Call for Papers

Between the Lines: 
Discerning Affect and Emotion in Pre-Modern Texts

Co-Sponsored by
The Columbia University Seminar on Affect Studies, the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (CHE), & the Anglo-Saxon Studies Colloquium (ASSC)

Columbia University Faculty House 
Friday, September 30, 2016

Keynote speaker:

Fiona Somerset, Professor, Department of English, University of Connecticut

This conference addresses multiple challenges in the study of affect and emotion in the pre-modern period. To what extent can we assume commensurability between contemporary definitions and understandings of affect or emotion and earlier, pre-modern iterations? Can we historicize affect? How do we? One strategy is to read across the surface in pre-modern works, looking for the explicit naming of emotional states (for example, “anger” or “joy”) and the gestures and expressions associated with those states; but another might be to read between the lines and find less discursively obvious articulations of affect or emotion. How, for example, do we discern or quantify affect in a culture that might value understatement and reserve? How do we read the absence, or indeed, the extremes of emotional expression or affect in texts? How do cultural texts (artistic, literary, religious etc.) contribute to the history of emotions? And how do we account for emotional change across time?

Papers for this conference should address these themes in pre-modern texts (pre-1500) from around the world. “Texts” can be constructed loosely, as written, oral, aural, visual, literary, political, administrative, religious, etc.

Possible ideas include, but are not limited to:

• evaluating the representations of emotions in the past via word study
• understanding normative associations of emotions with genders, or with specific types figures (heroes, demons, etc.) and genres.
• exploring how to discern emotional experience that is not categorized, or categorizable
• recognizing mixed emotions
• exploring the role of gestures, facial expressions, movements in art and literature
• interpreting the absence of emotional expression or affect altogether
• reading the filiation of certain emotions with the presence of faith/obedience, or with practices of conversion and devotion
• tracing unstated, unnamed emotions
• making associations between emotions and visual culture
• aligning the modern or contemporary interest in emotions and affects with the pre-modern
• interrogating the relation between emotions and conceptions of private and public life in the pre-modern
• reading emotions in cross-cultural encounters
• pedagogy and pre-modern affect

Submission deadline for abstracts: May 1, 2016. Abstracts of 300 words accompanied by a brief biographical paragraph should be submitted to conference organizers Patricia Dailey and Lauren Mancia (Columbia University Seminar on Affect Studies), Stephanie Trigg (University of Melbourne/ARC CHE), and Irina Dumitrescu (Universität Bonn): premodern.affect@gmail.com. Papers should be up to 20 minutes in length.

Subventions for travel or lodging will be available to graduate students giving papers. To apply for a subvention, write an additional paragraph explaining how this paper and conference fit into your larger program of graduate study, what funds you already have access to, and what approximate costs you will have in traveling to and staying near Columbia for the conference. Submit this paragraph along with your abstract and biographical paragraph by May 1, 2016.