

Structures of Feeling? Affect and Genre in British and Anglophone Literatures

Dr. Harald Pittel (Leipzig) & Dr. Johannes Schlegel (Würzburg)

The direct, intimate relation between genre and affect has been a key element in poetic theory since classical antiquity. The relation between them was already fundamental to Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which he famously argues that a perfect tragedy "should [...] imitate actions which excite pity and fear". (1951: 27) Therefore, it is all the more surprising that a survey of contemporary research reveals remarkably little interaction between genre and affect. While, for instance, genre theory has experienced increasing attention in the wake of the so-called new formalism (e.g. Allen 2020; Group Phi 2013; Caplan 2012, Duff 2000), the (potentially) constitutive function of affects is hardly discussed at all. At the same time, contributions to affect studies have often emphasized emotional content over literary form (e.g. Jaffe 2017) and so ignored questions of what role and aesthetic impact form and/or genre might have in presenting emotions and affects in a distinctly literary way.

This seems all the more striking given that many successful, important texts of the contemporary literary field are structured precisely by their conspicuous representation and evocation of diverse affects, moods, and ambiances. Examples range from the in-her-face theatre of Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill via novels such as Douglas Stuart's prize-winning *Shuggie Bain* or Onyi Nwabineli's *Someday, Maybe* to Rupi Kaur's poetry performances which could arguably be observed as what Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick has described as reparative readings (2003). Together, these and further instances raise not only systematic questions concerning the nexus of affect and genre in contemporary literature, but also open novel historical perspectives. What, for instance, does the relation between affect and genre tell us about genres and modes such as Early Modern masques, 18th-century amatory fiction, or the Gothic, to name but a few?

The fact that existing research in affect studies tends to ignore questions of genre and form is, as Ruth Leys writes to some extent due to the fundamental assumption that "affects must be viewed as independent of, and in an important sense prior to ideology – that is, prior to intentions, meanings, reasons, and beliefs – because they are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning." (2011: 437) While this certainly has to be qualified for other approaches to affect and emotion (e.g. Ahmed 2017), it also raises urgent questions concerning the mediation of literary genres as well

as their material-medial conditions and cultural techniques. These questions are especially relevant in the wider contexts of media transformations in a digital age and literary transactions in increasingly trans- and intercultural contexts.

This section at the Anglistentag 2024 therefore seeks to investigate the numerous interplays and interconnections of affect (studies) and genre (theory) in British and Anglophone literatures from the early modern period to the present regarding three interrelated analytical categories: 1) genre formation, 2) representation, 3) reception.

- 1) Which genres, subgenres, and modes are constituted by drawing on certain affects? Which affects are decisive here? What about popular genres and forms? How have these genre formations evolved over time? In what ways do they relate to and inform literary histories and, respectively, their descriptions? How are affects related to notions of realism, the fantastic, etc.?
- 2) How are concrete affects including joy, anger, disgust, or shame represented in specific genres and individual works? How do these representations relate to categories of race, class, gender, etc.? Which aesthetic embodiments are thus articulated?
- 3) How does the interplay of genre and affect shape (potentially novel) modes of reception? Rita Felski (2020), drawing on both affect studies and actor-network theory, puts forward a concept of affordance in order to describe connections between aesthetic and social orders. She is concerned with specific ways of mutual 'attachments' between artworks and recipients, whereby questions about the propositional character of literary texts are of interest with regard to the affective dispositions, patterns of perception, and modes of (re)action they demand and enable. How do genres and modes enable such affordances, then?

Papers might address, but are by no means limited to, these three areas. Possible focal points and further topics include:

- The role of literary modes (romance, tragedy, comedy, satire/irony) in affect-related (re)constitutions of genres
- Affect-related inter- and transcultural and transformations of genres in postcolonial contexts
- Genres and affects in the wider economic relations of production and consumption
- The significance of affects in the relations between gender and genre
- Literary genres as responses to non-literary regulations of affects
- Planetary feelings and genres of world literature

- Digital transformations of genres and affects
- Affective communities and/as interpretative communities
- Genre, affect, and so-called small forms ('kleine Formen')
- Rhetoric traditions and affects
- Travel writing, affect, and alterity

Please send your abstract (300-400 words) and a short bio to the section organizers:
 harald.pittel@uni-leipzig.de & jo.schlegel@uni-wuerzburg.de

Deadline for submission is January 15, 2024.

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