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Introduction — “Affective Forms of the Modernist Novel”

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In November 1925, D. H. Lawrence wrote his famous essay on “Why the Novel Matters,” with its much-quoted proclamation that “[t]he novel is the one bright book of life,” which, unlike “poetry, philosophy, science, or any other book,” can “make the whole man alive tremble” (195). Far less well-known is another essay he wrote in the same month, “The Novel and the Feelings.” Lawrence begins by drawing a distinction between the “emotions”—“things we more or less recognise” and can readily name as love, hate, fear, anger, or greed—and the “whole stormy chaos of ‘feelings’” that reside in “the dark continent of [the] self,” the former likened to “domesticated animals” and the latter to “wild creatures” whose “muffled roarings” and “stifled shrieks” have been suppressed by modern man (202). Whilst the emotions have become our docile companions, “[w]e have no language for the feelings, because our feelings do not even exist for us,” so successful have we been in our efforts “to exclude this in-bounding, in-leaping life” (203). This state of affairs might be parlous, but there is a glimmer of hope. It is to the novel that Lawrence would have us turn in our efforts “to cultivate our feelings” (204):

Now we have to educate ourselves, not by laying down laws and inscribing tablets of stone, but by [...] listening-in to the voice of the honourable beasts that call in the dark paths of the veins of our body, from the God in the heart. Listening inwards, inwards, not for words nor for inspiration, but the howling of the innermost beasts, the feelings, that roam in the forest of the blood, from the feet of God within the red, dark heart. [...] If we can’t hear the cries far down in our own forests of dark veins, we can look in the real novels, and there listen in. Not listen to the didactic statements of the author, but to the low, calling cries of characters, as they wander in the dark woods of their destiny. (205)

Clotted with febrile imagery, reliant on racist invocations of “the aboriginal jungle” and “darkest Africa inside us” (202, 203), and so contorted in its argumentation as to be almost incoherent, it is no surprise that this essay has been critically overlooked. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that “The Novel and the Feelings” offers salutary lessons for contemporary modernist studies in a moment when the preoccupation with affect is rapidly becoming *de rigueur*.

At first blush, Lawrence’s terminological distinctions between the *feelings* and the *emotions* closely resembles those between *affect* and *emotion* drawn by early affect theorists, the latter conceived as less amenable to linguistic representation and arising not from the “waste-paper basket of ideas at the top of my head” but “some other part of my anatomy” (292). Yet the terms, however proximate, do not neatly map on to each other, but are premised on very different understandings of subjectivity: Lawrence’s on a quasi-anthropological, vitalist vision, and affect theory on postwar psychological research—research that, as Ruth Leys has so powerfully demonstrated in *The Ascent of Affect* (2017), has proven less scientifically indubitable than proponents of affect theory tend to want to recognize. Such divergences should not only caution us from cleaving to the definitions so forcefully asseverated by early affect theorists, but more generally enjoin us to be more historically particularizing in our accounts of writers’ conceptualizations of affective experience, which necessarily entails a greater willingness to take seriously the language of emotion, feeling, and sincerity that has too often been dismissed as empty sentimentalism lacking analytic heft. The last five years have seen a small but growing number of critics expressing skepticism about what Wendy Anne Lee characterizes as “the ‘presentist’ tilt of affect theory” (4)—though it is worth saying that these are often critics who nevertheless continue to draw on affect theory rather than turn to alternative intellectual traditions, Xine Yao’s objections to affect theory’s presumptions of universality in *Disaffected* (2021) being a case in point. Few objects demonstrate the pitfalls of too readily mapping contemporary conceptualizations of affective experience onto historical artefacts that have their own

theoretical investments more starkly than “The Novel and the Feelings,” with its simultaneous universalizing ambition and overt reliance on contemporary racial discourse.

The precept that modernist fiction is formally geared towards the rendering of phenomenological experience is nearly uncontested in contemporary criticism, whether that be Ford Madox Ford’s promotion of literary impressionism or Virginia Woolf’s famous proposal that the novelist should record the atoms as they fall on the mind, in the order in which they fall. Where Lawrence exceeds this brief is in his conviction that the novel should not merely reflect the actualities of thought and feeling but be regarded as a tool for liberating the feelings and reshaping man’s relation to them—a form, in other words, with an affective-pedagogical function. This cluster takes seriously Lawrence’s provocation to approach the modernist novel as a potential source of insight into affective life. It is for this reason that the essays within are particularly focused on later iterations of modernism, examining how subsequent writers draw on, extend, and revise modernist approaches to affect, or spotlight alternative modalities to the by-now familiar formal strategies of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce.

Appropriately, then, it is with Lawrence that this cluster on “Affective Forms of the Modernist Novel” begins. In “D. H. Lawrence and Shyness,” Kirsty Martin illuminates the privileged role of an emotional state not normally associated with a novelist better known for his evocations of overwhelming sexual desire and murderous rage. Deftly placing representations of shyness from across Lawrence’s oeuvre in dialogue with contemporary psychological and physiological theories—most strikingly, postulations of the existence of an “inner blush”—Martin limns a more corporeal version of modernism’s handling of an emotion frequently reduced to a merely cerebral form of self-consciousness.

Sticking with interwar modernism, the cluster’s next essay, “Elizabeth Bowen’s Equivocal Modernism: Emotion, Sincerity, and the Novel Form,” explores the ambivalent uptake of modernism’s signature stream-of-consciousness techniques in the novels of Elizabeth Bowen. Tracking how Bowen at once foregrounds how poorly calibrated these techniques are to capturing crucial aspects of emotional life and counters them with a more explicitly philosophizing narrative voice capable of redressing such neglect, Doug Battersby aims to clarify our understanding of the real affordances—and limitations—of modernist forms for narrating affective experience.

Bowen is also the subject of the cluster’s most formally daring contribution, “Bowen’s Queer Heart,” a piece of experimental criticism that takes the shape of a fictional dialogue between its co-authors. Through this unconventional form, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle interrogate and estrange the most apparently sentimental figure of emotional agency, the heart, presenting Bowen as an exemplification of the alterity of cardiac affect in modernist aesthetics.

In “True Feints: Samuel Beckett and the Sincerity of Loneliness,” Rick de Villiers studies another Irish novelist famous for their anti-sentimentalism: Samuel Beckett. Focusing on the last long-form fiction Beckett wrote in English, *Company* (1979), de Villiers shows how the radical form of this novella, as a second-person address that almost entirely does away with the scaffold of character and plot, mobilizes a confessional mode that facilitates a surprisingly sincere dramatisation of the condition of loneliness.

With Ulrika Maude’s essay, the cluster turns our attention to a specifically late modernist preoccupation with states of irritation and anxiety, as powerfully dramatised in Kazuo Ishiguro’s experimental and oft-neglected novel, *The Unconsoled* (1995). “Ishiguro’s Late-Modernist Affect” deftly illustrates how the epistemological instability generated by the novel’s formal structure—its circularity, temporal loops, and deviant chains of causality—solicit a kind of contagion between reader and protagonist, both immersed in states of interminable irritation and anxiety that are neither resolved nor marshalled to more productive ends. These non-redemptive minor affects are, Maude suggests, the signature emotions of late modernism as practiced by Ishiguro.

The final essay of the cluster offers the most direct engagement with the legacies of modernism in twenty-first century fiction. Derek Attridge opens his meditation on “Joycean Form, Emotion, and Contemporary Modernism” by theorizing five types of emotional engagement registered by the modernist novel. This typology is put to work in readings of two novels, Lucy Ellmann’s *Ducks, Newburyport* (2019) and Tom McCarthy’s *The Making of Incarnation* (2021), which inventively develop the stylistic

innovations of two different chapters of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), "Penelope" and "Ithaca." Together, these readings are testament to how modernist forms for handling affect remain an invaluable resource for novelists today.

Though full of theoretical insights, the collective ambition of these essays is not to systematically map out the modernist novel's multitudinous affective forms, but to unsettle the primacy of approaches that too readily read current conceptualizations of emotion into works that mobilize quite different understandings of affect, some drawing on contemporary culture, others entirely idiosyncratic. Ranging from rich excavations of early twentieth century physiology to formalist investigations into the affordances of different narratorial forms, from experimental criticism to narrative theory, and from interwar "high" modernism to more contemporary manifestations, the cluster ultimately presents a range of different angles of incidence on to the dramatizations of affect that lie at the heart of modernist aesthetics.

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