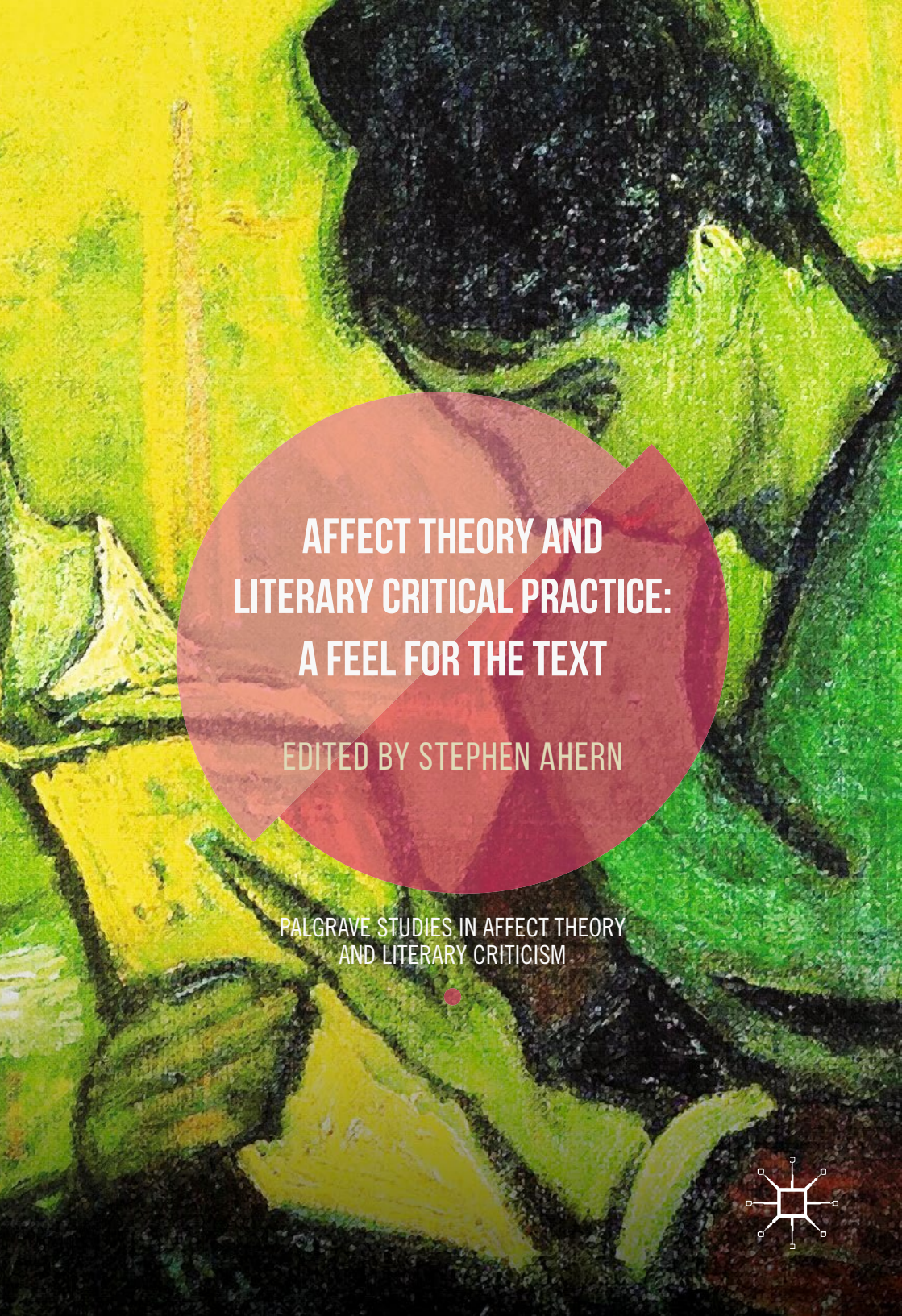

AFFECT THEORY AND LITERARY CRITICAL PRACTICE: A FEEL FOR THE TEXT

EDITED BY STEPHEN AHERN

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Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice

A Feel for the Text

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Palgrave Studies in Affect Theory and Literary Criticism
ISBN 978-3-319-97267-1 ISBN 978-3-319-97268-8 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97268-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018961609

Cover credit: Vincent van Gogh, “The Novel Reader”/Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

My thanks go to series editors Adam Frank and Joel Faflak for seeing the potential in this project from the start, and to Ryan Jenkins at Palgrave Macmillan for encouragement in the early stages. I am grateful to commissioning editor Allie Troyanos and her colleagues Rachel Jacobe and Emily Janakiram for shepherding the volume through to production with efficiency and grace. Andrea Warner, my research assistant at my home institution, Acadia University, helped proof individual chapters with care, and Noeline Bridge has produced a first-rate index. Research funding from both Acadia University and the Acadia University Faculty Association allowed me to attend the conferences at which I first heard and was excited by the work of some of the contributors included in the present volume (my thanks in particular to organizers of "The Affect Project" for hosting a wonderfully productive conference in Manitoba in 2015).

The ways in which this volume came together demonstrate the embeddedness of us all in networks of relation. Contributors coalesced into a virtual community scattered across five countries, one forged in the many back-and-forths focused on producing a final text that could do justice to the complexity and promise of recent theorizations of affect. I thank them for their insight, dedication, and patience. Finally, all scholars are shaped by the professional and affective communities in which they work and live; I have been profoundly lucky to have at the center of my communities my colleague and life partner Jessica Slights, to whom with love I dedicate my contribution here.

—Stephen Ahern

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Katherine G. Sutherland retired recently after a 25-year career of teaching and administration at Thompson Rivers University (Canada). She continues to do research and write about affect theory, postcolonial literature, and motorcycle literature from her home on Vancouver Island.

Neil Vallelly recently completed his PhD as Commonwealth Scholar at the University of Otago (New Zealand) in conjunction with Shakespeare's Globe. His research spans the fields of literary studies and continental philosophy, with an emphasis on phenomenology and critical theory. He has articles forthcoming in *Angelaki* and *Poetics Today*, as well as forthcoming book chapters on forced displacement and suicide in public (co-authored with Catherine Dale). He is completing a book-length manuscript on the notion of futility in contemporary capitalist societies.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Feel for the Text

Stephen Ahern

When it comes to accounting for affect, it's not yet known what a critic can do. In representations of embodied agents literary texts have long strived to capture human experience in its multivalent forms. Recent theorizations of affect have made us more attuned to the passing modulations of bodies affected by and affecting the others they engage with and the environments they inhabit. The challenge for critics is how to develop a critical practice that accounts for the importance of affective phenomena in the psychological models and rhetorical strategies deployed by poets, dramatists, and novelists to depict the forces that move characters to feel, to think, to act. Also requiring attention are occasions when affect breaks free of the text or script to circulate through readers or audience members in ways that are hard to predict yet palpable nonetheless. The essays collected here seek to move forward our understanding of how particular affects, as well as affect conceived more broadly as modulated intensities, can determine character development and narrative form, and can influence those who come to texts open to the promise of worldmaking they offer.

Literary critics have of course long been interested in the role played by emotion in the motivation of fictional character or the response of reader

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S. Ahern (ed.), *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice*,
Palgrave Studies in Affect Theory and Literary Criticism,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97268-8_1

or audience; in the Western tradition this interest goes back at least as far as Aristotle and Longinus. Yet the particular territory on which our current intervention hopes to make a mark is quite wide open and sparsely populated. For though a turn to affect has gripped disciplines such as social psychology, human geography, and political theory over the past two decades or so, interest in affect as embodied experience, as analytic category, as interpretive paradigm has developed more slowly in literary studies. The watershed year of 1995 saw the publication of foundational texts in what have become the two primary lines, perhaps now even traditions, of affect theory: Brian Massumi's meditation on affect's autonomy as prepersonal intensity, influenced by philosopher Gilles Deleuze (himself indebted to Baruch Spinoza); and Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank's interest in social scripts that are driven by biologically hardwired affect-pairs, according to the primary affects theory of psychologist Silvan Tomkins.

Given that professors of literature initiated what has become an explosion of interest in affect, it's remarkable how few works of literary criticism take an approach explicitly informed by the insights of affect theory; at the time of writing this amounts to a scattering of articles and a handful or two of books. We do have an excellent overview of key principles and challenges in the new *Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* (Wehrs and Blake 2017; see also Hogan 2016) as well as a few recent guides to model in a self-reflexive way how we might attend to affect: in the Tomkins line, for example, Adam Frank's development of a model of "transferential poetics" (2015); or in what we might call the Massumi–Deleuzian process-philosophical line, Ilai Rowner's exploration of the significance of "the event" in relation to literature (2015). But we are in the early stages of a field of inquiry still in the process of becoming, a time of exciting potential as new lines of pursuit open to those attuned to the affective charge of the text. And so the chapters in the present volume develop novel ways to read texts ranging from the medieval to the postmodern, drawing on the insights of scholars working in affect studies across many disciplines. In the midst of developing readings of texts, the author of each chapter here reflects on the value of affect theory to literary critical practice, asking: What explanatory power is affect theory affording me here as a critic? What can the insights of the theory help me *do* with a text?

Contributors here limn the contours of affective experience figured forth in the literary text, those intensities of being that often escape the attention of the critic. In so doing they keep in mind questions central to the project of accounting for affect:

- What are the limits of representation, especially as regards fictional characters by definition removed from the quickenings of affect that impinge on physical bodies?
- What are the sensual resonances, the aesthetic engagements, the affective investments of readers and writers?
- What identities, what affective assemblages—queer, hybrid, transnational—take shape in the spaces opened by heightened emotion?

While keeping these questions in mind contributors consider how attending to the circulation of affective energies might deepen—perhaps even move us beyond—the insights of cultural materialist, feminist, or postcolonial readings. And at the most metacritical level, we consider to what extent a turn to affect could or should supplant the turn to discourse in critical theory, and to ponder the implications for political critique of calls to embrace a more reparative project by theorists who tend to conceive of affect as pre-cognitive, non-representational, and thus resistant to analysis.

Notes on Method I: Histories of Emotion—And of Affect/s, Too?

Our hope in assembling this volume is that readers will find much of interest even in chapters that take up literature from outside the historical period or national literature that is their primary interest. Taken together the chapters model productive ways to bring the insights of recent theory to bear on literary texts, uncovering potentially transhistorical structures in the operations of affect while at the same time situating readings in the context of historical determinants such as culture and genre. All this to help us see the big picture: how the workings of affect—whether in moments when prepersonal intensities are actualized, or in narrative trajectories shaped by social scripts—drive formation of character and plot across 600 years of literature written in English.

In so doing we aim to complicate the presentism that marks much recent scholarship in affect studies. As Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi note in the Introduction to their collection *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts* (2017), investigations of the circulations of affective phenomena and their material implications have tended to be firmly rooted in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, and more narrowly to be written from a perspective that assumes a particular model of selfhood and society and is critical of a

neoliberal politics specific to the modern West (2–4). This scholarship on the cultural politics of emotion and affect proper has been groundbreaking, whether primarily concerned with the socio-anthropological, such as studies by Sarah Ahmed (2004), Kathleen Stewart (2007), and Lauren Berlant (2011), or—a much smaller corpus—with the literary, such as by Heather Love (2007), Rachel Greenwald Smith (2015), Pieter Vermeulen (2015), Jean-Michel Rabaté (2016), and Marta Figlerowicz (2017). Building on this conceptual groundwork yet seeking to take a longer view, many of the chapters in the present volume are informed by a history of emotions approach that allows us to register changes in conceptions of affective agency over time. An added benefit to such an approach is that it affords a measure of critical distance on the assumptions that underlie affect studies research whose object of study is us, now, as embodied agents forming social assemblages still in the process of becoming.

Such a historically aware perspective is crucial since without being attuned to changes in conceptions of affective agency, critics tend to read back into earlier periods a *mentalité* that was not in place at the time. So Earla Wilputte writes in *Passion and Language in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (2014) of the attempt by early novelist Eliza Haywood "to develop a language for the passions that clearly conveys the deepest felt emotions," those "innermost feelings" (4). Yet as historian Thomas Dixon (2003) has shown, the conception of *emotions* in a modern sense does not emerge until 100 years later, in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Rather, still dominant was a vision of *the passions* as forces often outside one's control. In the world of early romance novels popularized by Haywood and others, seduction begins with a process of unconscious influence that bypasses the rational mind; the transmission of affect happens without warning or intent, as characters are drawn involuntarily to one another (Ahern 2007). This is the model of "unfelt affect" that James Noggle (2015) has recently shown governs all forms of writing in the eighteenth century, a model revealed in the prevalence throughout the period of adverbs such as "insensibly" and "imperceptibly." And so more accurate would be to understand the model of affective agency at work in early modern texts such as Haywood's as one not of interiority but of subjectivity, in the true sense of the word: the state of being subject to forces outside one's control. To grasp the import of a protagonist's struggles to govern their errant passions is to see that what's playing out demonstrates the most fundamental insight of affect theory: that no embodied being is independent, but rather is *affected by* and *affects* other bodies, profoundly

and perpetually as a condition of being in the world. Having an understanding of the workings of affect can help us avoid anachronism by not reading into a text a model of selfhood that was not available at the time. And it can help us recognize in early texts what *is* there: something that looks very like the forceful impingements on thinking-feeling bodies that Massumi et al. describe. Affect theory offers up to the critic rich accounts of the phenomenology of felt experience that can help us better grasp what's at stake in early modern depictions of human agents under pressure from passions that rule more often than does reason.

Taken together the contributions to this volume assemble a conception of affective agency across a broad swath of cultural history. They identify texts that body forth affective intensities or script behavior, and unpack representative passages to plumb the operations of what can seem just beyond reach, to characters in the grip of affect's effects and to readers beckoned to share in a worlding whose affective charge is indicated through gesture, mood, atmosphere. In a sense the chapters amount to a longitudinal study of affect's force through history, collectively showing continuities as well as disruptions in a vision of embodied being whose contours—once we know to reach out and feel for them—are discernable through time. Continuities are to be expected if affect/s in practice follow the theory: for their logics are those of laws of nature, whether the physics of bodies in motion or the biological imperatives of motivational drives. And yet we also track disruptions in how such phenomena manifest, attentive always to historicize if we are to build an account as accurate as possible.

And so Wan-Chuan Kao takes a history of emotions approach in his investigation of the operations of wonder, shame, and amazement in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*, in the process productively bringing together the two major strains in affect theory to elucidate his text. His analysis is guided by an understanding that "premodern theories of affect [are] rooted in humoral theory and faculty psychology," and that medieval conceptions of "emotion" overlap with contemporary understandings of "affect" as biologically rooted, pre-discursive, and unconscious. Katherine Sutherland takes a long view in her chapter on the linking of speed and affect in modernist and postmodernist literature, and so is able to show that reading through the lens of affect theory's focus on dynamism can enhance our understanding of the model of subjectivity in play in a line running from De Quincy's essays to the Futurist manifesto to David Adams Richards' fiction (with stops in between). Sutherland shows at the same time that writings from the beginnings of the machine age are

"prescient" in that they can help us to grasp what's at stake in recent theory's preoccupation with motion and speed.

Carmen Faye Mathes contends that her chapter on Jane Austen's fiction "stakes its claim on affect's historicity," drawing our attention to the fact that "the 'turn to affect' is in many ways a 'return' to eighteenth- and early nineteenth century understandings of the physical and metaphysical world." Tara MacDonald stresses even further the need for broader historical perspective, arguing that awareness of nineteenth-century conceptions of affective agency not only can enhance our understanding of other times, but can improve current understanding by putting pressure on a key tenet of recent theory: that a categorical gulf separates affect from emotion. "The Victorians," she observes, "seemed to understand sympathy as *both* an emotion and an affect"; "re-orienting our [own] notions of sympathy to the body can allow us to reconsider historical understandings of emotion, as well as our own terminology for affective phenomena." And though she looks back only a few decades from our current moment, Jamie Ann Rogers also seeks to better historicize current theorizations of affect in her chapter on the contributions of Black feminist writers. Rogers contends that the writings of Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and Toni Morrison "not only offer compelling commentary on the workings of affect as political labor, but also are themselves powerfully affective, producing 'affective flights' that move within and among readers, and become part of the affective circuits or 'structures of feeling' that condition the different realities in which we live." Rogers' perspective is metacritical and polemical: noting "the conspicuous under-citing of Black feminists' intellectual, political, and philosophical contributions within the narrative of the genealogy of affect theory," Rogers shows that "in their insistence on the *political* significance of communal and self-love" these writers "prefigure by several decades the 'affective turn'"—and so the record must be corrected and their work embraced if we are to have an honest and accurate account of how we have arrived at this point.

With affect seeming to be everywhere at the moment, with interest burgeoning across so many disciplines, we clearly have a zeitgeist in the making. Of course a danger in pursuing any promising new theoretical paradigm is that we could end up imposing an interpretive framework alien to the properties of the cultural artifacts under study. The readings here demonstrate in varied and compelling form that this is not at all the case; rather, we are accounting for what is *already there* on the page. Once you start recognizing affect in motion its presence can seem ubiquitous,

and the relevance of affect theory to literary interpretation obvious. And yet the critic is faced by the challenge of working at a third remove: of trying to account in critical discourse for phenomena that writers themselves portray as difficult to apprehend fully, let alone capture in words—and that materially affect bodies that are fictional in the first place.

Notes on Method II: Representing the Ineffable

A recent review article considering founding works of affect theory poses a question that is doubtless in the minds of many new to the theory: "Why Study Unknowable Intensities?" (Manning 2017). Contributors to the present volume start from the assumption that after years of hard work the multidisciplinary project to account for affect has entered a mature phase, and so this question does not need answering: that with the stage of convincing now over, we can move beyond mere rehearsals of discovery that affect is in play in lives. But what about in *representations* of lives, and of fictional ones, at that? Contributors here show that the phenomena of interest to affect theorists—the affective intensities that circulate in and through bodies, and the primary affects that script behavior and generate meaning—are discernably at work in the texts themselves, and are coded in their effects as significant, if inchoate, even ineffable. If we are to deal fully with the properties of the literature that is the focus of our attention, the act of criticism must include attunement to the text's affective valences. These manifest in the rhetoric, the style, the mood of literary texts written over many centuries, exerting a shaping influence on character, on narrative structure, even on generic form. So the question is not why to study these forces, but *how* to do so—how to make the ostensibly unknowable knowable.

Our volume aims to help develop for literary critical practice what has begun for social science research, by approaching the task of accounting for affect with a self-reflexive focus on method. The contours of affective phenomena are particularly difficult to discern, because, in the case of affect as intensities, they signify that which is fleeting, diffuse, pre-conscious, even pre-personal; and in the case of primary affects, because biologically driven motivators of behavior operate in the first instance outside of willful self-control. While such phenomena exert material effects, they evince immaterial properties. And so the editors of *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect* (2015) state that their collection "reacts to a challenge: How to trace and understand the immaterial forces of affects as cultural researchers?" Contributors to that volume as

well as a few other scholars—most impressively Margaret Wetherell (e.g., 2012, 2013)—have begun to find ways to study affective phenomena with an eye to method that can provide some guidance to those of us working in other disciplines. Still, the challenge faced by the sociologist studying impingements on actual bodies in networks of relation is compounded for the literary critic, whose object of study is not the real but that which is embodied in language only. Yet there is perhaps not so radical a category difference as might first appear, because—and here a profound insight of the Massumi–Deleuzian line of thinking comes in—phenomena always encompass the virtual as well as the real, are about potentiality in the process of becoming, even when actualized in a singular instance of body or art, flesh or fiction.

The editors of *The Affect Theory Reader* identify as central to the theory a drive to recognize the constant modulations of affective states and in the process to produce "an inventory of shimmers," to assemble a more complete picture of life lived moment by moment (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). As choice of the term "inventory" indicates, in the first instance this project has largely been one of description, of bringing in from the cold phenomena left out of standard accounts of experience. Certainly until very recently, the main push across many disciplines has been to demonstrate the need to attend to affect if we are to access an ontology that recognizes the relational quality of the bond between subject and object, human and non-human, animate and inanimate, material and immaterial. The challenge for researchers is that affect is not some*thing*, but rather is "in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*"; rather than housed in or controlled by the individual, it "arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon"; and rather than be evident in its operations, "it is quite likely that affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest shuttling of intensities: all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-" (1–2). Contributors to the present volume read the literary text as register of the ineffable shimmerings of embodied being, figured forth especially in moments of heightened affective charge. The authors of many of the primary works of literature considered here strive to represent such moments of the *extra*-ordinary, of a surfeit or surplus of affect, in which forces of encounter overwhelm a character's sense of self-possession as the transmission of affective intensities threatens to wipe out psychic integrity—and yet at the same time enkindles a sense of potential, of promise, of something profound in play beyond the narrow confines of the self, something that baffles bare cognition, let alone full comprehension.

Interest in the transformative potential of such moments has a long tradition in literary theory, whether as the culmination of a process undergone by audience member or reader, in the experience of catharsis described by Aristotle, or of the sublime by Longinus, Dennis, Burke, or Lyotard; or as a sudden apprehension of meaning given voice by poetic speaker or narratorial persona, in Wordsworth's "spot of time," Joyce's "epiphany," or Woolf's "moment of being." Such moments are characterized by a rend in the fabric of the everyday, by an intensification of presentness, by a sense that time stands still. These are temporal and existential ruptures freighted with a felt significance whose intense immediacy eludes attempts at mediation through language.

So how can affect theory help us parse what's going on in these moments? In her Introduction to "The Affect Theory Dossier" Marta Figlerowicz (2012) observes that in an important sense the "various branches of affect theory are all theories of timing," in that they entail "theories of the self running ahead of itself," or "of the self catching up with itself" (3–4). Figlerowicz notes that the explorations of affect theorists often include "celebrations of Proustian moments when the self and the sensory world, or the conscious and the unconscious self, or the self and another person, fall in step with each other in a way that seems momentarily to make a sliver of experience more vivid and more richly patterned than willful analysis could ever have made it seem" (4). Affect theorists signal that there may be something more at stake than what concerns the individual as a self-determining entity, investigating moments of connection whose import exceeds what is often assumed: that such moments entail an experience laden with private meaning only, one in service of a consolidation of psychic identity or of spirit transcending the physical. The revolutionary insight of affect theory is to turn such individualism on its head, insisting on the relational rather than atomistic basis of all things—hence Figlerowicz on the "falling in step" of ostensibly binary elements into a oneness of being.

But how to embark on "willful analysis" of that which resists domestication in discourse, and how to keep the energy, the sense of promise, alive, while subjecting the text to the rigors of study? The first step is to turn our attention to those elements that have flown under the radar of critical apprehension, trying to give voice to that which is inexpressible, often explicitly coded as such. Heightenings of affective intensity or the affect-triggers—distress, terror, joy—of social scripts are discernable at the threshold between intuition and cognition (a character's, a reader's).

These are points in the unfoldings of plot at which the event is imminent, as the immanent potential of the virtual becomes actualized in the real. But what to look for? How do forces of encounter manifest in the aesthetic properties of the cultural artifact?

On one level, we find that the workings of affect are a determiner of narrative form. Figlerowicz is again instructive here, noting that one way "to describe the preoccupations that affect theorists seem to share is to say that affect theory is grounded in movements or flashes of mental or somatic activity rather than causal narratives of their origins and end points" (4). Much like the process philosophers whose metaphysics of becoming exert a deep influence on recent thinking about affect,[1] many of the literary authors considered here seem interested less in predetermination of outcome than in unfoldings of experience as the thinking matter of bodies and minds collide. Movements of bodies and flashes of insight fill moments of high drama, assembled together in narratives that can seem less interested in linear plot progression than in limit states of intensity—of being gripped by awe-struck paralysis, of falling into a swoon—purveyed through repetitions of event and reversals of fortune. Such moments of affective excess are prevalent, for example, in the literature of sensibility in the eighteenth century and into Romanticism. The novels, the plays, the poems of this period are preoccupied with staging scenes of extravagant response, those "certain, lively episodes" marked by "strange fits of passion" that Alan McKenzie (1990) and Adela Pinch (1996) have profitably explored (see also Ahern 2007, 2017). Narrative structure can seem held hostage to the set-pieces of overwrought feeling that punctuate the text, as displays of characters deeply affected and affecting crowd out what are—or so we've long been told—the defining features of the early novel: realistic depictions of the everyday presented in straightforward narrative trajectories that track the *Bildung* of the self-actualizing individual.

Textual interest in more attenuated and varied affective experience can exert an even more significant impact on narrative structure, as Carmen Faye Mathes shows in her investigation here of the "affective cycle" that recurs throughout Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Mathes is interested in the significance of a specific negative affect—disappointment—whose trajectories she tracks in order to tease out the politics of social class and rank: disappointment in Austen is "an affect of momentum and transition, down which subjects can coast or tumble just long enough to substitute one social arrangement for another." Yet affect operates on another level as well, not of content or political implication but of form, as Mathes shows in her track-

ing of a recurring pattern of "moving through suspense, security, disappointment, bliss, rapture." Her analysis reveals movement through primary affects to be a principle that organizes not just character but plot as well.

But what drives this preoccupation with heightened affect in works of literature across the centuries as well as in the work of recent theorists? It's as if we are drawn to witness rehearsals of a primal scene, to a site of structural sameness, even of formulaic cliché, and yet one endlessly compelling because never closed off to a sense that something profound might be happening here. Perhaps key to grasping the significance of such moments for affect theorists is to trace their import back to the founding presence of at least one major strain of the theory, Baruch Spinoza. Massumi notes that "the body, when impinged upon, is described by Spinoza as being in a state of passional suspension in which it exists more outside of itself, more in the abstracted action of the impinging thing and the abstracted context of that action, than within itself" (1995, 92). What interests many of the contributors here are textual moments when a body is in just such a state of "passional suspension," in a state of being outside itself. This is the very condition of sublimity, which at root (*sub* + *limn*) entails the approaching of a threshold: in the terms of process philosophy, the point of change at which the virtual is actualized.[2]

We see just such a metaphysics of becoming at work in medieval narrative, as Wan-Chuan Kao shows in his analysis here of the experience of wonder in moments of "temporal suspension" in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* (1476). On Kao's reading, "the moment of pure reaction to wonder" is freighted with significance because it "activates temporal maneuvers that would suspend the present and make possible a queer futurity." By enacting a "wonder–shame script" the queer figure of Aurelius's brother moves at least for a time from periphery to a place of influence over a narrative preoccupied with heteronormative closure. Kao's reading navigates between the poles of recent queer theory, seeing the "life force" embodied in the brother as entailing neither embrace of a death drive nor a utopian hopefulness. Rather, he sees in Chaucer's character a "figuration of premodern queer futurity that shifts the affective locus of queerness away from the binarism of negative and positive affects, without losing sight of both." Contending that the brother inhabits a Deleuzian "fourth-person singular" that "constitutes itself as an identity position simultaneously virtual and actual," Kao shows how an affected figure at the margin embodies a singular vitality that is able to "confound categorical thinking"—and thereby open a space for the forging of a new collectivity.

Joel Sodano's chapter investigates similarly potent watershed moments in the early novel, noting "sentimental fiction's tendency to treat emotional epiphanies as markers of subjective change," as "deviations from an expected course of events that catch characters off guard, profoundly altering both their perception of reality and the events that follow in the wake of such realizations." The framework Sodano develops to account for such moments mounts a challenge to decades of criticism on the rise of the novel. Rather than seeing at work the conventions of a formal realism that instantiates an empiricist epistemology, one intent on excluding all but the "ordinary particular," he reads the aesthetic of sensibility that governs many early novels as registering "an attunement to the virtuality that resides within emotional extremes." In considering the challenge of "narrating intensity" in the early novel, Sodano finds a new way to understand the gap between experience of affective excess and capacity to capture the force of encounter in words—a problem often highlighted in the texts themselves, and one whose significance critics have long tried to parse. "When novels attend to the intensity of affective events," Sodano explains, "they interrupt the process of meaning-making to describe the forms of experiential becoming that reside between pre-established knowledge and a knowledge yet to come." A condition of liminality rules such moments of interruption; and so "in eighteenth-century fictions of feeling, critique of the event takes place when narratives are arrested by the impossible task of expressing affective intensity."

Moments of charged affect can also engage the reader, as Merrilees Roberts shows in her chapter on Romantic drama. Roberts draws on Tomkins' theories about shame as well as on conceptions of affect as autonomous to read the character of Beatrice in Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819) as a study in self-construction. Roberts tracks Shelley's use of "the dynamic phenomenological aspect of affect to give his protagonist and his play an agency that bestows an intentionality upon otherwise unconscious processes." Her interest is with those "disruptive moments" that direct the reader's attention to "affective phenomena produced by what remains unsaid, unspoken, but nevertheless actualized in a text as a virtual feeling of 'intensity.'" Beatrice's reticence about whether she has been raped by Count Cenci drives a shame script that she enacts to reclaim some sense of agency; the ambiguity that results produces a "form–content implosion" as the "silence of the text" generates both plot trajectory and dramatic atmosphere.

The transformative potential of the moment of excess comes into focus perhaps most clearly here with Kimberly O'Donnell's reading of scenes of fainting in Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), junctures at which the transmission of affect threatens an "annihilation of self." Against critics who have read "the vampiric nature of affect as frightening or immoral, as the self is penetrated or overtaken by another and thereby evacuated of what is individual or special about the human subject," O'Donnell draws on affect theory to "read these moments of affective encounter and alterity as scenes of ethical plenitude." O'Donnell's analysis of moments of particular intensity is informed both by late Victorian physiological understandings and by the insights of affect theorists, such as Catherine Malabou on heteroaffection and Deleuze and Guattari's reading of the vampire as a figure of affective becoming. An "ethics of affective alterity" informs Stoker's dramatization of deep relationality, O'Donnell argues, reading the moment of excess as charged both with a sense of risk and with the potential to bring about recognition of alterity or even reconciliation of self to other.

And so we return to the fundamental insight of the Deleuzian–Spinozist line of recent theory: that no embodied being is independent, but rather is affected by and affects other bodies as a condition of being in the world. Inter-informing and adding explanatory power to affect theory's relational ontology have been fellow travelers increasingly influential of late: actor-network theory, new materialism, and posthumanism. These all see the human as embedded in, as subject to, even constituted by, networks of relation larger than the individual. Importantly, the move from "self " to "subject" here is not that of the New Historicist, not a rehearsal of Foucault's determinism, but rather an attempt to *escape* the prison-house of discourse, to move beyond the binary logics of the linguistic turn long ossified in structuralism and poststructuralism alike. Relational thinking offers the opportunity to open ourselves again to the promise of contingency, to move past the lessons of cultural materialism to celebrate the possibilities of what Deleuze called an "immanent" materialism. If what matters is acknowledging not only bare matter but also the powerful potential of the immaterial … then for the citizen what's engaged is promise of a space for assembling vital communities out of the fleeting comings-together of impassioned bodies; and for the cultural or literary critic, attunement to a feel, a tone, a mood. In the wake of this kind of thinking, indebted to what has been called the ontological turn, where, though, does this leave the critic trained to interrogate, to diagnose, to look past the surfaces of texts for symptoms of disease, of false consciousness, of political co-optation?

Reading Beyond Suspicion?

Since the 1970s the literary text has been the subject of interrogation, as critics laid bare its discursive coding in search of its replication of or resistance to ideological forces. Budding critics learn in the classroom that "becoming a critical reader means moving from attachment to detachment and indeed to disenchantment" (Felski 2009). But what if we came to these texts with an attitude of openness to their promise of affective connection-making? Rather than be driven in our critical practice by a stance of suspicion that entails a narrowing of horizons, in that it scans for signs of complicity and repression, and so always knows in advance what it will find, what if we came to these texts on their own terms, in a way? Perhaps we might then live up to the spirit of Eve Sedgwick's call for a "reparative" mode of critique that could move us past the habit of "paranoid reading" she sees as endemic to academic culture. Rather than searching to uncover what is lurking *beneath*—or to call for action *beyond*—the text, we might instead focus on the *beside*, on those interstices between being and action, feeling and judgment when the relational positioning of bodies and recognition of their interdependence is all that matters.[3] Could we read, for instance, scenes of teary-eyed reconciliation in the sentimental novel in a straight-up fashion, as opening a space for authentic, potentially revolutionary new assemblages of the kind envisioned by Deleuze,[4] rather than as always already co-opted by the power dynamics that determine social relations? Calls for us to move past the hermeneutics of suspicion entrenched in critical practice have included a rehabilitation of vernacular insight; we have as a model Rita Felski's embrace of a "neophenomenology" that "springs from a desire to build better bridges between theory and common sense, between academic criticism and ordinary reading, by delving into the mysteries of our many sided attachments to texts" (2009, 31). A moment of postcritical reflection is now upon us, challenging long-held habits (see, most influentially, Felski 2015; Anker and Felski 2017), while an ethic of repair that promises reconciliation of self to other has reinvigorated influential voices in the feminist project (e.g., Hemmings 2014), and is leading more generally to a more nuanced and even hopeful critique.

But where do we go after suspicion? As Felski suggests, perhaps the best place to start is where for the critic meaning-making begins, in the act of reading, for curiosity, for the pleasure of the text, before a machinery of critique kicks in to straightjacket the act of interpretation. We might again

learn from the untutored reader, from the response of our freshman students and members of the community in extension classes, those yet unschooled in the conventions of academic criticism who testify to their affective identifications as they are moved by love, by joy, by sorrow, by fear. But it's hard to know how to proceed, given that for almost a century now we have lived with appeals to readerly affect ruled out of court when it comes to building competent interpretations of the literary text. New Critics along with assorted schools of formalism, structuralism, and narratology sought to isolate the object of study and establish grounds for a stable hermeneutic by excluding affective response to a text. And so W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and M.C. Beardsley in their epoch-making essay "The Affective Fallacy" (1949) saw attending to the reader's experience as an "obstacle to an objective criticism." For such critics, interpretation entails not a process unfolding in time engaged in by a reading body, but an investigation carried out by the neutral observer, one who constructs an account of formal properties and themes pre-resident in the text and so by definition unaffected by a reader's creative engagement. The various strains of reader-response theory in the 1970s fought to factor the reader back into the production of literary meaning, even if their attempts didn't fundamentally alter the practice of most critics nor change the methods of textual analysis taught by professors in the classroom, especially once ideological critique based in discourse analysis came on the scene.

An important recent corrective to the banishment of readerly affect has been Jane Thrailkill's polemic against what she terms the "'Affective Fallacy' Fallacy" in the introduction to *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (2007). Thrailkill's work seeks to "engage with ideas and practices that emerged in the late nineteenth century—literary, philosophical, and scientific—which illuminate the corporeal textures of readerly experience" (2006, 365–66). In close engagements with a number of realist novels, in *Affecting Fictions* Thrailkill tracks connections among an emerging neuroscience preoccupied with physiology; the conventions of a realist mode that strives to represent everyday embodied experience; and the "affective enlistment" of the reader such that one comes "to realize one's creative participation in experiencing of the text and indeed the world" (51). Against Wimsatt and Beardsley, this and other recent work such as Adam Frank's modeling of a "transferential poetics"[5] (2015) assumes that any fulsome account of meaning must factor in the embodied response of reader or audience. And so in her chapter here on *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Carmen Faye Mathes shows how the

text's deployment of "proleptic affective states" such as hope and anticipation allows readers to share in the ups and downs of "pleasurable romantic plotlines." Austen's parodying of gothic novel conventions works by letting the knowing reader in on the joke—and yet at the same time her text teaches readers by way of "reading's embodied effects" how to enjoy, how to be affected, nonetheless. The disappointment of Catherine Morland creates a community of feeling readers, bonded through the experience of affective arousal.

Jill Marsden pays similar attention to the neglected role of the reader in her investigation here of modernist fiction. Her attention focuses in on "what gets missed" in standard accounts of reader response: "those affects experienced only in reading, those ripples in the stream of sensibility upon which our certainties float." Marsden seeks to reject the assumption that readers are affected through a process of identification with character, maintaining that "contrary to the common sense view that we are receptive to such affects because we have felt similar things ourselves … readers encounter them in the process of their creation and 'recognize' them as they come to be." Seeking to build a new account of readerly affect that moves past subjectivist assumptions, Marsden draws on Nietzsche's account of affective becoming to explore two "richly suggestive examples of idiosyncratic affective experience" embodied in the protagonists of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946). There's a political as well as aesthetic imperative to Marsden's approach, for "considered in terms of 'affective becoming,' the impersonal forces that compose these narratives can be interpreted critically as sites of resistance to cultural norms of disability, gender, and sexuality."

In an equally provocative call for a radical rethinking of the role of reader, Neil Vallelly in his chapter urges us to "think of literature as a verb," as a process unfolding rather than an object of study, and so to acknowledge a reader's active engagement in the production of literary meaning. He contends that "traditional distinctions between the physical materiality of literary texts on the one hand and their social meanings on the other no longer stand up"; rather, "literary materials and human materiality are caught up in one another, and the significance of this affective correspondence lies in neither the physical object nor the social world but in the energy of the correspondence itself." Influenced by the insights of new materialism and affect theory, Vallelly develops the outlines of a "new *literary* materialism" that seeks to revitalize critical practice. To demonstrate the need for such a revised practice he considers the difficulty faced by critics in explaining the

"*thingness*" of Shakespeare, as cultural icon, as playwright, as embodiment of the playtext, as force of encounter affecting audience members at the Globe theatre. Vallelly urges attention to a conception of the event, to the contingencies of the creative ensemble: an assemblage of cast, playtext, atmospheric condition, audience member.

Getting a feel for the text is also about addressing urgent personal and political concerns, as Tobias Skiveren shows in his exploration here of Ta-Nehisi Coates' memoir-essay *Between the World and Me* (2015). Skiveren is keen to credit "a phenomenon that the common reader regularly encounters: If we venture close enough, literature has the potential to transform us by opening our bodies to hitherto inaccessible experiences, expanding our sense of how the life of others might *feel*." Bringing back into critical practice the excluded element of readerly affect is a pressing matter for Skiveren as he seeks to bear witness to Coates' struggle as an African American man moving through environments often hostile to him. Coates' letter from father to son "operates on the level of viscerality, displaying the corporeal experiences, moods, and rhythms of life potentially tied to the becomings of black bodies." Skiveren is deeply aware of the potential for appropriation when a middle class white man from another country presumes to speak; yet speaking not for the author but for the author's effect on him as reader, he sees his testimony as an act of solidarity, of resistance to the still-resonating legacies of slavery in America. Decrying the dominance of "a critical mode of inquiry [that has] has long restrained literary scholars from affective engagements," Skiveren contends that such engagements with literature "can facilitate an attunement to the emotional lives of Other corporealities." To be open to the pain, the joy, the fear—and to refuse to foreclose the transformative potential of such engagements—is an ethical imperative that must guide our critical practice.

Literary critics inspired by the insights of affect theory strive to register affective resonances and their implications at the micropolitical level, to be open to the emancipatory possibilities implicit in the texts as well as the theory. Such attention to the emergent power of affective events informs Lisa Ottum's reading here of Helen Macdonald's *H Is for Hawk* (2014), a memoir recounting the author's experiences training a young goshawk. Following the finding of Silvan Tomkins and others that "we actually learn from feeling," and showing how "affect plays a vital role in connecting readers … to a creature that might otherwise become merely a literary device," Ottum calls for an immersion in reading that entails a kind of merging with animal sensibilities. Such connection is forged not through

facile identification with a conception of the wild, but through readings alive to the rhythms and textures of Macdonald's lyrical prose. Ottum contends that attending to the impact of writerly style on readerly response offers the critic a way to factor in the affective charge of the text. Unpacking the workings of a key passage, she shows, for example, how "the temporality of grief is associated with haptic imagery meant to capture the somatic aspects of affect." Ottum views adoption of an embedded perspective as a means to reinvigorate ecocritical practice. *Pace* those critics who might detect a naïve anthropocentrism in her practice, Ottum's reading allows us to see that *H Is for Hawk* "demonstrates the potential of affect to turn us outward, away from solipsism to a sense of connectedness with, and even responsibility toward, the world around us."

Critical attention to the circulations of affect in and outside the text entails just such attunements to the contingencies of bodies affecting and affected, to the potentiality immanent in the process of becoming, to an ontology that sees all as interconnected and implies an ethics of relation that opens a space for acknowledgment of multiplicity and respect for difference. There is a revolutionary fervor and a subversive politics to Deleuze and Guattari's call in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) that we champion in knowledge creation the rhizomatic, not the arborescent, and in scale the molecular, not the molar. The chapters here model a range of approaches critics can take to account for affect as it "transpires within and across the subtlest shuttling of intensities," manifested in those moments of "the ordinary and its extra-." Considering literary representations of interpersonal, even interspecies, affective relationality across the centuries, the contributors here add to a critical conversation of building richness that promises many lines of flight in future.

Notes

1. For the influence of process philosophers—especially James, Whitehead, Bergson, Deleuze—on thinking about such phenomena as emergence, flow, intensity, and the immanent potential of the virtual, see Massumi (1995, 2011).
2. And so Massumi writes eloquently of "the virtual as cresting in a liminal realm of emergence, where half-actualized actions and expressions arise like waves on a sea to which most no sooner return" (1995, 92).
3. See Sedgwick (2003, 8–9), and Chap. 4.

4. To counter what he decries as a tradition of dualistic, even fascistic thinking that aims to negate difference and above all ascribe a stable identity to the subject, Deleuze collapses subject-object distinction. He instead develops a vision of decentralized networks of relations always marked by potential, by flux, by a perpetual state of becoming rather than being. Deleuze celebrates the generation of multiplicity in a process of creative movement figured as lines of flight, as circulations of depersonalized intensities; disparate entities coalesce on a "plane of consistency," forging new combinations, "assemblages," communities. The most influential articulation of the revolutionary potential of such planar relations comes in the book Deleuze wrote with Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), especially the chapters "Rhizome" (3–25) and "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible …" (232–309).
5. In his investigation of major American writers and artists from the 1840s to the 1980s, Frank "discern[s] in the work of these artists an acutely receptive and reflexive attention to the movement of feeling across and between text and reader, or composition and audience" (2015, 1). To account for such movements Frank develops a heuristic model of "transferential poetics" drawing on the theories of Silvan Tomkins, Melanie Klein, and Wilfred Bion.

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PART I

Feeling Early Modern