Introduction
Affect and Literature

Alex Houen

I.

Scene: I'm lying on the bed, face down on the pillow. Outside in the guttering some house-sparrow chicks are cheeping incessantly for food, they're like feathered car alarms. I'm exhausted – bodily and mentally. Partly from having been immersed all afternoon in the dense, translated prose of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Partly from having had to clear up the effects of a plumbing emergency in my house yesterday. Partly from doing extra childcare (it's school holiday time). Plus I've been trying without success not to think of the imminent anniversary of a friend's death. A sudden pang of grief dies away with the thought of it. I concentrate on the pulse in my ear; it's slowing. The sparrows are very insistent. Little prickles of anxiety. I should do more work. I must go on. I can't go on – not when I feel so lacking in energy. Long pause. I find myself imagining my five-year-old daughter sneaking out into the street to look for our cat. She's been out there for a while and I hear a scream. I picture myself looking out of the window and see her being pulled into a car by a man. Dashing out of the house I run after the car I've imagined such a chase before am exploding into myself the car trying to speed up our narrow street hits a van jutting out and goes into a bit of a spin. One man in the back gets out and runs off – that's my daughter under a blanket? – I'm ripping open the front door I pull the driver out smash him down onto the road my rage fuelling rage, but no what about my daughter and

what am I doing? I can't bear to see her looking traumatised. Pulse racing against the pillow, I focus on my breathing until I'm floating on the bed in a kind of manageable suspended rage, a soft rage accompanied by sparrow song. Must get back to work.

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The written 'scene' above is just one example presenting how a person can be affected by various things in various ways, but it raises a host of general

issues and questions with which this book is concerned. What is the relation of mind and body in terms of how one feels emotionally affected? At points above it seems that sensation triggers affect, as when sparrow song elicits irritation. At other points it seems that a thought causes affect, as when remembering the anniversary prompts a 'pang' of 'grief'. If that pang suggests a sharp awareness – one that is both mental *and* bodily – of an affect's *presence* in experience, it's also true that the lived present in the scene is repeatedly coloured confusingly by things that have already happened (the plumbing emergency, etc.), and things that are going to happen (the anniversary), as well as things imagined as happening (the kidnapping). That raises an important question in terms of this book's literary focus: if affective experience can be so temporally and spatially manifold in being coloured by multiple things simultaneously, then is affect compatible with sequenced orderings of narrative prose, or even with the linguistic expressions of innovative poetry? For if affect extends to bodily sensation, then can it be conveyed adequately through language? When writing the scene above I began to feel that the sentences referring to various forms of affect would build thematically – resonate together – over the reading experience to engender a tonal atmosphere. I also tried to get style to do some affective labour: for example, the longer flowing sentences with less punctuation registering the rush of rage; also the paragraph break mid-sentence for the sudden change of heart. At other times, I let forthright assertion do pathos: 'I must go on. I can't go on'. The latter is actually a loose quotation that came to mind from Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* (1953), though, and Beckett on occasion also uses mid-sentence paragraph breaks.[1] That raises the question of how literary expressions of affect relate to those of 'real life'. Is our affective life ever separate from our imaginary life? My scene above did actually happen to the extent that I lay on my bed and pictured my daughter being kidnapped, and while that kidnapping only happened in my imagination it did precipitate a form of rage. I felt that rage in my body as well, but it also felt somewhat up in the air precisely because the kidnapping remained imaginary – which is why I've described the affect as 'a kind of manageable suspended rage, a soft rage'. If affects can include real and imaginary experience at the same time, is literary writing particularly well suited to exploring their dynamics?

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To help us think more about matters and questions such as those I've just raised there is no shortage of 'affect theory' which, over the last two decades, has gained interest across numerous disciplines – including anthropology,

psychology, philosophy, sociology, politics, cultural studies, and literary studies. 'Is there any remaining doubt that we are now fully within the Episteme of the Affect?',[2] asks Eugenie Brinkema rhetorically. Well, certainly affect has increasingly become a principal subject of investigation not just in academia but also in the wider world, partly because it's seen by many to be a basis of knowledge. (At the time of writing, for example, I've seen multiple journalism articles in just the past few days arguing that today's 'post-truth' politics and 'fake news' are appealing primarily to people's affective sensibilities.[3]) Within academia, two publications in 1995 are regarded as having been particularly influential in fostering an 'affective turn': Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold', and Brian Massumi's 'The Autonomy of Affect'. The two texts are not singing from the same score: Sedgwick and Frank's explores the importance of the psychologist Silvan Tomkins's work on affect, whereas Massumi's is mostly drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's reading of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Despite their different sources of inspiration, these two texts have both been viewed by some theorists as advancing a concept of affect as a form of *bodily* feeling that is distinct from emotion, cognition, and language.

It's easy to deduce such a view from Massumi's text, given statements in it such as the following: affect (which he also calls 'intensity') 'is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things'; it is 'outside expectation and adaptation, [. . .] disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration'; 'It is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion'; 'Language [. . .] is not simply in opposition to intensity. It would seem to function differentially in relation to it'; 'Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional [. . .] point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, [. . .] into function and meaning'.[4] As I'll show shortly, it's harder to draw a similar conception of affect as fundamentally distinct from cognition, emotion, and language in the writings of Tomkins or Sedgwick and Frank. Ruth Leys is not alone in thinking otherwise, though: she aligns Tomkins and his followers with Massumi in arguing that they similarly characterise affect as 'nonintentional, bodily reactions'; 'noncognitive, corporeal processes or states'.[5] Leys is right to argue that such a characterisation has become a principal way of conceiving affect in affect theory. It's evident, for example, in Patricia Ticinetto Clough and Jean Halley's influential collection of essays *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007) – Clough states in her 'Introduction' that the volume's interdisciplinary explorations are particularly influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Massumi, and

Spinoza.[6] Another influential collection of essays, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), similarly has an Introduction that frames the essays by setting up the importance of Tomkins, Sedgwick, Deleuze and Guattari, Massumi, and Spinoza for affect theory.[7] Most of the contributors to these two volumes work outside literary studies in the social sciences or humanities. But their characterisation of affect has also been advanced by literary theorists such as Fredric Jameson. Prior to the affective turn, Jameson in his *Postmodernism* (1991) declared that the surfeit of simulated and mediated experience in contemporary culture had compromised any sense of authentic subjectivity and emotion to such an extent that we face a wholesale 'waning of affect' – 'there is no longer a self present to do the feeling'.[8] More recently, in *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), though, he has done a volte face by arguing that affect thrives as a vital, bodily phenomenon that is irreducible to literary representation. Like Massumi, Jameson argues that there is a 'structural difference' between emotion and affect: whereas emotion arises as cognitive, 'named' structures of feeling that entail 'the intervention of language', affects are 'bodily feelings' that are resistant to language.[9] Accordingly, Jameson is keen to insist 'on the new representational tasks [affect] poses poets and novelists in the effort somehow to seize its fleeting essence and to force its recognition'.[10]

This approach to affect as distinct from emotion, cognition, and language is not the only one to have grown prevalent in affect theory. As Leys points out, in addition to the 'noncognitivist' approach there is the 'opposing' side of 'cognitivists', which includes psychologists such as Richard Lazarus and philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum and Anthony Kenny.[11] It's not surprising that numerous philosophers and literary theorists have been keen to develop a cognitivist approach to affect in literature, given their common investment in exploring the richness of mental life – including memory, consciousness, and imagination – as well as its relation to language and representation. Cognitivists tend to uphold a concept of affect as emerging through distinct cognitive 'attitudes'; subjective outlooks, that develop like narratives.[12] For that reason, cognitivist approaches to literature have tended to focus on prose fiction as a means of reflecting on emotion in terms of character and personality. When considering that emotional content of literature, cognitivists have also argued that it can elicit sympathy or empathy in readers and so foster good ethical capacities. This kind of approach is prominent in Donald Wehrs and Thomas Blake's *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism* (2017), which raises some important questions about the

limitations of regarding affect as essentially corporeal.[13] Yet cognitive approaches have their own limitations. Their focus on mental attitudes often subordinates the question of what role bodily sensation plays in affective life. Moreover, in viewing narrative or language as 'expressions' of subjective feeling, cognitive approaches have often emphasised emotional content over literary form and so ignored questions of what role and aesthetic impact form, genre, or style might have in presenting emotion in a distinctly literary way.

For the rest of this Introduction I want to build the case for an approach to affects in theory and in literature that is neither strictly cognitivist nor noncognitivist, and that is open to considering literary affect in terms of fusions of content and form. I'll do this first by showing that Spinoza and Deleuze, then Tomkins, Sedgwick and Frank, do not in fact support an opposition of bodily affect versus emotion and cognition. I'll then consider the work of other literary theorists that lends support to an approach that is reducible neither to cognitivism nor noncognitivism. After offering my own examples of what such an approach looks like in practice, I'll conclude by outlining how the three sections of this book build distinctly literary perspectives on affect.

II.

One of the most important features of Spinoza's philosophy is its monism: there is no dualism or split between mind and body, he asserts, for they are two 'attributes' of the same 'substance' and are always correlated with each other.[14] That is evident in what Spinoza calls the 'affections' (*affectio*) which arise whenever you are affected by something: 'The [affections] of the human body whose ideas represent external bodies as present to us, we shall call the images of things [. . .]. When the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines'.[15] When Massumi discusses Spinoza's affections in 'The Autonomy of Affect' he stresses that they form bodily 'traces' and suggests that ideas of them are generated through secondary 'conscious reflection' that amounts to a process of 'abstraction'.[16] Deleuze, however, offers a different interpretation and asserts that the bodily 'image' of an affection is inherently a form of 'idea'.[17] As he points out, Spinoza also states that the affections form another kind of affect (*affectus*) that is a felt idea of how one's affective state itself has shifted: 'The *affectio* refers to a state of the affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body, whereas the *affectus* refers to the passage from one state to another'.[18] In general, then, Spinoza does not assert that ideas tied to affections and

affects arise as *secondary* cognitive 'abstractions'; instead, as Deleuze puts it, 'Our feelings are in themselves ideas'.[19]

Seeing Tomkins as dissociating affects from cognition is similarly questionable. While Sedgwick and Frank argued that Tomkins saw cognition and affects as systems that 'involve many kinds of interdependent transformations',[20] Leys argues that he 'remained committed to the idea of their autonomy as separate subsystems' and that he keeps them 'inherently independent of each other'.[21] It's true that Tomkins proposes a system of nine distinct and innate affective ranges: distress-anguish; interest-excitement; enjoyment-joy; surprise-startle; anger-rage; fear-terror; shame-humiliation; disgust (the impulse to expel something noxious); and dissmell (the impulse to pull away from something noxious).[22] It's also true that he posits a 'freedom' of each affect to 'combine' and 'coassemble' with objects as well as various mental and bodily 'components' of the human organism – including other affects, memory, sensation, perception, and action. Contrary to Leys's assertion, though, Tomkins by the end of his four-volume magnum opus, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1962–91) does not maintain that the cognitive and affective are 'inherently independent' systems; instead, he states that the two are conjoined through 'a set of relations of partial independence, partial dependence, and partial interdependence that vary in their interrelationships, conditional upon the specific state of the whole subsystem at any one moment'.[23] In other words, the dynamic conjunction of affects and cognition is fluid, contingent upon the 'state' one happens to be in – which is comparable to Spinoza's conception of affect (*affectus*) as a felt idea of 'the passage from one [affective] state to another'. Tomkins might at times theorise affect and cognition as two separate systems, but he does so largely for heuristic reasons; the reality of the situation, as he states, is that 'The coassembly and fusion of both motivational [affective] and cognitive mechanisms is the rule, not the exception'.[24] As in Spinoza's theory, affects and cognition need to be seen as thoroughly fused with each other. Such fusion develops, for example, through the 'affect theories' and 'affect scripts' that Tomkins says are developed by people individually. As Sedgwick and Frank explain, according to Tomkins the 'theory' a person builds for a particular affect is built up empirically over the course of multiple experiences of it. The theory is thus 'cognitive and affective' in nature, and also involves strategies for dealing with the affect – for example, by amplifying it, diminishing it, or combining it with other affects.[25] Similarly, Tomkins's 'script theory' is based on affective 'scenes', and the scripts – which are continually flexible and revised – are generated by what

Tomkins comes to call the 'minding' system, which is 'composed of cognitive and affective subsystems'[26]:

> Scripts are generated by the minding system as rules for that system, including rules for both cognitive and affective ordering as subsets, analogous to the way in which an interpretation of a text presupposes and includes rules of grammar, semantics, pragmatics, and more.[27]

Ultimately, then, the case for seeing Tomkins as upholding a 'noncognitivist' account of affect is as tenuous as the one that ascribes such an account to Spinoza and Deleuze. Contrary to Jameson's and Massumi's positions, Tomkins's does not call for strict differentiation between emotion and affect, and far from seeing affective life as being 'in opposition' to language, Tomkins suggests that the 'scripts' people form with and for affects are akin to the work of textual criticism.

I. A. Richards in *Practical Criticism* (1929) commented that while critical practice had become rich in methods of interpreting meaning, it was poor at dealing with feeling: 'For handling feeling we have nothing at all comparable. We have to rely upon introspection, a few clumsy descriptive names for emotions, some scores of aesthetic adjectives [. . .]'.[28] That imbalance has increasingly been redressed, particularly since the 'affective turn', with critics and theorists not only developing fresh insights into how affect can be interpreted through language, but also new understandings of how language itself is affective. Denise Riley, for example, has recently been influential in exploring how language 'does not express feeling' so much as it 'does feeling'.[29] While language is 'impersonal' in being indifferent to those who use it, she argues, its architecture is at the heart of the affects we form. Punctuation, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and ideological discourse can all be informative and formative for a person's affective life. Punctuation can do affect by exclamation marks, for example, just as a statement can be modified affectively by tone or volume of voice. Vocabulary alone affords a variety of tones: when relating the fact of a person's death, for example, I can say he 'died', or 'passed away', or 'kicked the bucket', each of these carrying a different affective charge, the force of which will also depend on my tone of voice no less than the affective state of the person hearing it. In using any of those words for death I could also retain quotation marks around them (if speaking, I can signal that with finger movements) in order to ironise the meaning, affective charge, and my identification with them. For Riley, as well as Judith Butler, we each come into being as a social individual largely by identifying oneself through the terms and structures of language.[30] We are interpellated into society through language, by taking up a position in it, and

it's because the terms of language are consequently very much at the core of one's selfhood that hate speech, for example, can be so affecting and injurious.[31]

As Riley argues, the self identifications we make with language can engender an array of affects. In stating, for example, that 'I am an Australian, a father, and a lover not a fighter', I might feel pride and solidarity with others who identify with any of those terms – though if I were to let my daughter be kidnapped under my watch and then let her see me pummelling her kidnapper in rage I'd be more likely to have what Riley calls 'linguistic shame' in feeling that I do not live up to the terms. The affective dynamics of linguistic identification should not be seen as involving just nounal categories but also other grammatical modes as well as syntax. In saying 'I love you', for example, the very act of identifying my feeling with that statement can augment the feeling itself while formalising its existence for me and my beloved. In other words, the statement isn't simply expressive but also performative in so far as the feeling emerges through its verbal formalisation.[32] As with any statement, though, one can have varying affective identifications with 'I love you'. It might make me feel happy in thinking that my love resonates with other love scenes that I have taken to heart from literature and films and life. I can even take the statement's syntax gladly to heart and feel that, yes, *I* as subject am *doing* the emotion and am giving it to my beloved. Alternatively, I might think that the statement is a cliché and that its syntax doesn't fit with feeling how I am *subject to* a love that has arisen not solely in me but *between* me and my beloved – in which case I'm better off declaring 'Love You-It-I makes me'.

Taken together, the points I've made in relation to Tomkins and Riley support the case for arguing that affective experience can lead to modifications of how we theorise, script, and interpret it, just as those theories and scriptings play a part in informing and forming affects. This doesn't mean that affects are reducible to the affective 'architecture' of language; as the 'I love you' example shows, we need to think of affect, language, and cognition as thoroughly conjoined yet open to various modes of interaction, coassembly, and fusion. When Riley asserts that 'sensibility *is* words' it sounds as though she's maintaining that affect is purely linguistic, but she emphatically states that she is not suggesting that it 'is "really only" words'.[33] Conjoining 'words' and 'sensibility' means seeing language, affect, and cognition as being interrelated, yet open to the different kinds of affective identification and linguistic negotiation that I've described.

That fluidity of interaction leaves the intimacy of language and affects open to context and historical change. 'Sensibility' itself has shifted over the centuries. As Raymond Williams has noted, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the word meant 'physical feeling or sense perception', in the eighteenth century its meaning was 'much like that of modern *awareness* (not only consciousness but conscience)', and in the twentieth century it was seen more as 'a whole way of perceiving and responding, not to be reduced to either "thought" or "feeling"'.[34] The very word 'sensibility' has thus reflected and informed attitudes to how cognition and affect relate. That's also true of 'affect'. The Latin of Spinoza's *Ethics* means that his use of *affectus* and *affectio* harks back to classical Roman senses of those words. Yet, as Philip Fisher has pointed out, Spinoza – like other thinkers such as Aquinas, Descartes, Hobbes, and Kant – modified the senses of the Latin terms to give them different values and meanings.[35] It's notable that the Latin *affectus* was also frequently translated as 'passion' or 'emotion', writes Teresa Brennan, who argues that the current concept of 'affect' as fundamentally bodily stems largely from Charles Darwin's physiological account of emotions, along with William James's psychological writings.[36]

Lineages of aesthetic theory and literary criticism show how particular forms of feeling have been developed in relation to specific modes of language and literature. Take the sublime, for example. In Longinus's *On the Sublime* (written around the first century CE), he associates sublimity with a 'grand style' of 'elevated language', the effect of which 'is not to persuade the hearers, but to entrance them' with 'wonder' such that 'sublime passages exert an irresistible force and mastery' over them.[37] For Longinus, the affective force of this sublimity is rooted in combining 'grand conceptions' and 'powerful and inspired emotion' as well as 'figures of thought and speech', 'noble diction', and rhetorical style.[38] (In discussing how language 'does' feeling, Riley also considers rhetoric and cites Demetrius, for example, explaining how asyndeton can make speech dramatic.[39]) The grand style is thus conceived as eliciting a particular form of feeling – wonder – through specific forms of language and literature that combine powerful conception and emotion. In Edmund Burke's eighteenth-century writings, though, the sublime entails a different form of feeling: not wonder so much as terror and even physical pain. Some of Burke's thinking about the importance of terror relates to his views on politics of the time, but he also relates it to the power of language. Words, he argues, 'are able to affect us often as strongly as the things they represent, and sometimes much more strongly'.[40] Unlike Longinus, he suggests that language itself even harbours the potential for surpassing our

conceptions, as when he considers the phrase 'universe of Death' from Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

> Here [. . .] are two ideas not presentable but by language; and an union of them great and amazing beyond conception; if they may properly be called ideas which present no distinct image to the mind [. . .].[41]

For Burke, then, the figurative language of Milton's poem effectively amounts to a novel form of aesthetically affecting idea that is 'amazing' by virtue of exceeding conventional ideas. Burke also intimates that mediating effects – such as arise through the artifice of mimesis and figurative language – can elicit an aesthetic form of affect:

> if the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not so conversant about the present destruction of the person [. . .] they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror [. . .].[42]

Whereas Longinus portrays the grand style as expressing and performing powerful conceptions and emotions that the writer or speaker has already had, Burke suggests that language and literature can generate affect with an aesthetic twist. The indeterminacy of the 'delightful horror' and 'tranquility tinged with terror' that Burke emphasises with his 'sort of [. . .] sort of' brings me back to the 'kind of manageable suspended rage' that I began with, and the question it led me to: if affects can include real and imaginary experience simultaneously, is literary writing particularly well suited to exploring their dynamics?

A sublime aesthetics of 'delightful horror' has certainly been explored and fostered by Gothic novels. Other specific literary forms and genres, too, have traditionally focused on particular affects: for example, the sonnet on love; comedy on mirth and laughter; elegy on mourning and melancholy.[43] In Raymond Williams's view, such literary explorations of affect serve an important function, for they can register and convey to readers wider social 'structures of feeling', which he elaborates in a chapter of his *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Williams argues that 'the social' has been regarded too much in terms of 'fixed forms' of social institution and class tied to 'formal concepts', 'ideology', or 'world-view'.[44] What we need to grasp more, he writes, is that a person's experience as a social being is actually 'present and moving' and involves fluid, often ephemeral, 'structures of feeling' that take shape and circulate among people.[45] In engaging with these affective structures, writers and critics 'go beyond formally held