



Review: *The Affects of Pedagogy in Literary Studies*
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How does a literary studies classroom feel? What affects circulate within and stick to such spaces? And what do we do with the feelings and affects that emerge in the process of teaching and studying literature? The volume, *The Affects of Pedagogy in Literary Studies*, edited by Christopher Lloyd and Hilary Emmet, explores precisely these questions. Along with its Introduction and Coda, the volume is organized into four clusters, featuring several formally experimental essays. These essays, as diverse in their scope and form as they are, draw upon stories—fictional, personal, or anecdotal. As Emmett and Lloyd highlight in their Introduction, the volume builds on the premise that teaching literary studies is inherently entangled with and shaped by emotions, feelings, and affects, and therefore, theories of pedagogy must consider these entanglements (2). These entanglements are also the places where questions of race, sexuality, gender, and disability become more visible, and the volume’s palpable effort to consider affects’ relation to ideology is a testament to its aim to “[write] the body back into theory and teaching practice” (7). The literary studies classroom—a site for pedagogical, personal, political, and unexpected encounters—is one that is saturated with affects and affect-ability. A pedagogy of literary studies, therefore, must reckon with its affects.

“Textualities and Reading Practices,” the first of the four parts, centers around the act and process of reading. Contributions to this part parse through the current debates—“method wars,” reading wars, critique and postcritique—and raise questions about the methodology of reading, the figure of the pedagogue, as well as the nature of the literary studies classroom. For some contributors, the latter begins with a (re)definition of the classroom as “reparative classroom,” (37) one that has its roots in reparative reading and reparative pedagogy, stemming from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work. Another way to look at the classroom, where trust for a “non-stultifying pedagogy” (57) is established, is via a re-evaluation of the hierarchical and pre-figured conceptions of ‘the teacher’ and ‘the student’. The methods of reading at the center of this cluster seek active involvement of the student and radicalization of the student-teacher relationship. While reparative classroom, “with its counterintuitive affects that disturb student/teacher binaries” (44), aims to dissolve the boundaries, bad-faith-pedagogue’s classroom establishes trust and seeks equality between the learner and the teacher instead of working against the binaries (57). Even though the mode of reading in each essay of this cluster is defined on different terms—close reading, reparative reading, affective reading—what all the articles in this part advocate for is a mode of reading that attends, closely, to the affects sticking to the act of reading. Reading (with) the feelings.

Shifting the perspective from the affective interactions in the classroom to the affects themselves, contributions in part two, “‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Feelings,” invite us to think about the roles such affects play in literary studies classrooms. Contributions to this part see negative affects, such as failure, dis/comfort, confusion, stuckness, and

shame as opportunities instead of affects to move away from. They call to sit with such affects/feelings and to work through and with them instead of working against them. Such an attitude towards affects, by and large, the articles show, is also a signal of a different pedagogical approach, exemplified by bell hooks' "engaged pedagogy", or practices aiming at decentering and decolonizing the classroom. Contributions explore the relationship between feelings/affects and binaries that saturate our classrooms—reader/text, student/teacher, text/critic, success/failure. The classroom, through affective pedagogical practices, becomes a space of shared vulnerabilities and holds "therapeutic capacity" (78).

Part three, "Triggers and Responses," takes a closer look at the workings of classrooms. Contributions to this part ask how affects are surged and incited, and how we can productively respond to them in classroom settings; in other words, they explore the question of what it would mean "to read and teach otherwise" (113). Through their experimental forms—ranging from dialogic essays to anecdotes and personal experiences of teaching a specific text, these contributions embody the mode of thinking otherwise and exploring the unconventional and unknown. As one of the contributions to this cluster aptly puts it, "[t]here is something about teaching we know nothing about" (115). As instructors of literature, this cluster of essays establishes, it is our task to adapt ourselves to the unexpected, unforeseen and turning those situations, or affects, into learning opportunities. The essays exemplify this by exploring the affects of shame and pride specifically in the pedagogical experiences of Black women, or through an embodied "pansy pedagogy" and queer-feminist refusal as a pedagogical strategy to stand against conventional heteronormative structures, noting that refusals must also be collective. The contributions to this cluster continue to reframe the classroom through an affective lens not only by paying attention to students' "stirrings" (112) or acknowledging discomfort's value as a pedagogical learning opportunity in a classroom, but also by defining the classroom as a space of "affective encounter between the individual student and the text" (123). Some contributions in this part also build on previous essays' discussion on the relationship between the student, texts, and groups, albeit this cluster frames these relationships through "encounters." While essays in the previous cluster highlighted the importance of dissolving the boundaries that shape the instrumentalist educational system, this cluster shows that "the idea of affect reveals our interdependence with the world and others" (129). Through these encounters, "affects are catching—they connect us with others" (128).

The final part of the edited volume, "On Situatedness: Race, Identity, and the (Trans)Cultural," heavily engages with Sara Ahmed's work on feelings and whiteness, while focusing on the feeling subjects and objects of the classroom. The first essay of this cluster returns to objects in the classroom to better understand their racial functions

and offers a decolonial close reading of the “desk,” examining “the affective impact it can have on differently radicalized bodies in the classroom” (162). The essay argues that “attending to the assemblage of desks, bodies, discourse and affective forces in the literature classroom and beyond” (170) can help subvert the systems of white dominance. Unpacking the concepts of “the ideal reader,” the “pedagogy of empathy,” and the “pedagogy of pain,” the following essays in the cluster showcase the many ways affects shape the literature classroom experience. Feelings, as situated as they are, can be(come) a ‘waystation,’ as in the example of empathy, or an object of racist fetishisms. The pedagogy of pain highlights the need to bear witness to the Black pain that is so often dismissed and overlooked. The essays’ practical examples as to how to engage in such pedagogies illustrate the many ways literary studies pedagogies can be altered by way of affective engagements.

Taking the thread back to the beginning of the volume, and to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Hilary Emmet provides a Coda, whose title asks, “Where Do We Go From Here?”. Framing the Coda as “a reparative undertaking” (211), Emmett brings together the seemingly inconsistent nature of the essays—the personal, the political, the academic essay, the dialogic essay, the fragments, and the anecdotes—gathered in the volume to highlight the very message all the essays have given: affects are a productive and generative framework to understand the literary studies classroom and to (re)imagine new pedagogies that will account for all the surprises that life and the classroom have to offer. Affect, in this journey, is “a way of feeling our way along a path that *might* lead us there” (212, emphasis added), for Emmett. Reflecting on what the Covid-19 pandemic has made evident in the years when this volume was being prepared, Emmet concludes “we can’t go home again” (214), as if to answer the very question the title of the Coda poses. The Coda, like the other essay contributions in the volume, does not offer a new destination to turn our faces to, but instead asks us to think about teaching as a journey that is full of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ surprises, and to sit with those surprises and to turn them into opportunities along the way. The edited volume’s focus on affects of pedagogy in the literary studies classroom is significant, as it moves away from the traditional emphasis on objectivity and scientific detachment, highlighting the emotional and relational aspects of teaching and learning. Given the recent (re)turn to affects in critical theory and practices, perhaps the literary studies classroom could also have benefited from a more systematic analysis of how literature and classroom affects interact, though this is not the task the edited volume takes on. Its encouragement to teachers to rethink and embrace the emotional complexities that shape their classrooms is a crucial first step in acknowledging the value of these encounters and experiences and lays the groundwork for continuing the conversation that is sorely needed.

Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

Reference

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