

Conference Report on "Writing Emotions. Literature as Practice (19th to 21st century)" International Conference

Doctoral Programme Culture, Text, Act(ion) - European PhD-Net Literary and Cultural Studies, 18-20 May 2016, University of Graz

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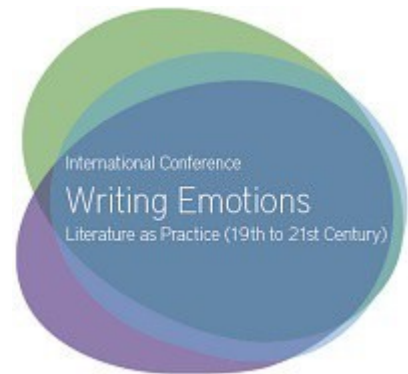
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Conference Report on "Writing Emotions. Literature as Practice (19th to 21st century)" International Conference

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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? What kind of theoretical models do we have for analysing forms of emotion in modern literature? At the conference "Writing Emotions", international researchers in literature and culture studies aimed at answering these and other central questions and presented their latest findings and theories on the thematic field of emotions. The conference facilitated a discussion of the complex link between aesthetic and non-aesthetic emotional patterns and components by focusing on the process and practice of writing. The diverse topics presented ranged from jealousy in English Renaissance drama to depression in modernist Finnish literature and *The Twilight Saga* as an emotional cultural symptom. The 19 presentations and two keynotes provided fruitful input for engaging debates.



On May 18th, the first day of the conference, several presentations concentrated on psychological phenomena in literature, namely psychotic writing, autism, depression, and the concept of "cruel optimism". In the first panel, ANGELA CALDÉRON VILLARINO (Heidelberg) and INGEBORG JANDL (Graz) focused on literary texts from the 19th century: Angela Caldéron Villarino analysed the construction of Nerval's Aurélia as a form of autopoetic writing and Ingeborg Jandl linked the topic of the 'superfluous man' to the depiction of emotional distancing, as seen in works by Pushkin and Lermontov.

In the second panel, RIIKKA ROSSI (Helsinki) analysed Zola's poetics of disgust and demonstrated its connections to the contemporary discussion about naturalism and social problems. Her presentation led to an engaged discussion about the principles of naturalism and the question whether objective depiction is desirable in literature. ANNA OVASKA (Helsinki/Giessen) then discussed how an enactivist view on emotions, according to which affections are the basis for a person's relations to the world, can be used in literary studies; she then analysed the literary techniques used in Sarah Kane's *Psychosis* 4.48. MARIE DÜCKER

(Graz) showed how the young-adult novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is structured by a "cluster of promises" that are linked to the protagonist's psychological development.



In her keynote on the first evening, GESINE LENORE SCHIEWER (Bayreuth) presented her findings from interviews conducted with the author Michael Stavaric on the role of emotions in the writing process, the autobiographical aspects of writing and the writing techniques related to emotion. She linked these findings to ontogenetic processes involved in the development of emotions and stressed that interdisciplinary approaches are fundamental for further analyses of emotions.

On May 19th, the first panel centered on the relation of the writing process to the emotions in literary texts. LAURA OULANNE (Helsinki/Giessen) discussed the embodiment of the author and the agency linked to objects in Djuna Barnes's texts and showed how the author is implied from a constellation of agency within the text. YULIA MARFUTOVA (Münster) demonstrated how J.J. Engel's *Herr Lorenz Stark* is linked to the 18th-century discussion about the physiognomy and pathognomy of style, especially considering the problem that a portrait also depicts the portrayer. EVA FAUNER's (Graz/Giessen) presentation focused on a theoretical approach to the sound of writing and the implied emotions in audio-visual texts.

In contrast to the earlier panels, the next panel concentrated on the depiction of emotionlessness and silence. JULIA GRILLMAYR (Vienna) discussed how Jonathan Safran Foer's *A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease* provides a key for understanding Foer's fiction, as it presents symbols for the barely expressible remains of emotional utterance. TOM VANASSCHE (Freiburg) provided a critical approach to seemingly emotionless texts about the Holocaust, discussing the political implications of their use of language.

The afternoon-session started with a panel of historical views on the writing of emotions: EMANUEL STELZER (Bergamo/Giessen) gave insight into various kinds of jealousy in early modern English Drama. In an analysis of William Shakespeare's jealousy plays and Philip Massinger's *The Picture* he pointed out the influence of medical discourses on the generation and representation of emotions both in life and literary practices. ANGELA LOCATELLI (Bergamo) explored the correlation between emotion and religion by reading Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and William James. She dealt with the question of religious feelings as personal and cultural phenomena and compared them to secular emotions.

The next panel brought up the prevailing political dimensions in confronting writing and emotion: NORA BERNING (Giessen) analysed Rachel Kushner's Novel *The Flamethrowers* (2013) concerning the correlation between emotion, movement, politics, and identity and its impact on narrative structures. The following discussion centered on gender-specific aspects of emotional writing processes. SILKE JANDL (Graz) addressed emotionality in YouTube Vlogs (= video-blogs) and their capacity to authentically demonstrate strong emotions. The great effective power of Vlogs can be attributed to complex intermedial relations.

The last panel of the day offered perspectives on post- and non-human emotional spheres: In an analysis of Michel Houellebecq's *La possibilité d'une île* (2012) and Kaspar Colling Nielsen's

Den Danske Borgerkrig 2018-2024 (2013) SABINE SCHÖNFELLNER (Graz/Giessen) elaborated on the interplay of emotions and writing in posthuman fiction. HETA PYRHÖNEN (Helsinki) discussed the representation of intensive love in the Twilight-Saga by Stephenie Meyer. She explored how the emotions in fiction are transferred and incorporated into the reader's emotional reality.

Friday, May 20th, started with the second keynote by VERA NÜNNING (Heidelberg). Beginning with Virginia Woolf's statement that "writing is an act of communication", Vera Nünning pointed out the interfaces between narrative and emotion. She discussed the potential of literature for representing, evoking, and transforming emotions. The narrative turns the reader into a kind of co-worker who can experience fictional emotions in/as real life. Therefore, fiction can be considered a tool for feeling.

The first presentation of the conference's last panel took up the central idea of the previous keynote: PIRJO LYTIKÄINEN (Helsinki) discussed the textual evocation of emotions and provided a toolset for analysing emotion effects in Literature. ELISE NYKÄNEN (Helsinki) presented the special literary technique of provoking empathy, namely the affective strategies of writing guilt and shame in the narratives of the two moder-



nist authors Franz Kafka and Organisationsteam onlineKertuu-Kaarina Suosalmi. IOANNA KIPOUROU's (Graz/Giessen) paper addressed emotions as dynamic interdisciplinary instruments that mediate literary production and redefine cultural discourse within the framework of American literature. The following and final discussion lead to the conclusion that writing can happen everywhere. Its emotional impact cannot be restricted to pages and book covers – literature is truly a life-practice, which is in- and outside, before and after the text.