

## Comparing Emotions: Literary and Cultural Dynamics

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### ABSTRACT:

As Ruth Leys (2011) has noted, many of the conceptual conundrums surrounding, for instance, the distinction between emotion and affect are grounded in considering the latter as belonging to the pre-linguistic and autonomic realms and the former to the linguistic one. Within literary studies, narratology has taken up parts of this debate and has contributed to transcultural and transhistorical approaches to the study of the forms and structures through which emotions circulate beyond the verbal arts (cf. Hogan 2011). By envisioning an issue dedicated to the study of emotions as players in literary and cultural dynamics, our aim was not to solely focus on how literary scholars draw from psychology or cognitive science, but also to explore how literary works and non-fictional narratives address and represent issues related to emotions in aesthetic ways. In this respect, the issue positions literary and comparative studies as *loci* of research and reflection about emotions and thus as a field able to make original contributions to the affective turn. The articles gathered here showcase the diverse approaches available to tackle the study of emotions in literature and non-fictional narratives, and the various case studies encompass a wide range of periods, from the early modern age to contemporaneity.

## **RESUMO:**

Como Ruth Leys (2011) assinalou, muitas das quezílias conceptuais que envolvem, por exemplo, a distinção entre emoção e afecto têm origem na consideração deste último como pertencente ao domínio pré-linguístico e autónomo, e do primeiro como parte do domínio linguístico. No âmbito dos estudos literários, a narratologia tem-se arrogado de partes deste debate e contribuído para abordagens transculturais e trans-históricas no estudo das formas e estruturas através das quais as emoções circulam para além das artes verbais (cf. Hogan 2011). Ao conceber um número dedicado ao estudo das emoções como intervenientes nas dinâmicas literárias e culturais, o nosso objectivo não foi centrarmo-nos exclusivamente no modo como os estudiosos da literatura recorrem à psicologia ou à ciência cognitiva para explicar esses processos, mas também explorar de que modo as obras literárias e as narrativas não ficcionais abordam e representam questões relacionadas com as emoções através dos mecanismos da estética. Neste sentido, o número posiciona os estudos literários e comparatistas como *loci* de investigação e reflexão sobre as emoções, e, assim, como um campo capaz de oferecer contributos originais no âmbito do *affective turn*. Os artigos aqui reunidos evidenciam as diversas abordagens possíveis ao estudo das emoções na literatura e em narrativas não ficcionais, abrangendo estudos de caso que vão desde o início da idade moderna até à contemporaneidade.

## **KEYWORDS:**

emotion; affect; comparative studies; narrative

## **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

emoção; afecto; estudos comparatistas; narrativa

THE ENQUIRY into and the fascination with emotions has enjoyed a long-standing presence in literature and the arts, and has fostered multiple interdisciplinary dynamics between literary studies, philosophy, psychology and, more recently, cognitive science. While the Aristotelian take on poetics has generated a distinguished progeny, which can be found in a sustained scholarly interest in the effects of literature turned into the affects of literature, through studies on empathy (Nussbaum 1995), desire (Brooks 1995), disgust (Menninghaus 2002) or emotional protection (Türk 2011), other related branches sprang with equal vigour concerning strategies of codification and representation of emotions in the arts and literature, for instance, in the wake of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Laocoön* (1766), or the inquiry into the nature of the aesthetic experience encapsulated in the notion of the sublime. Still the question that William James posed in his famous 1884 essay "What is an Emotion?" remains open for debate.

In fact, the American psychologist set the tone for interdisciplinary thinking about emotions and for their centrality in western conceptions of the self and within the "aesthetic sphere of the mind" (James 1884, 188). As William M. Reddy has argued, "in the western conception, emotions are involuntary, inherently pleasant or unpleasant, and thus they orient the self to perform certain actions or to maintain certain dispositions" (2001, 315-316). However, recent scholarship has veered our attention to emotion and forms of affectivity towards new questionings that are no longer restricted to challenging the Cartesian dualism or centred exclusively on human subjectivity, probing instead to also consider what Jacques Rancière (2000) called "le partage du sensible" as equally applicable to matter and nature, thus giving rise to figures and formulations such as "vibrant matter" (Bennett 2010) or "viscerality" (Massumi 2002). Others, especially within sociology and the political sciences, have emphasised the role of cultural frames for thinking about emotions at the collective level, like Sara Ahmed, who contends in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* that by tracking "how emotions circulate between bodies, examining how they 'stick' as well as move" (2014, 4), it becomes possible to identify "affective economies" (2014, 46), an exchange arena between the individual and the social.

The *tertium quid* of these variegated appraisals of the relations established between emotion and matter/body would be language; an aspect which indeed turns out to constitute the virtual unity of the articles gathered in this issue of *Compendium*. In fact, as Ruth Leys (2011) has noted, many of the conceptual conundrums surrounding, for instance, the distinction between emotion and affect are grounded in considering the latter as belonging to the pre-linguistic and autonomic realms and the former to the linguistic one. Within literary studies, narratology has taken up parts of this debate and has contributed to transcultural and transhistorical approaches to the study of the forms and structures through which emotions circulate beyond the verbal arts (cf. Hogan 2011). By envisioning an issue dedicated to the study of emotions as players in literary and cultural dynamics, our aim was not to solely focus on how literary scholars draw from psychology or cognitive science, but also to explore how literary works and non-fictional narratives address and represent issues related to emotions in aesthetic ways. In this respect,

the issue positions literary and comparative studies as *loci* of research and reflection about emotions and thus as a field able to make original contributions to the affective turn.

The articles gathered here showcase the diverse approaches available to tackle the study of emotions in literature and non-fictional narratives, and the various case studies encompass a wide range of periods, from the early modern age to contemporaneity. The first article places the chronicles of the Indies by Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés and Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in the tradition of the *devotio moderna*. Dirk Brunke argues that this religious strain of thought functioned as a cultural framework, which allowed for the setting of imperial travelogues as narratives structured to induce compassion. The permutation to the political arena, Brunke argues, corresponds to the functionalization of emotion in favour of the Spanish colonial project and its detachment from the aim of consolidation of faith and edification, or from the humanistic curiosity. Furthermore, Brunke's analysis of the chronicles conceptualizes compassion not only as an intercultural and interpersonal emotion that is evoked to calibrate the colonial encounter, but also as a rhetorical device of persuasion targeted at the Monarch for monetary favour and at the subjugation of the indigenous peoples of America.

Grounding her analysis in the close reading of nineteenth-century Russian and Ukrainian prose narratives and narrative poems (Fiodor Dostoevsky, Taras Shevchenko and Lessia Ukrainka), Nikol Dziub explores representations of the lived experience of exile and incarceration as understudied scenarios to investigate how emotions are codified in collective and personal captivity narratives. Thus, the relationship between language, territory and emotion is articulated as a key aspect to understand the intertwining of centre and periphery power relations during the aegis of the Russian Empire, which becomes simultaneously visible and fraught in the strategies of self-expression and self-representation used to navigate the severed community. Dziub brings to the fore the carceral emotions of melancholy, nostalgia and indifference, which arise in the accounts of the three writers under scrutiny. Here, the author also highlights and compares the diversified narrational tools deployed to mediate these negative emotions, such as depersonalization or the doubling of the enunciative subject, the spatialization of emotion and the tensions between heteroglossia and exophony.

In “Sobre uma conversa com os intestinos: ler Jung a ler Joyce”, Miguel Ramallete Gomes converses with Carl Jung's often disparaged essay on *Ulysses*, where the psychoanalyst seems to struggle with hermeneutic strategies, to problematise modes of describing and accounting for the representation of the body in some critical approaches privileging symbolic readings of it. In fact, Ramallete Gomes maintains that Joycean representations of the body are better understood outside any kind of cartesian dualism and may benefit from thinking of bodily agency as affect instead. In other words, the author identifies a “visceral perception” at work that cannot be simply equated with emotional expression or a script, and places it in the scope of a voiceful but ultimately non-communicative aesthetic.

The fourth article deals with scenes of reading and writing in selected *œuvres* by Margerite Duras and Pascal Quignard. Rita Rieger discusses the role of emotions such as loneliness, fear and despair in the representation of writing and reading

subjectivities. Framing her analysis along the lines of Patrick Colm Hogan's notion of prototypical and paradigmatic narratives as well as the narrative basis of emotions (Voss), Rieger unveils the tensions amidst Duras' and Quignard's (auto-reflexive) depictions of authorship, readership and agency.

In this issue's last article, Agustín Corti focuses on intermedial storytelling and develops a conceptual model to address the narrative function of emotional events in graphic novels. Corti illustrates his proposition through the analysis of some strategies of representation and evocation of fear and anxiety in Mayte Alvarado's graphic novel *La Isla* (2021). Thus, Corti explores the ambiguities that infuse visual cognitive metaphors as vehicles of emotional states in intermedial narratives, and argues for the necessity to encompass the diverse narrative levels in the appraisal of the role of emotions both in the story world and in discourse. In so doing, Corti describes an intricate narrative construct where the characters' behaviour may not always be conducive to the unambiguous display of an emotional state, and interrogates cultural schemas underlying the codification and interpretation of emotions.

The final section includes reviews of a selection of recent thought-provoking publications grouped under the aegis of the affective turn, but each privileging a different approach and object of analysis.

The editors of this issue would like to thank the authors for providing fascinating insights into their research, the reviewers of recent publications for broadening the scope of the subject area, and the anonymous peer reviewers for generously sharing their expertise. Special thanks go to Amândio Reis, the editor-in-chief of *Compendium*, for his valuable assistance during the editing process.

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