

**GENERAL TOPIC: The Emotions and the Arts in Nineteenth-century English Literature**

**SPECIFIC THEME: Literary Representations of the Emotions in the Arts**

**Principal Researcher:** Paula Alexandra Guimarães

Centre for Humanistic Studies (University of Minho)

**Introductory Remarks**

Although generated by neurobiological processes, emotions (*pathe, affectus*) also consist in a process of appraisal and individual judgement, which depends on social and cultural norms and individual proclivities. As they heavily influence social relations and the behaviour of individuals and groups, emotions are socially relevant and, consequently, subject to scrutiny, judgement, and normative intervention. They fulfil social functions and follow social rules. Hence, they are potentially subject to change and are shaped by the society in which they operate. Although it can be argued that emotions are a universal phenomenon, they do have a history and are a very important subject of historical research. This applies both to emotions closely connected with socio-cultural norms (e.g. friendship, pity, honour, shame, pride) and to 'basic emotions' (e.g. fear, hope, joy, grief, disgust, despair, love, lust, envy).

Emotions are important both as subject and as background of textual sources. Most (if not all) textual and pictorial sources at our disposal are directly or indirectly generated by emotions, display emotions or aim to arouse emotions. Admittedly, the emotional background is more evident and significant in some sources than in others. The study of the emotions is an emergent interdisciplinary field, which means that scholars from different disciplines (mainly literature, history, philosophy and cultural geography) are interested in the subject, and come together to work out how to discuss it.

And what is the relationship between the arts and the emotions? From the very earliest times, philosophers, psychologists and artists themselves have reflected upon this issue, without reaching a total consensus.

According to Jenefer Robinson (*Deeper than Reason. Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*, O.U.P., 2005), one of the main reasons for this was the very little knowledge of what exactly emotions are and how they operate (1). After analysing several different theories over the last thirty years (namely, cognitive and philosophical approaches), Robinson concludes that none is fully complete or accurate and she establishes a new theory of emotion, drawing on experimental psychology and neuroscience, where it “is treated essentially as a *process*, in which a special kind of automatic ‘affective appraisal’ induces characteristic physiological and behavioural changes and is succeeded by [...] ‘cognitive monitoring’ of the situation.”(3) This process involves “constant feedback from each of its elements to the others” and cognitive monitoring “assesses such matters as how much control one has over the situation” and “is often marked by a conscious judgement cataloguing the emotion in recollection” (97). But Robinson insists that if we want to fully understand the nature and follow the progress of an emotion process, we should avoid “the generalizations of philosophers and psychologists, and turn instead to the detailed studies of emotion that we find in great literature.” (99)

The arts represent, express, suggest, and provoke emotions. Novels, tragedies, comedies, poetry, as well as the visual arts, depict human actions, sentiments, and values. Paradoxically, for several decades literary and art critics have not been interested in the most obvious dimension of literature and the arts, that of affectivity. Since the early 1980's, several disciplines have studied the emotions and their role in life and in the arts and, at last, literary and art criticisms have also started to be interested in the emotions and tried to connect with the theoretical and experimental issues brought up by other fields of knowledge. In discussing the link between art and affectivity, we might consider the artist's aims and/or the emotional effects of artistic works on the readers or spectators. It was customary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to consider that art can “instruct and amuse” at the same time. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, emotional identification seemed most often the best and almost necessary type of

aesthetic experience. But, at the same time, artists rejected the Romantic identification and called for distance; and, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several artists in various traditions looked for a non-emotional art. What does the rejection of emotions mean in artistic terms?

This project will explore the ways in which nineteenth-century authors, artists, sculptors and musicians imagined and represented emotion, and how writers and critics conceptualised the emotional aspects of aesthetic response. It aims to map the state of the field in this growing area of interest for nineteenth-century scholars by locating recent interdisciplinary work on sentimentality and art and writing and the senses within wider debates about the relationship between psychology and aesthetics in the long-nineteenth century. How did Victorian artists represent feeling and how were these feelings aestheticised? What rhetorical strategies did Victorian writers use to figure aesthetic response? What expressive codes and conventions were familiar to the Victorians? Which nineteenth-century scientific developments affected artistic production and what impact did these have on affective reactions?

### **SOME BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE EMOTIONS AND THE ARTS**

Borod, Jean C. (ed.), *The Neuropsychology of Emotion*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Brady, Emily and Arto Happala, "Melancholy as an Aesthetic Emotion", *Contemporary Aesthetics ...* (Online)

Ekman, Paul and Richard J. Davidson (eds). *The Nature of Emotion. Fundamental Questions*. Series in Affective Science. New York and Oxford: OUP, 1994.

Fantini, Bernardino et al. (eds.), *On Resentment: Past and Present*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013.

Harré, Rom and W. Gerrod Parrott (eds.), *The Emotions. Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions*, London California and New Delhi, SAGE Publications, 1996.

Hogan, Patrick Colm, "Fictions and Feelings: On the Place of Literature in the Study of Emotion", *Emotion Review*, vol. 2, No. 2 (Apr. 2010), 184-195.

Illouz E., D. Gilon and M. Shachak, *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*, Springer 2014. ("Emotions and Cultural Theory")

Izard, Carroll E., *The Psychology of Emotions*. New York and London: Plenum Press, 1991.

Juslin, Patrik and John Sloboda, *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

Karandashev, Victor, *Romantic Love in Cultural Contexts*, Springer 2017.

Leary, David E., *Metaphors in the History of Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Lemmings, David and William Reddy (eds.), *Palgrave Studies in the History of Emotions*, Palgrave Macmillan, 8 volumes, 2014-2016.

Manstead, Antony et al, *Feelings and Emotions: The Amsterdam Symposium*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Matravers, Derek. *Art and Emotion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

McSweeney, Kerry, *Supreme Attachments. Studies in Victorian Love Poetry*. The Nineteenth Century Series. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998.

Nussbaum, Martha Craven, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Oatley, Keith and Jennifer M. Jenkins. *Understanding Emotions*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

Pinch, Adela, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen*, Stanford University Press, 1996.

Plamper, Jan, *The History of Emotions. An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Clarendon, 2015 (translated from the German, Siedler Verlag, 2012)

Robinson, Jenefer. *Deeper than Reason. Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music and Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.

Ruberg, Willemijn and Kristine Steenbergh (eds). *Sexed Sentiments. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Gender and Emotion*. Vol. 34 of *Critical Studies*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011.

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Theories of Emotions" (May 25, 2006, rev. Oct. 15, 2010).

Strongman, K. T.. *The Psychology of Emotion. Theories of Emotion in Perspective*. Fourth Edition. Chichester, New York et al: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1998.

Other Research Resources:

[The Histories of Emotion Blog](#)

[Historical epistemology: emotional styles and communities in the 19th and 20th centuries](#)

[Cultural History of Emotions in Premodernity Network \(CHEP\)](#)

[The Centre for the History of Emotions at Queen Mary University of London](#) ([Director Thomas Dixon](#))

[International Society for Research on Emotion \(ISRE\)](#)

[Emotions Studies, Loyola University Chicago](#)

[Society for Emotion and Attachment Studies \(SEAS\)](#)

Journals:

[\*Attachment and Human Development Journal\*](#) (the journal of both IAN and SEAS)

[\*Emotion Review\*](#)

[\*Emotion, Space, and Society\*](#)

[\*Passions in Context: An International Journal for the History and Theory of Emotions\*](#)

Press Series:

[Palgrave Studies in the History of Emotions, Palgrave Macmillan](#), eds. [David Lemmings](#) and [William Reddy](#)

[History of Emotions, University of Illinois Press](#), eds. [Peter N. Stearns](#) and [Susan Matt](#)

[Emotions in History, Oxford University Press](#), eds. [Thomas Dixon](#) and [Ute Frevert](#)