any* idea how close I came to crossing the line today? [...] Do you know what that would have meant? [...]”

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31 Ibid.: 527.

He ground his teeth together. His hands were balled up in fists at his sides. He was still standing against the wall, and I hated the space between us.<sup>32</sup>

The couple's quarrels repeatedly address the same subjects, such as the the vampires' strife with the werewolves, the danger posed by the Volturi, the presence of Jacob in Bella's life and the ontological difference between the lovers. Edward acts patronizingly and coercively, insisting that his actions stem from protectiveness. Bella repeatedly defies the rules Edward imposes, even escaping from his home to meet Jacob. When Edward left her, she learned to love Jacob, and in *Eclipse* she begs him to kiss her even after she has committed herself to Edward.<sup>33</sup> Today, two independent emotional selves must repeatedly renew the reasons and the emotional conditions defining why they started their relationship.<sup>34</sup> The discord requires that Bella and Edward continually revisit these reasons. Their arguments also concern the reciprocity and symmetry of the relationship because of the discrepancy between them, not only in economic and social standing – as well as age, for Edward's life as a vampire has lasted over a hundred years – but also in ontological status. Bella is adamant that only becoming a vampire will create equality and emotional equity. Until then, Edward always has the upper hand. Moreover, Bella interprets Edward's refusal to transform her as his unwillingness to commit fully to the relationship. Illouz explains that especially women worry about achieving a stable, intimate relationship, because they find men emotionally elusive and routinely resisting long-term commitment.<sup>35</sup>

These negotiations, arguments and compromises between Bella and Edward turn love into an object of endless investigation and self-scrutiny. Berlant identifies “the conversation”<sup>36</sup> as a narrative motif designed to handle moments during which characters search for means of adjustment and look for modes of living on. This motif is thus one means of dealing with “the impasse”. Bella and Edward have ongoing discussions about desires, needs and goals. Although Illouz does not consider her findings within the same theoretical frameworks as Berlant, it is significant that she, too, names conversations, negotiations and making compromises as the vehicles through which men and women manage intimacy and love relationships. While love relationships still in the nineteenth century stressed the spouses' ability to play their marital roles successfully,

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32 Meyer 2007: 140-141.

33 Cf. ibid.: 525.

34 Cf. Illouz 2012: 39.

35 Cf. ibid.: 66.

36 Cf. Berlant 2011: 57.

feeling and expressing the emotions attached to these roles, Illouz claims that expectations have changed considerably in our day. The negotiations exhibit the contemporary ideal that intimacy include verbal disclosures of emotions and the act of sharing these emotions with a partner. These disclosures reveal and lay bare the lovers' emotional selves so that they get support and recognition, while simultaneously safeguarding their individuality and freedom.<sup>37</sup> Such negotiations show self-awareness, ability to identify and name feelings, talk about them and empathize with each other's position. These listed features – fitting the desires and goals of two separate individuals, achieving reciprocity and symmetry, engaging in self-reflection and negotiating how to meet each subject's needs – figure as hallmarks of the contemporary architecture of choice. It is through such measures that individuals arrive at a decision about who fits them as partner the best.<sup>38</sup> They are indications of what Illouz calls emotional intelligence,<sup>39</sup> which plays a key role in romantic choice. In pinpointing the same narrative motif of “conversation”, both Berlant and Illouz highlight the large amount of emotional work that goes into sustaining intimacy. As this motif does not address talk where one settles things once and for all, but an ongoing, constant series of discussions, it suggests that romantic relationships are repeatedly threatened by “barriers” and even “impasses”. Therefore, they need steady vigilance in order to stay intact. Together, these features imply that the capacity of the romance novel to sustain optimism is currently weakening.

The *Twilight* saga resorts to extreme means in order to salvage the optimism of the romance genre. What is notable is that the generic structures and conventions of romance alone are not enough to provide a means out of the impasse. The saga employs both fantasy and vampire Gothic genres in order to rescue the romantic relationship. Consequently, the terms in which the impasse between Bella and Edward is reworked into an obstacle that can be overcome recontextualize the love relationship by making it address the binary of human/inhuman. Only by opting for vampirism and superhumanity can Bella put the anxieties concerning love to rest.

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37 Cf. Illouz 2012: 38.

38 Cf. ibid.: 241-246.

39 Cf. ibid.: 64.

## SAVING THE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

Many romance novels conclude with nuptials. From a generic perspective, Bella and Edward's marriage ought to mark the pinnacle of their love. In the *Twilight* saga, however, this conventional crowning element of commitment supplies a new barrier. Bella insists that the couple have sex during their honeymoon while she still is in her human form. Edward manages not to kill her, but his passionate love making leaves Bella badly bruised. Consequently, he wants no more sex, at least not until they both are vampires. Things deteriorate between the couple when it transpires that the newly-wed Bella is pregnant with a half-human, half-vampire child. Edward wants her to abort it, because the fetus threatens her life. Hence, even this event that consolidates the relationship in the romance novel turns into a further obstacle. By refusing abortion, Bella is ready to die for the child; also, she continues to hope that giving birth will compel Edward to metamorphose her in spite of the risks. Edward performs an emergency Caesarean section, but Bella's heart stops beating. In order not to lose her, Edward stabs her heart with his venom and bites her all over her body:

It was like he was kissing her, brushing his lips at her throat, at her wrists, into the crease at the inside of her arm. But I could hear the lush tearing of her skin as his teeth bit through, again and again, forcing venom into her system at as many points as possible. I saw his pale tongue sweep along the bleeding gashes [...].<sup>40</sup>

Edward finally fully commits himself to Bella by transforming her when she is no more than a horribly mangled corpse. What is remarkable in this scene is its gruesomeness, which moves the narrative into the realm of the vampire Gothic. The child breaks Bella's spine, her stomach is slashed open, she is bathed in blood, and bit all over by a vampire. With narratives of fascination, remarks Baumbach, readers are usually granted a "shelter of safe spectatorship", enabling them to immerse themselves in the allure of fascination and to stay insulated from its dangers.<sup>41</sup> Because Jacob narrates this scene, readers are provided with some distance to its violent nature, as Rachel DuBois observes. The uncertainty about Bella's fate is resolved when she finally wakes up. A painful transformation process has turned her into a vampire: "As a human, I'd never been best at anything. [...] After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. [...] I was amazing now – to them and to myself. It was like I had been

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40 Meyer 2008: 326.

41 Cf. Baumbach 2015: 61.

born to be a vampire. [...] I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined.<sup>42</sup>

Bella's reference to "shining" reveals that she now has the personality, looks and sexiness with which to impress others. Her new gorgeous body is made for evoking desire as well as giving and receiving pleasure, qualities that play a greater role in securing a relationship than before.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, once the lovers are ontologically the same, all tensions vanish, and they need neither to negotiate anything nor make compromises. Instead, from the moment of Bella's metamorphosis, the couple is seamlessly united into one. The couple's concord is crowned when Bella finally lets Edward read her mind as proof of her love.

DuBois observes that Bella's metamorphosis marks a breach with readers, for after it Bella no longer functions as a site of narrative and physical possibility for them: she becomes alien, an other.<sup>44</sup> I have argued elsewhere that what this means for the romance script is that *the end vaporizes fascination*. The *Twilight* saga unties the knot between danger and death and thus empties out its strongest emotional source. With the shared ontological status of the lovers, the enticing danger vanishes, and is replaced by vapid, soft-pornographic allusions to continual great sex.<sup>45</sup> The dissolution of the fascinating tension becomes apparent in the manner the saga changes track after Bella's transformation. The latter part of the expansive fourth volume, *Breaking Dawn*, deals with the strife between the vampires called the Volturi and the Cullen clan supported by the werewolf allies of Jacob's Quileute tribe. It moves into the terrain of the family saga. While establishing a benevolent communal context for Bella's vampire family motivates this shift, the fact remains, nevertheless, that it pushes the saga's primary romance relationship into the background.

While a "happily-ever-after" conclusion is part and parcel of the romance novel denouement, the *Twilight* couple's union will literally last forever. Here the saga departs from its conventional counterparts. Consider, for example, Jane Austen, whom Regis characterizes as "the master of the romance novel".<sup>46</sup> Austen invariably places her romantic couples in a larger communal context, drawing attention to an array of various types of marriages. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the happy unions of Elizabeth and Darcy and Jane and Bingley are contrasted with the quarrelsome marriages of Lydia and Wickham as well as Elizabeth's parents. The rational marriage of Charlotte Lucas to the intolerable Mr Collins

42 Meyer 2008: 484-5.

43 Cf. Illouz 2012: 44-45.

44 Cf. DuBois 2012: 141.

45 Cf. Pyrhönen Forthcoming.

46 Regis 2003: 75.

provides a further reminder of the realities of adult life. By marrying Bella off to a supernatural creature, however, the *Twilight* saga rejects the human dimension of intimate relationships. It is as if the long-term crises and the various impasses Bella and Edward encounter could not be resolved in any other than a superhuman way. If we regard genres as affective contracts as Berlant does,<sup>47</sup> then the *Twilight* saga suggests that the romance genre alone no longer provides as satisfying a vehicle of desire as before. The genre's ability to provide continuity in the readers' belief in the possibilities and promises of life has become defective.

Interestingly, even the scant descriptions of vampire married life suggest that this ending opens the door to boredom. Only Carlisle, the patriarch of the Cullen family, has a meaningful occupation as a doctor. Edward and his siblings study indifferently, lounge around, have great sex, as well as shopping and consuming high fashion and gadgets. Thanks to Alice Cullen's ability to look into the future, the family's investments secure great wealth. The consumer society's script of the good life is roundly fulfilled. Furthermore, the saga turns the ideal of commitment into eternal love; consequently, stability turns into stasis and immovability. There is no need for any kind of growth. Brendan Shea observes that romantic love is not capable of providing meaning over unending repetition and time stretching to near infinity because our capacity to love arises from our vulnerability and mortality. It is the limited character of our lives that makes our desires and purposes meaningful.<sup>48</sup>

Let us now put our finger on the main features of the *Twilight* saga's emotional style. Doing so enables us to be more precise about its fantasy nature. I have argued that in its reliance on the generic stages of the romance novel, the saga constructs a "double emotional structure". It expresses a longing for love and sexuality that do not produce anxiety, negotiation and uncertainty. It promotes the notion that readers should tenaciously believe in love in order to achieve it in their lives. In so doing, it insists that love still is a worthy cause.<sup>49</sup> On the one hand, fascination allows characters and readers to express longing for enchanted love that is based on self-sacrifice, fusion and affirmation of absolutes. Enchanted love speaks to us because it implies transcendence of the mundane human condition. Its appeal is tinged with nostalgia, for, as Illouz remarks, we no longer can sustain belief in this type of love; neither can we feel the emotions appropriate to it. Instead, the rationalisation of our approach to love has spred deep-seated disappointment. Yet we still yearn for a sense of the sacred and the capacity to believe because disenchantment has meant that the mystery

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47 Cf. Berlant 2011: 6.

48 Cf. Shea 2009: 91.

49 Cf. Pyrhönen Forthcoming.

of love has become disparaged and meaningless.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, fascination based on the dangers of dating a vampire unleashes just those anxieties that are familiar from contemporary life. Today, the criteria for mate selection are more diverse than ever and they have become integrated into the private dynamics of individual taste. Like us, Bella can only rely on herself in choosing a partner, and this choice results from a complex process of emotional and cognitive evaluation.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the *Twilight* saga enables readers to experience contradictory emotional valences: longing for and belief in an outdated mode of love together with contemporary insecurities and anxieties about the challenges of romantic choice.

That the saga's emotional style enables contradictory emotional valences arises from its nature as a cultural fantasy. Illouz remarks that such a fantasy presents and distorts reality. It incorporates reality, defends the self against reality, and yet helps one live with it. Fantasy affirms and denies the emotions and concepts on which it rests. This double emotional structure is of such a nature that it embeds both explicit and hidden instructions readers can take away from the reading experience.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps luckily, becoming a vampire is not among the suggested options. Yet the protagonist Bella does function as key to what is offered as a useful carry-over for readers. The character of Bella could perhaps best be described as a "manager of emotions": she is capable of using language in order to express her inner self. It is in this sense that she has a great deal of emotional intelligence. What this means is that, for her, language provides a tool for making sense of difficult emotions which she can then communicate to Edward. As Illouz remarks, contemporary culture prizes language because it enables couples to construct a narrative of verbal intimacy that they can share and use to enhance this intimacy further. In fact, this advice is in line with present-day therapeutic self-help manuals that emphasize the injunction to share needs and feelings as a significant factor in sustaining and fostering love in a relationship. It is notable that this ideal of communication, aimed at managing emotions and instituting emotional control, privileges woman's selfhood and perspective. It empowers women readers by attributing to them the capacity to carry on relationships according to fair procedures of speech but also burdens them heavily with the responsibility for doing so.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, the saga's double emotional structure allows for two ways of reading. It enables readers' hold on the optimism of the romance novel. Hence, it

50 Cf. Illouz 2012: 158.

51 Cf. ibid.: 50, 54.

52 Cf. Illouz 2014: 22-24.

53 Illouz 2008: 226-227, 236.

provides what Berlant calls “a cluster of promises” that sustain hope in enduring intimate relationships. Yet, because only a supernatural transformation finally saves the romantic relationship, readers may also see the saga as heralding a situation of cruel optimism: the notion of love it promotes no longer provides tools for envisioning a good life.

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# Detuned Selves

## Evoking and Conveying Affects and Emotions in Depression Writing

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ANNA OVASKA

I am sad  
I feel that the future is hopeless and that things cannot improve  
I am bored and dissatisfied with everything  
I am a complete failure as a person  
I am guilty, I am being punished  
I would like to kill myself  
I used to be able to cry but now I am beyond tears  
I have lost interest in other people  
I can't make decisions  
I can't eat  
I can't sleep  
I can't think  
I cannot overcome my loneliness, my fear, my disgust  
I am fat  
I cannot write  
I cannot love<sup>1</sup>

The passage is a list of symptoms written down by Sarah Kane for her play text *4.48 Psychosis*. It is also a list that is directly borrowed from Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI), a test used by medical professionals to assess the severity of a

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1 Kane 2001: 206-207.

patient's depression.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in the context of Kane's work of art, the words become distanced from the medical discourse. They are meant to be read (and likely are read) as an expression of someone's inner experiences – of deep feelings of distress and pain. A voice names the sadness, the hopelessness and the loss of capabilities that characterize depression. Behind the words, we imagine a person whose experiential world is altered. Through the act of reading and empathizing with the speaking I, the words of medical discourse turn into an evocative expression of a depressed mind.

This article focuses on affects and emotions that are constructed and conveyed to readers in depression writing. How can fictional texts evoke the experiential world of depression? How are the often distressing and unsettling experiences of depression mediated through writing? Phenomenologists and theorists of embodied cognition have in recent years emphasized the interaffective, interpersonal and embodied nature of depression.<sup>3</sup> In these views, depression is understood as a disorder of “intercorporeality and interaffectivity” and as “a ‘detunement’ of the resonant body that mediates our participation in a shared affective space”.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this text is to show how this new understanding can help us to see why depression writing is able to evoke such powerful corporeal and emotional responses in its readers, and also how depression writing may point to the embodied and interaffective nature of the human mind, thus opening up new possibilities for understanding mental experiences.

The first section introduces two particularly affective texts which employ different narrative and poetic strategies in order to evoke and convey experiences of mental illness to their audiences: British playwright Sarah Kane's performance text *4.48 Psychosis* (2001) and Finnish writer Maria Vaara's autobiographical novel *Likaiset legendat* (*The Dirty Legends* [1974]). Both works of art challenge the common cultural and clinical view of depression as a “mental” disorder that is “inside the head”. Instead, they pay attention to the affective and bodily experiences of depression and portray depression as a mode of being in

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2 In the questionnaire first developed by Aaron T. Beck in the 1960's, a patient chooses the experience closest to theirs from a list of choices such as the following: “(0) I do not feel sad. (1) I feel sad. (2) I am sad all the time and I can't snap out of it. (3) I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it”. On the multiple citations, allusions and intertexts used in *4.48 Psychosis*, cf. Diedrich 2013, also Ovaska 2016. Kane's monologist hints about the references for example by speaking about being the “last in a long line of literary kleptomaniacs”, as if pointing to the method of writing the text (Kane 2001: 213).

3 Cf. Fuchs 2013a, Ratcliffe 2015.

4 Fuchs 2013a: 219.

which the basic structures of experience and being in the world (and being with others) have changed. In their work, depression is not understood as a “pathology of the mind”, but rather as a reaction of the embodied and social mind to extreme experiences or circumstances.

The second section demonstrates how Kane’s and Vaara’s descriptions of depression resonate with the embodied cognitive view according to which affects and emotions are not something “interior” (or “inside the head”), but rather structures that frame our bodily being in the world and our attunement to other people. The section outlines how affectivity – ranging from simple bodily feelings and intensities to more complex moods and emotions – connects us to the world and to others, and how in depression these affective structures have been altered, resulting in a self that is “detuned”. The discussion draws from the work of phenomenologists such as Thomas Fuchs and Matthew Ratcliffe and philosophers of embodied cognition such as Giovanna Colombetti and Michelle Maiese who have in recent years focused their attention on the role of affects and emotion in human experience in general, and more specifically, in psychiatric disorders.

Finally, the theoretical understanding of the role of embodiment and affectivity in depression is put to use in the analysis of Kane’s and Vaara’s writing. The last section shows how language and narration evoke affects, emotions and bodily feelings, and how fictional texts can invite readers to enact the alterations of affectivity that characterize depression.

## DEPRESSION IN SARAH KANE’S AND MARIA VAARA’S WRITING

If being healthy means that I understand even more clearly the borders between people and myself, I think it is easier to be ill.

Then I want to be ill.<sup>5</sup>

British playwright Sarah Kane (1971-1999) and Finnish writer and autobiographer Maria Vaara (1931-1992) were very familiar with depression through their own experiences, and these experiences are also reflected in their writing. Both authors paint a striking picture of severe depression, Kane in her famous

<sup>5</sup> Vaara 1974: 58: “Jos terveenä oleminen on tällaista, että tajuan entistä selvemmin rajan ihmisten ja itseni välillä, on kai helpompaa olla sairas. / Silloin haluan olla sairas”. All translations by A.O. unless indicated otherwise.

play *4.48 Psychosis* and Vaara in her less-known autobiographical novel *Likaiset legendat*. Both writers employ their readers' sociocultural understanding of the illness by referring to clinical and folk psychiatric accounts of depression and by utilizing generic conventions of illness narratives and patient-therapist conversations.<sup>6</sup> But most importantly, both bring forth distressing bodily, affective and intersubjective experiences, and show how depression is connected to a person's relationship to the world and to other people.

Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* is a performance text which depicts severe depression on the brink of psychosis.<sup>7</sup> In a fragmented monologue, Kane's nameless protagonist describes some of the most painful symptoms of depression, for example the heightened feelings of guilt and shame which debilitate her/his social being. The monologue is filled with repetitive voices which take the form of self-accusations: "Shame shame shame. / Drown in your fucking shame".<sup>8</sup> The narrating I also outlines the most extreme symptoms of depression, like the loss of the sense of self, and the loss of interest in being alive: "I cannot touch my essential self";<sup>9</sup> "I have been dead for a long time",<sup>10</sup> the narrator complains. In addition, s/he describes changes in her/his bodily experiences. There is a sense that one's body is something separate, either a barrier between the self and the world, or something that is separated from oneself:

Here am I  
and there is my body  
dancing on glass<sup>11</sup>

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6 Vaara uses psychoanalytical terminology and refers to psychoanalytical notions like transference love, repression and loss. Kane quotes new diagnostic tools like the BDI, but refers also to the psychoanalytical understanding of depression (cf. Ovaska 2016).

7 *4.48 Psychosis* was written in 1998-99 and first performed posthumously in 2000 at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs in London. Kane referred to her plays as "texts for performance", and *4.48 Psychosis*, too, is meant to be performed on stage. It however lacks all the usual stage directions and consists of a collection of short monologues and dialogical fragments (cf. Ovaska 2016). In this article, Kane's play is approached as a text and attention is paid to its narrative and poetic techniques. For an analysis of affects and emotions in the performances of *4.48 Psychosis*, cf. Campbell 2005.

8 Kane 2001: 209.

9 Ibid.: 229.

10 Ibid.: 214.

11 Ibid.: 230.

Maria Vaara's autobiographical novel *Likaiset legendat* deals with similar themes, images and techniques.<sup>12</sup> The narrating I (Maria; "the librarian") describes feelings of guilt and shame, and experiences of estrangement and loss of sense of agency:

And no one knows that the librarian is not a part of this reality, because she does not exist. Now I sit at home, I listen to records and I cry. I don't know really what I am crying about and who is crying. I should probably call the town doctor, he is the closest there is. I would still like to live this week and the next.<sup>13</sup>

Like Kane's protagonist, she describes experiences of social alienation and feelings of separation from herself. She is not a "part of this reality", she "does not exist". The narrating I is also constantly observing herself ("Maria") from the outside. In their most extreme manifestation, the self-reproaches take the form of hallucinatory voices: "— Maria, it would be better if you were dead, one of the Scattered said."<sup>14</sup> The monologue of the narrating I is constantly interrupted by voices, like "the Scattered", which thematize the loss of a unified self and offer a vivid description of the experiences of worthlessness and failing in social relationships that are common in depression.<sup>15</sup>

Both Kane and Vaara depict experiences which slowly lead their protagonists to a psychotic breakdown.<sup>16</sup> The narrator-protagonists lose their sense of a

12 *Likaiset legendat* was the first novel in Vaara's autobiographical trilogy published in Finland between 1974 and 1978. In her autobiographical novels, Vaara describes her experiences as a schizophrenia patient in 1970's Finland. It is, however, unclear whether she was actually suffering from schizophrenia, or only from severe depression and psychotic episodes which were misdiagnosed as schizophrenia (cf. also Vaara 1980).

13 "Eikä kukaan tiedä, että kirjastongoitaja ei ole todellisuudessa mukana, koska häntä ei ole olemassa. Nyt istun kotona, kuuntelen levyjä ja itken. En oikein tiedä, mitä itken ja kuka itkee. Minun kai pitäisi soittaa kunnanlääkärille, hän on lähimpänä. Tahtoisin elää vielä tämän viikon ja ensi viikon" (Vaara 1974: 60).

14 Ibid.: 57: "— Maria, sinun olisi parasta olla kuollut, irrallinen sanoi".

15 On the problems in interpersonal experiences in depression, cf. Ratcliffe 2015: 218-226.

16 Thematically, the breakdowns in both texts are tied to a loss experienced during psychiatric treatment: Kane's protagonist is mourning (or rather failing in mourning, as psychoanalysts would put it) the ending of therapy. In her/his dialogic fragments, s/he goes through the (past) therapeutic encounters and problems of the therapy (cf. Ovaska 2016). Vaara's narrator likewise suffers from a feeling of being abandoned by

unified self and become unable to make distinctions between reality and hallucination, the outside world and their inner worlds. In addition, both texts are framed as stories of failed therapeutic relationships, which worsen the situation: both protagonists cling on to their therapists as a last source of hope, and end up planning suicide as they feel abandoned by their therapists.

Kane's and Vaara's portrayals of severe depression engage in a dialogue with common clinical accounts of depression (though, as we will see, they do not fit neatly into any specific diagnostic categories). Diagnostic manual DSM-5, for example, defines major depressive disorder as a combination of depressed mood, heightened feelings of shame and guilt, and diminished interest in being alive.<sup>17</sup> In general, depression is understood on the one hand as an affective disorder characterized by the depressive mood, and on the other hand through its cognitive disturbances, such as delusions of being judged or despised by other people, memory alterations (negative or painful memories are often heightened in depression) and difficulties of expression.<sup>18</sup>

The cognitive problems inherent in depression are often seen to have consequences also for writing about depression. It is difficult for individuals to express these experiences, and linguistic problems and negatively embellished memories also distort autobiographical writing.<sup>19</sup> Both Vaara and Kane reflect these difficulties in the structure of their works: both texts are constructed out of monological fragments, and the linearity of the stories is disrupted by flashbacks. The text is often gappy, and the perspectives change: in both texts the monologue of the narrator-protagonists is interrupted by dialogical elements (patient-therapist conversations) which may either be interpreted as hallucinatory or imaginary inner dialogues, reports of past conversations, or scenes in the actual world of the text.

Depression researchers have been quite sceptical about whether it is possible to gain knowledge about the illness through first-person accounts such as memoirs or self-narratives because of the memory problems and linguistic problems.<sup>20</sup> It is true that we need to be cautious of not drawing too far-reaching

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her therapist and falls into psychosis. Both texts implicitly refer to the well-known psychoanalytical view of depression as an inability to mourn a lost object: what is lost, is incorporated into one's bodily ego as an object of eternal sorrow. Like Freud's theory (Freud 1985), both Kane and Vaara emphasize the bodily aspects of depression experience and connect their experiences to a painful loss.

17 Cf. DSM-5 2013.

18 Cf. Fuchs 2013a.

19 Cf. Radden/Varga 2013; also Ratcliffe 2015: 25.

20 Cf. Radden/Varga 2013.

conclusions from depression narratives, but I also suggest that there is a different kind of value in the autofictional depression writing produced by both Kane and Vaara. Neither of the writers seeks to create clinical knowledge of depression. Rather, they use fiction and experimental writing as means to express these experiences and to convey them to their readers in ways that break the distinctions between the mind and the body, and the self and the world. In addition, both writers emphasize the universality of these experiences. The experiences are not something impossible to understand: even though they are often extreme, they are still tied to the ways we all – whether suffering from depression or not – experience our bodies, feel emotions and relate to other people.

Despite the connections to common understanding of depression, both Kane's and Vaara's writings thus pay attention to experiences that are often disregarded in clinical and folk psychiatric accounts. The experiences they describe are not just *affective* problems or *cognitive* problems that are somehow separate from one another and unrelated to other people and to the shared world. Especially bodily experiences and affectivity have a significant role in their representations. Much like the embodied cognitive and phenomenological accounts of depression, Kane's and Vaara's written, artistic descriptions show that we need a different kind of understanding of the relations between embodiment, affectivity and cognition in order to understand these experiences. Most importantly, Kane's and Vaara's texts invite us to pay attention to the ways the mind, affectivity and relations to the world and to other people are intertwined.

## ALTERATIONS IN AFFECTIVITY

In recent views of the mind as embodied, affectivity is seen as the basis for our being in the world and our being with others. Affectivity or 'affective framing' is understood as a way in which bodily agents engage with their surroundings.<sup>21</sup> To be affective means to be cognitive, and changes in affectivity have a deep impact on the ways one makes sense of the world. As Michelle Maiese puts it: "A shift in affective framing changes not just how one perceives the world, but what someone remembers, how one engages in practical reasoning, how one relates to other people, and even which object-directed emotions one experiences."<sup>22</sup> In other words, affectivity is a mode of being bodily attuned to and engaging with the world. Affects are ways of making sense of and caring about one's surround-

21 Cf. Colombetti 2014; Maiese 2014, 2016.

22 Maiese 2014: 525.

ings: they influence the ways we perceive, remember, feel and reason.<sup>23</sup> Affectivity also connects us to other people, creating intersubjective and interaffective spaces, as Thomas Fuchs and Sabine Koch suggest: “Our body is affected by the other’s expression, and we experience the kinetics and intensity of his emotions through our own bodily kinaesthesia and sensation.”<sup>24</sup> Ever since early infancy, we are tied to others through bodily resonance, and this forms the basis for intersubjective relations.

The view of affectivity as a mode of “making sense” of the world and being with other people has consequences also for our understanding of depression. In this account, depression is understood as an alteration in the ability to affectively engage with the world and with others. According to Fuchs: “our participation in interaffective space is mediated by a fundamental bodily resonance. In depression, this attunement fails, and the lived body, as it were, shrinks to the boundaries of the material body.”<sup>25</sup> Rather than as a “mental” problem in some interior sense, depression is thus understood as a problem of interaffectivity and bodily resonance.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Cf. also Fuchs 2013b: 613. In the background is the idea that a living organism always “cares” for its surroundings and its existence. Giovanna Colombetti defines affectivity as “lack of indifference”: as sensibility for or interest in one’s existence (cf. Colombetti 2014a: 1-2). On this very primitive level, affectivity is a mode of making sense of the world: a mode of evaluating one’s environment and navigating this environment (cf. Maiese 2014, Colombetti 2014a). There are different kinds of affective states, ranging from the more simple to the more complex or enriched: the *primordial affectivity* just described is in the background of everything that is alive (cf. Colombetti 2014a). In addition, there are *background feelings* or what Matthew Ratcliffe has called *existential feelings* or *Stimmung* (for instance, the feeling of being alive, the sense of belonging to the world, or the feeling of being dead or alienated) – and these form the background of experience (cf. Ratcliffe 2009, 2015, Fuchs 2013b). Furthermore, there are longer lasting moods and atmospheres (like the depressed mood, or the feeling of uncanniness). And finally, there are shorter lasting and more complex *emotional episodes* that are usually intentional, i.e. oriented towards objects in the world or other people (like experiences of shame or guilt). Cf. Fuchs 2013b for a discussion on the phenomenological distinctions between different forms of affects and emotions.

24 Fuchs/Koch 2014: 5.

25 Fuchs 2013a: 234.

26 Fuchs (2009) and Colombetti (2013) have combined enactivist (embodied cognitive) theories and phenomenological insights in their analysis of mental disorders. For similar ideas on the basis of phenomenological theories, cf. Ratcliffe 2009, 2015.

The detunement, or loss of bodily resonance, which happens in depression helps in understanding the different symptoms of depression, like the feelings of bodily alienation and social estrangement. In addition to the loss of connectedness to oneself, the loss of bodily resonance diminishes the ability to connect with other people, which in turn results in the experiences of having failed socially or being judged by others. It explains one of the central paradoxes of the illness: how there can be at the same time symptoms like the loss of caring for one's existence and loss of will to live, and heightened social emotions like shame and guilt.<sup>27</sup> Clinical manuals like the DSM acknowledge the multitude of different kinds of bodily, affective and intersubjective alterations in their symptom listings, but focus on separate symptoms without paying much attention to the ways they are connected in the actual experiences of depression: in the ways the changes in how one perceives oneself, the world and others, remembers one's past, engages with the world and others, and experiences one's body are linked to each other.

This complex network of different kinds of experiences and changes in the experiential world is also what Kane and Vaara describe in their texts, focusing especially on the bodily experiences and on problems in intersubjective relations. As Kane's narrating I states:

I have reached the end of this dreary and repugnant tale of a sense interned in an alien carcass and lumpen by the malignant spirit of the moral majority

I have been dead for a long time<sup>28</sup>

Kane's poetic writing brings forth the experiences of alienation and the loss of will to live – and the heightened, painful experiences of hopelessness that result as the world seems to offer no more possibilities: “No hope No hope No hope No hope No hope No hope No hope”.<sup>29</sup> The narrating I also describes cutting her/himself and pays attention to the ways depression medication changes her/his body. The general experience of depression is closely tied to changes in bodily being – and articulated for example in the image of the body as an “alien carcass”.

Vaara, on the other hand, portrays how corporeal experiences are connected to the efforts of staying alive. The narrator tries to control her life by controlling her body: “I am tired, but I have to go skiing. / Maria says: –You have to ski,

27 Cf. Fuchs 2013a.

28 Kane 2001: 214.

29 Ibid.: 218.

you have to fast, you have to lose weight.”<sup>30</sup> The ability to control one’s body is depicted as a chance for hope (in this sense depression comes close to eating disorders). Yet, on the other side of these efforts of control is the loss of all meaning: “– It does not matter, nothing matters, I do not care.”<sup>31</sup>

The embodied cognitive view of the human mind offers a clearer understanding of these kinds of experiences and of the ways one’s body, mind and the social world are intertwined. In addition, it helps us to understand how these experiences can be conveyed to other people. When we listen to others, we are moved by them, and we may even bodily imitate what is being told. We are also moved by absent or imagined others through texts: writing, especially the emotional writing of depression narratives, becomes expressive of others’ experiences. This is particularly clear in texts like Kane’s and Vaara’s, which deal with phenomena such as changes in bodily experiences and heightened negative emotions, and use different poetic and narrative strategies to evoke affective resonance in their readers.<sup>32</sup>

## WRITING DEPRESSION

Humans have a tendency to attribute experiences to other people and other animate and inanimate creatures.<sup>33</sup> We also quite easily find expressions of feelings, affects and emotions in written texts. As anthropologist Niko Besnier aptly puts it, “affect permeates all levels of linguistic and communicative structures, all utterances, and all communicative contexts”.<sup>34</sup> Narrative texts are able to tap into

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30 Vaara 1974: 44: “Maria sanoo: –Sinun on pakko hiihtää, pakko paastota, pakko laittua”.

31 Ibid: 62: “–Se on yhdentekevää, kaikki on yhdentekevää, minä en välitä”.

32 Also neurocognitive research suggests that language is connected to bodily experiences: listening to stories activates some of the same neurological processes as telling them (cf. Hydén 2013: 235).

33 Cf. Colombetti 2014a: 178.

34 Besnier 1990: 437. Developmental psychologists suggest that language is grounded in early embodied interactions between the infant and the caregiver: in affect attunement, or in the “cross-modal matching of vocalizations and bodily movements in terms of rhythm and intensity”. Cf. Stern 1985; Colombetti 2014b. Prelinguistic processes also appear in language, in phenomena like rhythm and melody. This is most visible in face-to-face encounters, in speech prosody and gestures. It is perhaps less visible in

readers' bodily and affective background by soliciting our tendency to attribute and simulate experiences, as proposed by cognitive narratologists.<sup>35</sup> Depression writing may invite us to re-enact affective states which are a part of our past bodily, perceptual and emotional experiences, and writing can also point to experiences that are perhaps unfamiliar to readers. In the following, I will look at the ways Kane and Vaara evoke experiences of depression in their writing by manipulating the temporal and spatial structure and perspectives of their narratives, and by using emotive words, bodily metaphors and images, as well as different para- and extralinguistic means to create affective resonance in their readers.

The verbalization of emotions like shame and guilt is one powerful way to evoke experiences of distress. We can for example recall Kane's repetitive "Shame shame shame. / Drown in your fucking shame"<sup>36</sup> or Vaara's "-Maria, it would be better if you were dead, one of the Scattered said."<sup>37</sup> In both texts, the emotive words and the second person is used to create vivid accounts of self-accusations. At the same time, the "you" also addresses the readers – inviting them to take the other's perspective and perhaps evoking similar experiences in them.

The invitations for the readers to interact with the texts are visible also in the descriptions of experiences of loss and pain. Kane shows this in a particularly vivid manner in an early scene where the narrating I seems to be recollecting a past event:

It wasn't for long, I wasn't there long. But drinking bitter black coffee I catch that medicinal smell in a cloud of ancient tobacco and something touches me in that still sobbing place and a wound from two years ago opens like a cadaver and a long buried shame roars its foul decaying grief.

[...]

I trusted you, I loved you and it's not losing you that hurts me, but your bare-faced fucking falsehoods that masquerade as medical notes.<sup>38</sup>

The memory is induced by a sensory experience (smelling coffee), and the powerful bodily similes and metaphors ("like a cadaver", "long buried shame roars

non-poetic or non-narrative written texts, but again, extremely visible in poems and stories.

35 Cf. Caracciolo 2014.

36 Kane 2001: 209.

37 "-Maria, sinun olisi parasta olla kuollut, irrallinen sanoi" (Vaara 1974: 57).

38 Kane 2001: 208-210.

its foul decaying grief") capture the physical experiences of shame, grief and loss. The text portrays how the smell transports the narrating I to the past experience, and the bodily images and the curses evoke the experience of distress. The unsettling effect is also strengthened by the syntax – by Kane's long, exhausting sentences. Even though the main aim of Kane's text is to portray deep depression, these words depicting pain and grief are likely to resonate with anyone who has experienced love and loss, whether they have experiences of depression or not.<sup>39</sup>

Another dominating feature in Kane's and Vaara's texts is their fragmentation, which leaves a lot of room for readers to fill in the gaps with their own experiences and emotional reactions. Fragmentation is visible on the story-level (it is often difficult for the reader to make distinctions between what happens in the actual world of the text, and what is remembered, imagined or perhaps hallucinated), but also on the material, textual level in both texts. Vaara, for example, uses typographical changes and spaces in a scene just before the narrating I falls into psychosis. As in the previous example from Kane, in Vaara's novel this climactic scene reveals how the feelings of deep loss and pain are connected to the loss of another person, the therapist Johannes:

It is dark.

–Could someone please help me?

Maria has gone away, I have gone away. The others have come.

#### JOHANNES HAS GONE SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY<sup>40</sup>

Vaara's narrating I suggests repeatedly during the novel that her life is tied to Johannes, who now seems to have abandoned her.<sup>41</sup> After this scene, the actual world of the text disappears and the second part of the novel consists of short hallucinatory stories and is mostly controlled by the solipsistic view-point of the hallucinating, narrating I. In the end, however, there is at least some hope of

39 Cf. Ovaska 2016: 5; Greig 2001: xvii. Kane's narrator-protagonist also repeatedly challenges diagnostic categories and binary distinctions like the "ill" and the "healthy": "I am not ill. I am depressed. Depression is anger" (Kane 2001: 212).

40 "Pimeää. / –Eikö joku voisi vielä auttaa minua? // Maria on mennyt pois, minä olen mennyt pois. Ne toiset ovat tulleet. // JOHANNES ON MENNYT JONNEKIN KAUAS POIS" (Vaara 1974: 63).

41 This is the narrating I's interpretation of the situation, but it becomes clear to the readers that Johannes is actually only on vacation.

recovery, as the narrating I finally breaks out of psychosis. She has “gone through” her “dirty legends”,<sup>42</sup> and the novel ends with a scene where Maria is shown to reach Johannes again: “I hear Johannes’ voice on the phone”.<sup>43</sup>

Kane’s performance text, on the other hand, ends with a scene that can be interpreted as suicide.<sup>44</sup> The narrating I has – like Vaara’s Maria – gone through her/his story with the therapist, and although we do not get a reliable picture of what has happened between them, it seems that there is no hope of recovery – not even though s/he states that “I have no desire for death / no suicide ever had.”<sup>45</sup> Directly following these words, in the final lines of the text, Kane creates an effect of movement through typography and repetition. The “falling” words express the disappearing subjectivity:

watch me vanish

watch me

vanish

watch me

watch me

watch<sup>46</sup>

As suggested, gaps and fragmentariness invite readers to interact with the text, and para- and extralinguistic elements like typography and prosody evoke emotional intensity and movement. The repetition of the “falling” words on the page casts a calm, melancholic tone. The reader of the text (or the performance audience) is once again directly addressed and invited to witness the disappearance of the narrating I, and a connection between the protagonist and the audience is created.

In a similar fashion, the narrating I in Vaara’s final chapter addresses her readers:

42 As suggested in another part of the autobiographical trilogy (cf. Vaara 1980).

43 “Puhelimesta kuuluu Johanneksen ääni” (Vaara 1974: 272).

44 Cf. Ovaska 2016.

45 Kane 2001: 244.

46 Ibid.

I do not know if this is the final chapter.

Maria does not know either.

Johannes does not know.

None of us knows at the moment.

At the very least none of you.<sup>47</sup>

In Vaara's ending, the narrating I reminds her readers of the impossibility of experiencing another person's experiences: it is not possible to feel what another is feeling. Yet, this does not mean that we would be unable to empathize with others: we can connect with others through our shared world and through our own bodily and affective experiences and histories.<sup>48</sup> Kane's narrating I makes the same point, emphasizing the ultimate blessing in the difference between the self and the other:

Despair propels me to suicide  
Anguish for which doctors can find no cure  
Nor care to understand  
I hope you never understand  
Because I like you.<sup>49</sup>

## CONCLUSION: MAKING SENSE

As mentioned, there are problems in the autobiographical testimonies of depression due to the distortion of memories and the ineffable nature of the experiences. However, both Kane's and Vaara's (auto)fictional writing actually uses these problems for its own ends. The problems are thematized, as we have seen, and there are different techniques and literary devices through which Kane and Vaara invite their readers to enact these experiences.

The descriptions, verbalizations and images discussed earlier solicit readers' experiences and memories of loss and pain. Different discursive and structural choices trigger readers' experiences of perceiving, imagining and remembering, as well as their experiences of the ways the borders between perceiving, imagin-

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47 "Minä en tiedä, onko tämä viimeinen luku. / Mariakaan ei tiedä. / Johannes ei tiedä. / Kukaan meistä ei sitä talla hetkellä tiedä. / Kaikkein vähimmin joku teista" (Vaara 1974: 266).

48 On empathy, cf. Gallagher/Zahavi 2012; Ratcliffe 2015.

49 Kane 2001: 239.

ing and remembering are sometimes blurred. Emotive words, unsettling images and bodily metaphors evoke spontaneous corporeal reactions. In addition, non-verbal elements, such as typographical changes, gaps (extralinguistic features) and word repetition, alliteration, and prosody (paralinguistic features), solicit readers' kinesthetic experiences. Both Kane and Vaara use bodily and affective metaphors and images as well as structural and typographical changes to evoke the physical and kinesthetic character of affective experiences: to create tension and movement.

These kinds of affective and bodily phenomena are familiar to everybody and they are at work in different kinds of narrative and poetic texts, but they often become highlighted in depression writing. Vaara's and Kane's texts tap into our most basic affective experiences and forms of sense making, evoking experiences of alterations in affectivity, and thus creating unsettling experiential worlds – but also meaning. Depression may be a state where the meaning of life is lost, but Kane's and Vaara's writing is all but meaningless.

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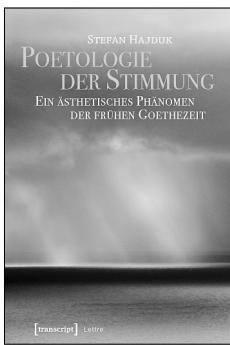
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