

Emotions and the Process of Writing

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1.

In recent years, the topic of emotion has been widely discussed in literary and cultural studies as well as in art theory.¹ 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

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.² 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.³ For literary studies, this demands an understanding

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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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

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”.⁶ 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

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*.”⁷ Thus ‘truth’ is the formal object of ‘conviction’, ‘desire’ that of ‘wishing’. However, so-called “paradigm scenarios”⁸ 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.⁹

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.

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 unsemanticized 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.¹⁰

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

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 writing¹¹ 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.¹² 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

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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).¹⁵

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).¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ This entails that the writ-

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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