

## PREFACE

*The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* developed from conversations during the spring of 2015 between Ryan Jenkins, then an acquisitions editor for Palgrave Macmillan, and myself. These discussions began with a meeting at the 2015 MLA Conference, where I delivered a paper at a session on “Gender and Medieval Affect” arranged by the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship. Both Ryan and I noted the growing prominence of “affect” as a topic within literary criticism. We also observed that radically different understandings of the term “affect” were in circulation, and that these differences reflected disjunctive theoretical orientations, intellectual lineages, and research agendas. Ryan suggested that I seek out between thirty and forty scholars, from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and areas of expertise, who would be willing to write essays for a handbook that would address affect/text relationships in a comprehensive and inclusive way.

Unvaryingly positive responses to the idea of producing such a handbook were sometimes accompanied by expressions of regret that heavy previous commitments precluded participation, but a sufficient number of scholars, located on three continents and representing a wide range of disciplines and specialties, generously agreed to contribute. I asked Thomas Blake, who had recently been a fellow contributor with me on another project, to undertake co-editor duties. Together, we put forth a proposal with a set of abstracts from projected contributors. Following a process of internal and external review by Palgrave Macmillan, we began work in January 2016 with more than thirty contributors on the essays in this volume.

*The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* is intended to meet several interrelated needs. First, it provides an orienting and authoritative account of how scholarship on affect (broadly conceived) and scholarship on texts (also broadly conceived, but with emphasis on literary texts) have come to inform one another over the past few decades. Second, it traces

how explorations of the ways texts address, elicit, shape, and dramatize affect have become central to much recent literary, film, performance, and arts criticism, as well as reshaped critical theory, cultural studies, rhetoric, and aesthetics. Third, the handbook offers readers a comprehensive guide to the variety of topics, themes, interdisciplinary dialogues, and sub-disciplinary specialties that the study of interplay between affect and texts has either inaugurated or revitalized. Fourth, the handbook showcases the diversity of scholarly topics, approaches, and projects that thinking of affect in relation to texts and related media opens up or enables. These include (but are not limited to) investigations of how attentiveness to affect reframe established methods of studying texts in terms of period, genre, cultural contexts, rhetoric, and individual authorship.

In its effort to explore comprehensively the permutations of affect/text dynamics and to relate those permutations to a sustained rethinking of literary, cultural, or social history, the *Palgrave Handbook* brings together, and puts in dialogue, strands of affect theorizing and criticism deriving from both post-structuralist philosophy and neurocognitive-evolutionary research. Linking contemporary discourse to a history of reflection upon affect that stretches from early antiquity to the present, and providing concise, accessible accounts of paradigm-shifting scientific research, the following essays present historicizing accounts of cultural understandings of affectivity and analyze diverse forms of textual engagements with affect and emotions from ancient epic to contemporary fiction. Encompassing criticism engaging affect in literature, film, rhetoric, and performance studies, the handbook's chapters chart the bearing of such criticism upon the formulating of new models for both period and genre research. For purposes of clarity, in this volume "affect studies" will refer to research, analysis, and criticism, from heterogeneous perspectives and intellectual traditions, focusing on affect, while "affect theory" and Affect Studies, capitalized, will refer to critical and theoretical discourse affiliated with work by Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

We have organized the volume's essays into an introduction and three parts. The introductory chapter situates contemporary affect research, theory, and criticism within contexts of an unraveling, in our time, of mind-body dualisms that go back to cultural shifts in diverse ancient societies around the eighth-century BCE. The introduction links the story of humans' reckoning with affect to the histories of philosophy, religion, aesthetic movements, political upheavals, and cultural innovations, including the advent of new artistic media. Textual engagement with affect spans the distance from surviving fragments of *Gilgamesh* to the twenty-first-century formulations of neurocognitive-evolutionary criticism and Affect Studies theory.

The handbook's first part, "Contexts and Foci," explores the philosophical and scientific bases of contemporary theorizing of affect and surveys their varieties. The two initial essays provide overviews of the current intellectual

terrain. Noting that competing twenty-first-century scholarly discourses define “affect” and “emotion,” and understand their relationship, in quite different ways, Kate Stanley argues that renewed attention to William James’ physiological account of emotion may allow affect/emotion distinctions to be rethought along more ecumenical lines. In a similar vein, Brook Miller describes sharp differences between the approaches to literature offered by affect theory, on the one hand, and by cognitive criticism, on the other. After delineating the philosophical, political stakes in those differences, he sketches possibilities for interconnecting aspects of each approach within enlarged, subtler modes of analyzing and interpreting literature.

The essays that immediately follow stress affect’s entwinement with cognition and sociality, and assess the mixed consequences of that entwinement. Bruce McConachie argues that bio-culturally evolved sociality most likely spurred the development of early human proto-languages from which symbolic language emerged, and Julia Reinhard Lupton explores how the “trust” cultivated in theatrical performance may be viewed as an index of its importance within affective and cultural life more broadly. Like McConachie, Lupton emphasizes the importance of mimesis for developing the emotions crucial to human bonding. Again like McConachie, she explores the role of social bonding in sustaining an ethically responsible political life. Patrick Colm Hogan, by contrast, considers how categorization, through establishing in-groups and out-groups, regulates cognition and affective responsiveness in ways that, though reinforcing selective sociality, also restrict how much and to whom empathy is directed and encouraged. Thomas Blake notes that it appears we are burdened by an embodied “affective aversion” to those who are different from ourselves, even though, studies reveal, we also possess a physiological resistance to observe others in physical or emotional pain. Blake argues that fiction, as a means of understanding other people’s intentions, goals, and desires, can help provide us with “a common point of view” that promotes collective well-being without demanding a dogmatic or exclusionary moral absolutism. Fiction, of course, presumes narrative, and in the following essay Claudia Breger delineates how diverse models of affective narratology reflect competing philosophical assumptions and political agendas. She argues that while work in Affect Studies remains largely antinarrative, current (dominantly cognitive) narratological work on emotion does not avail itself of Affect Studies’ conceptual possibilities. Seeking to redress the limitations in each approach, she concludes her essay with a sketch of how a syncretic affective narratology, embracing aspects of contrastive models, might be formulated.

The first part concludes with three theoretically oriented essays. Richard C. Sha argues that sharp distinctions between “affect” and “emotion” problematically continue post-structuralist critiques of rationality, putting at risk our ability to acknowledge that social subjects are more than effects of (involuntary) resonances among bodies or parts thereof. Along similar lines,

Charles Altieri questions whether any aesthetics keyed to “New Materialist” versions of affect theory can account for the agency of affect as it is registered within the consciousness of an individuated, singular human subject. Precisely the agency of the *feeling*, the consciousness of, affective surprise, he argues, is a central theme of both Romantic and Modernist poetry, which makes the appreciative reading of such poetry a corrective of dubiously sweeping theoretical claims. In the final essay of Part One, Marshall Alcorn seeks an alternative to the limited, flawed options that follow from elaborations of Plato’s Reason/Emotion binary. He advocates turning instead to Aristotle’s “*phantasia*/belief” counterpart, within which, Alcorn argues, reason and emotion, rather than being separate, overlap, with consequences that Aristotle delineates in his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*.

The *Palgrave Handbook*’s second part, “Affectivity and Textuality,” addresses permutations of how texts trigger and shape affects, and how susceptibility to diverse affects conditions responsiveness to particular textual features. Dana Munteanu discusses two affects central to literary art—empathy and love—and their textual eliciting through narrative techniques that create an impression of familiarity with imaginary people and reorder felt experience in relation to cultural expectations. Florion Cova, Julien Deonna, and David Sander, writing collectively, address the question of why we enjoy sad and serious narratives. Drawing on recent research in communication theory and media psychology, they suggest that when narratives provide us occasions to reflect on deep and meaningful truths about human lives, we experience the positive emotion of “being moved.” Jeff Pruchnic notes that Kenneth Burke’s mid-twentieth-century writings on literary and rhetorical theory delineate intersections of human physiological response with formal aspects of culture and art, thus anticipating and implicitly engaging contemporary cognitive criticism and affect theory.

Observing that Aristotle’s account of tragedy has one foot in affect and another in interpretation of emotion, Matthew J. Smith argues that the generic tension Aristotle implicitly identified has spurred innovations in tragic form from Sophocles and Seneca to Shakespeare and Chekhov. Donald R. Wehrs traces how epic, romance, and the novel offer generically distinct affordances for eliciting and shaping affect, and explores how Homer, Chrétien de Troyes, Jane Austen, and Duong thu Huong exploit those affordances to entwine affect’s disruptive, reorienting capacities with increased cognitive flexibility and enlarged sociable affections. Building upon the narrative theorizing of James Phelan and Meir Sternberg, Howard Sklar sketches how fictions engender sympathy, as distinct from empathy, for particular characters. W. B. Gerard blends recent cognitive research with historicizing analysis to explore interpretative and cultural issues raised by late eighteenth-century England’s textual and visual interest in a melancholy literary figure, “Poor Maria,” derived from the works of Laurence Sterne. Part Two concludes with Jaimey Fisher’s account of film studies’ shift from psychoanalytic paradigms,

dominant in the 1980s, to cognitivist and affect-oriented approaches, associated with David Bordwell, Carl Plantinga, Steven Shaviro, and Eugenie Brinkema. Through readings of crucial scenes within Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, he demonstrates the fruitfulness of combining diverse modes of film theory.

The handbook's third part, "Varieties of Affective/Textual Interplay," explores affect/text dynamics as they play out in different periods and genres, and in the details of individual works. Addressing the question of how culturally specific a given affect may be, Antonina Harbus considers a range of key Old and Middle English texts from *Beowulf* to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*. Noting that a collection of fourteenth-century English lyrics recruits conflicting prosodic cues from alliterative and accentual-syllabic meters, Nicholas Myklebust argues that, by arresting the biological surprise response that occurs when rhythmic predictions fail, the poems seek to induce an apophatic or negative stance toward analytic categories and textual events—in effect, making meter a vehicle for eliciting wonder at the expense of certainty. Julien J. Simon suggests that Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina* (1499), one of the first books of prose fiction written in Spanish after the appearance of the printed press, addresses at once a learned and popular audience in complex ways that a cognitive-historicist approach is best equipped to explore. Howard Mancing links *Don Quixote*'s extraordinary popularity and influence to the way Cervantes prompts readers to attribute thoughts to Quixote without specifying exactly what those thoughts are.

Cecilia Sjöholm argues that Descartes, instead of viewing agitation of mind as necessarily detrimental to thought, as in classical Stoicism, instead considered that arts, by producing emotions, could play a positive role in shaping judgment—not through controlling emotions or preventing affects, but through evoking them. Turning to the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* and related materials, Mark Bruhn delineates Wordsworth's affective poetics and situates it in relation to both Wordsworth's own literary-historical moment and our cognitive-neuroscientific one. Marta Figlerowicz relatedly argues that reimagining Kierkegaard as a theorist of affectively driven thinking helps us discern a conceptual gap in the way we analyze affects in our day and age. This gap consists in affect theory's simultaneous insistence that an affect theorist is moved, and even possessed, by her affects, and that she can quasi-objectively evaluate their broader import. Kierkegaard's writing, by contrast, enables us to see this theoretical position as a missed (but not irretrievable) opportunity for deeper engagement with affects as experiences of losing critical scale and distance.

Audrey Jaffe suggests that the Victorian novel deals with the new social mobility of persons in the nineteenth-century England by rendering what we tend to call "class" as a bodily affect, and further suggests that the naming and classification that characterizes Charles Darwin's work and, more

insistently, Silvan Tomkins' theorizing of affect, as well as novelistic descriptions identifying social or class affiliations, share dominant nineteenth-century forms of representation. Tracing the history of film music from *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) to *The Dark Knight* (2012), William Wehrs shows how such music acts on both affects, defined by Carl Plantinga as "felt bodily states," and emotions. Musical *leitmotifs* may cue audience response to character, but also link motifs to character and narrative development, though current film music is often minimalist and tied to the sound design in ways that contribute to emotionally flattened, dehumanized qualities in films such as *The Dark Knight*. Lorna Wood uses Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the affective dimensions of fascism to highlight how characters in *Lolita* are driven by fascistic desires that Nabokov portrays as delusory traps. Toward the end of the novel, however, Wood argues, Nabokov depicts both Dolores Haze and Humbert Humbert in ways suggestive of what recent cognitive studies call altruism born of suffering (ABS), even as his literary art pushes readers toward Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "reparative reading" and so the "kindness" and "tenderness" that Nabokov identified with "aesthetic bliss."

Reading Bret Easton Ellis's slasher satire *American Psycho* (1991) as a novel about the displacement of affects in capitalism, Doug Haynes investigates how structures of feeling in the finance economy of the narrative are both symptomatic and constitutive of the capitalist relationship, the horrors of which are literalized in Patrick Bateman, Ellis's financier protagonist and serial killer. Isabel Jaén examines how Dulce Chacón's 2002 novel *La voz dormida* (The Sleeping Voice) and its 2011 film adaptation seek to evoke and transmit affects in ways that will contribute to Spain's *memoria histórica* movement, which endeavors to gain public acknowledgement of the crimes of Franco's fascist regime, despite continuing obstruction by Franco's sympathizers. Noting that diverse studies indicate that positive interpersonal and social relationships are highly correlated with place-attachment, Nancy Easterlin adopts the perspective of *place studies* to interpret changing feelings for material spaces as a result of evolving human relationships in Colm Tóibín's contemporary Irish novel, *The Blackwater Lightship*. She reads the novel as elaborating a process of positive place-reconstruction in members of a fractured family, a process initiated by the appearance of a brother dying of AIDS and the community of gay friends caring for him.

While the essays comprising *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* certainly do not speak with a single voice—considerable diversity of judgments, focus, theoretical commitments, and research paradigms are represented—they offer, individually and collectively, accounts of how receptivity to neurocognitive-evolutionary and/or affect theory analysis has reshaped textual criticism over the past few decades, and they showcase what such criticism looks like and what it may achieve. Doing so, the essays

sketch a variety of approaches to innovative research, the elaboration and amplification of which is likely to transform and enrich humanities scholarship for the foreseeable future.

Auburn University, USA  
April 2017

Donald R. Wehrs



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-63302-2>

The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual  
Criticism

Wehrs, D.R.; Blake, Th. (Eds.)

2017, XXIX, 883 p. 30 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-63302-2