

Corina Selejan

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

corina_hila@yahoo.com

Affect Re-Considered: A Review of *Spectrum of Emotions*, Wojciech Drąg and Ewa Kębłowska-Ławniczak (eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2016.

Taking on what has recently come to be termed “the affective turn” in the humanities, Volume 5 in the *Silesian Studies in Anglophone Cultures and Literatures* Series published by Peter Lang departs from the series’ former lines of interest to engage with emotion and affect in art, literature, criticism and philosophy. The collection uniting 18 interdisciplinary academic essays is entitled *Spectrum of Emotions*. As its subtitle *From Love to Grief* suggests, the two most prominent emotions under discussion are love — discussed in six of the contributions and grouped together in Part I of the volume — and grief, which makes the object of four essays in Part III. The remaining articles deal with shame (Part II), trauma (Part IV) and envy, jealousy and revenge (Part V, entitled “Across Emotions”).

The volume posits itself as “a modest re-opening” of the discussion around the “need for a revision of the vocabulary of emotion used in literary studies, culture studies and criticism” (Drąg and Kębłowska-Ławniczak 2016: 7). As such, this well-orchestrated collection indeed stages dialogues between individual articles which save it from mere miscellaneousness. Tomasz Basiuk’s, Elżbieta Klimek-Dominiak’s and Dominika Ferens’s contributions are a particularly pertinent example: while all three deal with shame, treading common theoretical and critical ground — affect theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Silvan Tomkins feature repeatedly here — each seems to pick up where the previous one left off in order to veer into a slightly different direction. Basiuk makes a compelling argument on queer shame’s being performative, transformative and productive and links it to camp and finally to Pop as an aesthetic — all within the scaffolding of Andy Warhol’s work. The conclusion of Basiuk’s essay nods towards the contagiousness of

shame as a catalyst in getting the Other interested, a point taken up by Ferens, who deftly links affect (via shame, curiosity and interest) with cognition, a point made by more theorists and philosophers than one, all anxious to situate affect within a cognitive space, not divorced from the rational (Armstrong 2000: 18, 87; Nussbaum 1990: 78). Ferens refracts Sigrid Nunez's fiction through the lens of Tomkins's affect theory, in contradistinction with Freudian drives and their anchorage in the unconscious. Her insistence on the conscious and relational nature of affects points towards Klimek-Dominiak's treatment of shame in Patti Smith's memoir *Just Kids*. Like Basiuk's essay, Klimek-Dominiak's revolves around homosexuality and (vicarious) shame, thus implicitly acknowledging the contribution of queer theory to the affective turn. Taking the 'godmother of punk' as her object of investigation gives Klimek-Dominiak the opportunity to engage with music, photography, visual arts, the performing arts, poetry and drama, contributing to the interdisciplinary character of the collection. Music is also at the core of Michael Hollington's essay, the very last in the volume, which, apart from providing the reader with the etymologies of the words "emotion" and "passion", goes back to the 18th century and the setting to music of Collins's *The Passions: An Ode for Music* by William Hayes. Hollington interestingly argues that the change of the end of the poem in the process of its being set to music is not, as overtly claimed, due to the lack of fitness for musical setting of the poem's end, but an underlying stoic impulse which urges the restraint of the 'passions'.

Writing *about* affect occasionally slips into writing *with* affect, as is the case with some of the contributions in Part I, which hone in on love. Aleksandra Kędzierska's contribution on Seamus Heaney is a warm homage paid to Seamus Heaney the poet as much as Seamus Heaney the man. In a similar vein, Anna Cholewa-Purgał elaborates on Charles Williams's Romantic theology of love as well as on his personal charm and interests, i.e. on his involvement with the Inklings, and C.S. Lewis in particular, who thought Williams emanated "more *love* than any man [he] ha[d] ever known" (42). C.S. Lewis is a recurrent presence in the volume, as is Calvin, both accounted for by the fact that half of the articles on love are also concerned with transcendence and religious feeling, thus bringing a refreshing slant to the usual discourse on matters of love. While Joanna Bukowska focuses on the institutional changes brought about by early Protestant thought to marriage, which is thereby elevated to the status of the ideal love relationship, albeit within the more traditional medieval framework of courtly love in Chaucerian apocrypha, Tomasz Kulka rather uncommonly apposes a Calvinism/Puritanism-inflected suppression of affect with an aesthetics of wonder and a heightened sensorial perception of the world to highlight the apparent paradox at work in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*. The rest of the articles in the section on love are more discursively/deconstructively oriented, attempting a cross pollination of affect with other theoretical approaches such as feminism, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. Maria Antonietta Struzziero's article is an example in point,

tackling Jeanette Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping* from all these different angles. Language and obscenity is at the core of Rod Mengham's article regarding the effect on 1960 British fiction of the 1959 Obscene Publications Act. The trial of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is interpreted with a view to its effects on later fiction, such as the early fiction of Nell Dunn, who makes use of profane language and sexual content for purposes very different from Lawrence's professed aim of freeing the language of sex from shame. According to Mengham, the inversion of the moral values endorsed by Lawrence in Dunn's fiction is a political act drawing attention to the dispossessed and the disempowered.

Loss takes center stage in the volume's third section, particularly in the form of grief and nostalgia as its affective effects. Drawing on Freud, Derrida and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Rachael Sumner advocates the creative character of grieving as conveyed by Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* by likening it to painting as a recuperative as much as creative art. On the other hand, Anna Maria Tomczak deals with the inability of overcoming loss and grief by stressing the importance of cultural differences in her analysis of Mukherjee and Lahiri's fiction. A close (re)reading of Hamlet's grief by Rowland Cotterill reevaluates the extent to which Hamlet's reactions are conditioned by his 'moods'. Grzegorz Moroz's approach to Patrick Leigh Fermor's travel book *A Time of Gifts* is also textual, albeit a Genettian one, aimed at exposing the many layers of nostalgia through the book's paratexts, particularly its epigraphs.

Part IV of the volume engages with trauma in its many forms and consequences: trauma as resulting in reclusion and the suppression of affect, as in W. Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault* discussed by Bożena Kucała, trauma as caused by war as well as false accusations in Andrzej Księżopolski's scrutiny of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, the trauma of exile illustrated by Corina Crișu's perceptive reading of Irina Pană's memoir *Melbourne Sundays*. History is drawn attention to in all three articles — indeed, history itself seems to be the perpetrator of trauma, whether it is the Anglo-Irish conflict, WW II or Communism in Romania.

The last section of the volume, entitled "Across Emotions", encompasses two articles: one concerned with envy and jealousy in Muriel Spark's *The Finishing School*, a reading by Wojciech Kozak that does justice to the novel's metafictional traits as well as to the significance of Spark's Catholic background, the other already mentioned in connection to music and the passions, situated within a Dickensian framework.

The sheer diversity of its topics and approaches make this book an enriching read — spanning centuries from Chaucer to the contemporary, genres and arts from the visual and musical to the literary arts, crossing boundaries between theoretical discourses and illuminating the virtues of each by dint of their dialogical deployment. To my mind, the well-researched articles with at times impressive bibliographies evince a deep awareness of and engagement with all the major issues in the humanities today: gender, sexuality, class, race, culture, religion, nationality, etc.

This collection is also a very well-timed *critical* publication, succeeding as it does such recent *theoretical* publications as Patricia Ticineto Clough's *The Affective Turn* (2007) and *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. It also has the merit of putting affect theory into perspective by situating it within the larger network of theoretical discourses.

References

- Armstrong, I. 2000. *The Radical Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Drag, W. and E. Kęblińska-Ławniczak (eds.) 2016. *Spectrum of Emotions: From Love to Grief*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Nussbaum, M. 1990. *Love's Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.