



Article

The Sick Body Writing: Towards an Affective Genetic Criticism

Emily Bell * and Andrea Davidson *

Department of Literature, University of Antwerp, 2000 Antwerp, Belgium

* Correspondence: emily.bell@uantwerpen.be (E.B.); andrea.davidson@uantwerpen.be (A.D.)

Abstract: *The Sick Body Writing: Towards an Affective Genetic Criticism* examines the idea that manuscripts can be affected by illness as much as their authors' bodies are. This article aims to highlight a critical gap in the methodology of literary genetic criticism by introducing a new lens of affective genetic criticism. Genetic criticism looks at the archive of drafts and notes related to a literary work-in-progress. The application of affect theory brings focus to the impacts of the author's bodily experience during writing while in different states of un/healthiness. The effects of authors' health on their writing, especially textual non/production and the representations of un/healthiness, can be found in their archive in a variety of forms, whether represented in the narrative or responsible for elements of the narrative's structure. Using two case studies from different literary canons, James Joyce (modernist) and Aidan Chambers (children's and Young Adult), the article concludes that this lens can be productively applied to understand better the embodiment of writing processes and adaptations of writing environments as a result of affective needs.

Keywords: temporary illness; literary genetic criticism; affect theory; age studies; embodiment; authorship; James Joyce; Aidan Chambers

1. Introduction

Before the medium was the message, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about the effect of his typewriter on the kind of writing he produced: "Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts" (quoted in Kittler 1999, p. 200). In turn, media theorist Friedrich Kittler described Nietzsche as the first "mechanized philosopher" (ibid.). Nietzsche's typewriter was made by Hans Rasmus Johann Malling Hansen—it was a writing ball, its mechanical operation built for sensory engagement, adapted to the tactility and dexterity of working with one's hands. Nietzsche used it out of necessity to facilitate work under the ever-worsening state of his myopia. His so-called 'telegram style' grew out of 20-minute bursts of writing which was all he could handle due to the pain in his eyes. If the medium is the body, then the message is affective.

In calling Nietzsche "mechanized", Kittler institutes a slippage between Nietzsche's person (whereby technology is an extension of the self) and his philosophy (whereby his theories are shaped by technology, be it formally, aesthetically or in content). This suggestive label has much to say about technological impacts on literary production. What is absent, however, is a consideration of how Nietzsche's myopia (rather than his assistive tool) might have impacted his writing. If we are to accept Nietzsche's own assertion that the aesthetic and stylistic elements of his prose were fundamentally altered by the tool with which he wrote, then his body as a tool must also be considered. The chain of events that brought the writing ball into his hands as well as the form of the ball itself was centered on his physiology and his bodily interferences with his work.

The development of Nietzsche's 'telegram style' as an accommodation for his near-sightedness might thus be assessed by literary scholars using genetic criticism. This method originated in French literary studies in the 1970s, defined by its focus on the genetic dossier (manuscripts and drafts prior to the published text) in order to establish a meaningful *avant-texte* (the materials interpreted in their sequence pertaining to the writing process).



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It has gained traction in Anglo-American criticism, though its remit has largely remained within the period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This method's accomplishments have been to elaborate processes of writing and to understand textuality as dynamic and fluid, infused with possibility. Most recently, there have been advances in genetic criticism of digital textuality, as well as tools for facilitating such criticism in the digital age (Bekius 2021; Jaillant 2019; Ries 2018). Nevertheless, the possible applications of genetic criticism are yet underexplored. In this article, we seek to highlight and address how genetic criticism has forgotten the (affected) body of the author.

Recently, Bloom and Rovera (2020) addressed the materials involved in the writing process to understand "how the paper medium and writing implements help or hinder the act of composition" (p. 10); the body as a central instrument in this process, however, remains absent. Genetic criticism looks at authors' literary archives in a way that has not, until now, looked at the writing subject or the author's embodied sense of self nor at the circumstances under which creative writing took place. The effect of the writer's health on writing, especially textual non/production and the representations of un/healthiness in whatever texts that the writer was able to generate under conditions of bodily strain or pain, has been overlooked in genetic criticism. The circumstance on which our article focuses is the author's body when experiencing temporary or long-term unhealthiness. Because we use affect theory to describe and contextualize the (sometimes-sick) writer's body, we name our intervention affective genetic criticism.¹

It is remarkable that in fields where genetic criticism flourishes—for instance in studies of Gustave Flaubert, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf and Samuel Beckett—the embodiment of writing processes is forgotten, despite the critical inclination to discuss embodiment in their works. This article seeks to redress this gap by applying an affective framework to focalizing states of bodily unhealthiness during creative writing. We layer onto that framework a tenet from age studies: that bodily states, such as age and its attendant conditions, including health, come into existence through storytelling. Margaret Morganroth Gullette (2004) calls this "age autobiography" (p. 150) when that narrative is self-reflexive. Using two case studies from different literary canons, James Joyce (modernist) and Aidan Chambers (children's and Young Adult), we show that this lens can be productively applied to understand the embodiment of writing better. Specifically, we find that the affect and effect of illness is materially evident in the archives of Joyce (his impaired vision) and Chambers (psychosomatic symptoms and viral infection).

In this light, we ask how is genetic criticism alive to contemporary critical concerns, other than through examination of contemporary archives (such as born-digital literature)? Our approach acknowledges that the body is an essential vessel for and facilitator of writing: just as a pen without ink hampers or interrupts the writing process, so too can injury and illness hinder or alter the author's relationship to their manuscript and literary production. In our view, the body writing is captured through the lived experience of the author. Illness, therefore, is defined through subjectivity as it had impact and meaning for the author-at-work; symptoms of ill health are understood and explored as reported by the author. When self-reported, these anecdotal medical records may take the form of diaries, correspondence, or even, as we find, literary texts that bear certain traces of how authors experienced their health. Unlike official medical records, anecdotal medical records are subjective in that they refer to personal experiences of bodily states. They do not hold up or project upon the reporter's body any pure illness experience unless the reporter themselves subscribed to such a way of inhabiting their body. We borrow another leaf from Gullette's (2004) insistence that age is an embodied experience that is subjectively constructed in order to insist that there is no normative experience of un/healthiness when bodily states have been recorded anecdotally outside the realm of medical discourse. Because we have found anecdotal medical records in some literary texts and the documents that may be called their *avant-textes*, we therefore explore how manuscripts reveal writers' strategies of overcoming and accommodation in different states of health.

2. The Body Writing

Affect offers a way of centering the body in our discourse. What Patricia Clough (2007) identified as the “affective turn”, according to her, “expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter” (p. 2). This “new configuration” traversing human and nonhuman bodies aligns with our argument doubly: firstly, thinking of the body as part of a technology of writing and, secondly, thinking about how technologies or social strategies of accommodation are employed by writers. While taking up Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) call for reparative readings, the affective turn in modernist studies has focused on affect represented in narrative or visual mediums to restore agency to readers and narrative identities—in feminist readings, for instance (Watts et al. 2019). There have also been strides towards understanding critical affect in modernist studies, particularly in assessing the impulse to nominate something as modernist—“the affects modernist literature inspires” (James 2018, para. 6). In children’s literature studies, the focus is on readerly affect.

The affective turn in children’s literature criticism has often zeroed in on questions of reader response and representation in texts. Macarena García-González (2022) critiqued this tendency for being adult-centric, thus eliding children’s distinctive reading responses, as well as for being too invested in representation. With her call for an affective childist literary criticism that accounts for the materiality of texts and intergenerational adult-child reading experiences, García-González nevertheless keeps her lens trained on readers. The stakes for reader response in children’s literature studies are very high because of a tough-to-shake tradition that apprehends books for young readers as didactic tools that ask their readers to read and respond by learning, growing, and gaining self-awareness; therefore Mavis Reimer (2010) warns that the ongoing debate about how to describe the child reader is “fraught with difficulties” (p. 4). Whether focusing on this didactic element or pushing up against it, scholars of children’s and YA literature must often confront affects, namely the feelings that books inspire in young readers. If addressing the human-nonhuman entanglements that surround the act of reading, scholars in this field have observed affect as a dynamic that transcends representationalism, just as it intersects with the larger multiplicity of relations that the existence of a text involves (Enriquez 2022).

When not focused on reader responsiveness, applications of affect theory in children’s literature studies examine textual representations of affectedness and emotions. In this context, Louise Joy (2021) points out that “(t)o read a literary text is to uncover affect” (p. 8). Joy implies a link between the affect that is present in texts and the creativity of authors, for, “texts, as linguistic utterances, are performances of affect” (ibid.). Just as texts are utterances plus mediation, which often takes a material form, affect is performance plus sensation or feeling. Where Joy does not venture is to name the utterer and performer as a participant in the affects that readers uncover. Performing affects to which readers may respond, authors are also-affected subjects within the text’s matrix. In his critical writings, Chambers (1995) imagined that matrix as a mediated encounter in which readers keep companionship with authors. In Chambers’ practice of writing YA literature, this companionship meant that he performed feelings that his adolescent readers would authenticate as ‘adolescent’ feelings when their reading response was affective. Chambers brought feelings that he recalled from both his adolescence and his adulthood into his creative practice: often he responded to his writing affectively, by feeling those feelings again or responding to them in his body, such as feeling fatigued after writing an emotionally wrought chapter.

Writerly affect is noticeably absent from critical engagements, even though texts can be and often are representative of the writer’s bodily experience. In Joyce studies, disability has gained importance as a critical lens (Nemecek 2010; Bednarska 2011; Linett 2016; Quirici 2016), most notably in the volume *Joyce Writing Disability* (Colangelo 2022). These essays offer vital readings of Joyce’s works which, while not wholly new, are novelly collected under the explicit label of disability. Affect in modernist studies more generally has moved beyond subjectivity to explore loci of affect outside the individualized, aesthetically ideal experience—in ecology, in the non-human, or in negative affect, for instance (Mao and Walkowitz 2006; Rubenstein and Neuman 2020; Adkins 2022).² However, we continue

to neglect a consideration of authorial affect and its material consequences for the writing process.

Stephen Ahern (2019) emphasizes the question of “how” (p. 7) we can attune to textual affects, rooting the importance of affective critical engagements in process. As he points out, a difficulty faced by affect-focused critics has been that “affect is not something” but rather, employing Seigworth and Gregg’s (2010) phrase, can be described as “forces of encounter” (p. 2). Textual encounter has, notably in children’s literature studies, formed a focal point for investigations of readerly affect. Such “forces of encounter” understood to occur between reader and text surely also exert themselves in the relations between author and text-in-progress. Genetic criticism, with its emphasis on analyzing the documents which relate to a writing process, might have something to offer towards an understanding of authorial affect—that is, the affect of the process. Genetic scholarship relies on material traces in (or absences of) documentation that signal moments of possibility and decision in the writing process as it happened, demonstrating an evolution of the text without teleological determinacy. In studying the “movement of writing” (Deppman et al. 2004, p. 2), genetic critics infer the authorial decisions that went into making a document. The biological and physiognomic unpredictability of the author’s body must, therefore, be considered as an animating factor of the writing environment and process.

Ahern also observes how many affective critical impulses respond to Rita Felski’s (2009) “neophenomenology”, which aspires to a rapprochement between the strictures of literary critical response and the (lay) experience of reading in order to explore “our many sided attachments to texts” (p. 31). One crucial, missing attachment to text is in the networked, affective forces that materially shape textuality. Our proposal for an affective genetic criticism therefore posits the author as affectively participant in literary production to better understand the multifaceted, affective relations involved in artistic creation. Even as readerly affect pervades methodologies and neophenomenologies for literary criticism today, where is the writerly affect?

3. Genetic Criticism: Interventions

In a polemical essay, Oliver Davis (2002) surmised that, in genetic criticism, “meticulous description effectively takes the place of interpretation and analysis” (p. 100). While Davis’s totalizing claim is unfair to the field of genetic criticism, there is a ring of truth in the suggestion of sidelining hermeneutics. Discussions about ‘how’ to do genetic criticism continue to center on documentation (De Biasi and Wassenaar 1996; Van Hulle 2022). While archival documents have provided the fodder for genetic critics’ analysis, material traces of the author’s body that made these documents have eluded genetic attention. There is room to account for the embodiment of writing processes, the fluctuations of bodies in good or ill health and the attendant traces left in documents of writing.

A prominent debate that has occupied genetic criticism since its emergence in French post-structuralism concerns the status of the author and of authority. Addressing this debate, Sally Bushell (2005) wryly and presciently suggested that there is room for an author’s “half-life” (p. 57) in the discussion of compositional materials. In other words, genetic criticism can embrace a view of the author as an active agent in the compositional process without tying itself to the author as sole arbiter of a text’s evolution. For Bushell, the position of intention in genetic criticism is more a question of vocabulary rather than fundamental differences of method: “In many ways French genetic criticism is deeply ‘authorial’ but it always seeks to reduce and control this element by maintaining a strong centre of interest in the textual material and so attempting to create a depersonalized approach” (p. 56). The introduction of affect takes a less strong approach to the location of authority; lending agency to the body’s role in material textual production emphasizes the manuscript document as a site of confluential authorities. Our lens of embodiment adds new dimensionality to the understanding of authors at work and to the material traces of their writing process.

Davis' observation of genetic criticism's "fairly narrow range of 'acceptable', canonical, authors" is turned, in the concluding paragraph of his essay, into a hope "that genetic critics will begin to pay serious attention to the manuscripts of authors from beyond the canon" (Davis 2002, pp. 99, 101). The intervening period in genetic critical studies since Davis's essay has seen admirable attempts to broaden its purview of content, insights and approaches.

Cognitive narratology, for instance, has already found popularity among genetic critics, focusing on the thinking processes that inform writing. The application of cognitive lenses to genetic criticism was introduced by Dirk Van Hulle (2014) by way of reassessing the so-called 'inward turn' of modernism. Most recently, Emma-Louise Silva (2022) has extended this to children's literature studies, incorporating insights from studies in narrative medicine. Focused on 4E cognition,³ her approach also acknowledges authorship as an embodied practice in which bodily functions and health intervene or enhance creative processes. The explicit attempt to move beyond the Cartesian duality of the mind–body split in these cognitive approaches has, however, come at the expense of the body. An affective genetic approach has the potential to look beyond the immaterial, intellectualized process and understand writing and authorship as embodied and connected.

In turning to embodiment in a fuller physiognomic sense, affective genetic criticism provides insights into how the physical body facilitates and hinders writing processes. One justification for this approach is to be found in attending to the changeability of the living body through time, taking inspiration from Gullette's (2004) insight that, throughout the lifespan, some life stages can be more prominent and others more marginal. While crafting narratives in their creative work, authors will experience their corporeality differently during various, transitory phases, some of which are relatively more productive, others less so; on the chronology of the lifespan, many of these phases of the ageing process may happen synchronously with the creative process of a single literary work. The prevention of writing, especially when this occurs through periods of ill health, is harder for the genetic critic to trace than acts of writing that are, by definition, recorded on the page. However, our affective framework provides a means of understanding practices that temporarily replace or reduce writing when accommodations are needed—such as reading, dictation or resting—thus giving a fuller view of the writing process at each stage of (un)productivity.

The following examples from the genetic dossiers of Joyce and Chambers explore how temporary sickness impacted their writing processes. The physiognomic obstacles to process and progress are just as much part of the circumstances of writing as creative flow in stages of notetaking, drafting or revision. The material consequences of ill health—headaches or impaired vision, for instance—can leave material traces which shape the writing process and the written product like symptoms on the page.

4. The Case of Joyce

James Joyce's extensive and much-studied archive reveals two pertinent sensory aspects of his compositional processes: his deteriorating eyesight and his preference for writing by hand in pencil. Composition here largely refers to two activities: reading and writing. Joyce was a fervent note-taker and used his reading notes to draft and develop episodes of *Ulysses* (1922) and, later, chapters of *Finnegans Wake* (1939). While any Joyce scholar will be aware of these details about his eyes and his use of pencil, they have rarely been accounted for specifically as products of affect that impacted his writing process. Moreover, Joyce himself was explicit on many occasions in correspondence about both these experiences, often interrelatedly: to Lilly Bollach, a typist Joyce hired in the mid-1920s to produce clean typescripts of parts of *Finnegans Wake*, he asked (writing in heavy black pencil) that she "write with a heavy black pencil", as he could not "distinguish one word of print or pen but can pencil with a magnifying glass" (Joyce 1966, p. 118). To Harriet Shaw Weaver, one of Joyce's most important patrons and publishers, Joyce dictated a letter that described how his "notebooks, written when [he] was suffering from [his] eyes or lately, are quite legible to [him] as they were scribbled with thick black pencil", although some

thirteen others required him to wait for “improved sight” (Joyce 1957, p. 276). Joyce’s use of pencil facilitates both crucial aspects of his process as outlined above.

This article’s case study focuses on Joyce’s later career during the writing of *Finnegans Wake* for a number of reasons, perhaps the most important being that the genetic dossier for the *Wake* is extensive and the chronology extended, meaning the work was written during multiple bouts of ill health. In contrast to writing his earliest works—*Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), neither of which offers the critic an *avant-texte* comparable in scope to his late works—Joyce’s literary reputation by this time also played a crucial role in attracting and enlisting assistants, benefactors and collaborators to aid his work.

Joyce experienced significant eye trouble for most of his adult life, and it only worsened with age. References to and understandings of Joyce’s troubled eyes are commonplace in Joyce studies, most easily derived from reading his published correspondence. More than mere documentation, his complaints over his eyes expressed in such letters often describe the effects of this aspect of his ill health. “Being unable to read or write”, he explained to Weaver at the end of 1928, for example, he had instead “been taking oral lessons in these two languages [Spanish and Russian] and also in Danish, this time with a Dane as [he] wanted to vary the Norwegian pronunciation” (Joyce 1957, p. 277). While it would be speculative to suggest that this linguistic practice had any traceable impact on the evolution of *Wake* (which he was then working on), his renewed uptake of language learning at this time is stimulated by his visual impairment and can thus be viewed within this affective framework. It is worth remembering that *Wake* is commonly discussed as an aesthetic exemplar of multilingualism (Alexandrova 2020); this context also signals how Joyce’s methods of language learning were prompted and heightened by his sensory experience.

Disability studies within the field of Joyce criticism has done important work on bringing disability aesthetics to the fore in Joyce’s works (Nemecek 2010; Bednarska 2011; Linett 2016; Quirici 2016; Colangelo 2022). Despite these significant strides, the impact of Joyce’s own ill health is usually considered an experience that he was subsequently inclined to represent in his works, rather than something that shaped the formal development of the works themselves. Scholars have also considered the connection between Joyce’s weak vision and his works’ reflections on broader visual culture (Volpicelli 2018); the work of Roy Gottfried (1995) is foundational for these scholarly developments. Gottfried argues that Joyce’s visual impairments combined with the tools he used to aid his seeing were repeated reminders of his non-normative vision in a way that shaped his sensory and linguistic aesthetics: “the symptom of his text may be the pathology of his eyes” (p. 26). What has long been defined as a highly experimental textual aesthetic (in *Ulysses* and even more so in *Finnegans Wake*) might not solely originate in the avant-garde positioning of Joyce among his contemporaries. Rather, in conceiving of the text as a symptom, Gottfried suggests that Joyce’s novels are a bodily affect of Joyce himself, produced by way of representing his own disrupted sight that was literally shaped by optical instruments: “the spectacles for myopia, the opaque lens for the eye sensitive with iritis, the additional magnifying glass” (ibid.).

5. The Presence of Absence

As scholars draw on medical humanities to investigate Joyce’s illnesses—especially his bad eye health—with increasing precision (van Velze 2017), genetic criticism would similarly benefit from revising its version of textual evolution to heed the difficulties Joyce experienced in literary creation. In this view, the manuscript exhibits symptoms in direct correlation to, even an extension of, those experienced by Joyce’s body. In some cases, this difficulty might paradoxically manifest in a lack of manuscript, in *not* writing. Jed Deppman (2006), a genetic authority, has ruminated on the kinds of negative affect that we might miss in our reconstruction of Joyce’s writing process: “do we really get at the disappointments, the agonies, the sacrifices, the uncertainties and emotions that go with writing pioneering, large-scale books? A good novel does not leave out the tears, but a critic

in thrall to a text or an author tends to hide the pain and rush to a happy ending” (para. 29). Even in the genetic impetus to reinsert moments of deliberation into the textual process—to infer “the movement of writing” and to “reconstruct . . . the chain of events in a writing process” (Deppman et al. 2004, p. 2)—Deppman suggests that the genetic method lacks a will or ability to adequately parse the good alongside the bad. While his view penetrates to the heart of the relationship between the affective/affected writer and their writing process, it is probable that his observation also addresses the thorny topic of positivism as it relates to genetic analysis. The energy of genetic critics has frequently been turned to refuting charges of positivism (Lernout 2002), often passionately, though critics struggle with the need to define the line between “avoiding a scientific positivism” (Sartor 2018a, p. 3) and advertising as a “science of literature” (De Biasi 2004). An affective view could help temper the positivism repeatedly leveled against genetic criticism by accounting for periods of bodily rest and writing respite as constituent of—rather than competitors to—the writing process.

Absence as conceived by genetic criticism would normally denote archival loss—a document presumed to have been created but lost or destroyed—rather than an absence or cessation of writerly production altogether.⁴ But periods of inactivity or difficulty in writing can also be traced through the archive with the aid of creative context. For instance, Genevieve Sartor (2018b) convincingly suggests that Joyce’s preoccupation with his daughter Lucia’s deteriorating mental health stole focus from the task of gathering new compositional material when he was working on chapter II.2 of *Finnegans Wake* in the mid-1930s. As Sartor notes, several critics have commented on Joyce’s use of an early notebook known as “Scribbledehobble” (Buffalo MS VI.A, compiled in 1923) for the development of a section of this chapter for a pre-book publication in *transition* magazine (issue 23, 1934–35). Judging by the characterization of Joyce’s correspondence at this time, Sartor sees a probable link between his acute concern for Lucia and his compositional practice: “it is quite likely that Joyce borrowed heavily from Scribbledehobble because he was principally engaged with Lucia’s care, and thus simply did not have time to compose new material” (Sartor 2018b, p. 71). In other words, his comparably small literary production at this moment and his reliance on decade-old material are connected to his emotional commitments as an anxious father.

Other critical responses to Joyce’s literary practice for this section of the *Wake* curiously instill an affective relationship between Joyce and his working document, though not in such explicit terms. David Hayman (1965) suggests Joyce was “not interested” (p. 112) in this passage and completed it through a sense of obligation to the creative project; Dirk Van Hulle (2016) suggests instead that Joyce’s “mechanical composition process” (p. 191) at this time resulted from a certain lack of creative stimulation; Luca Crispi (2007) describes this “seemingly automated creative technique” as “an unprecedented manner of composition for Joyce in a first draft” (p. 227), footnoting Hayman’s suggestion of Joyce’s failed writerly confidence by way of explanation. Whether “automated”, “mechanical” or “not interested”, all three suggest Joyce’s indifference to his work on this manuscript. While genetic critics might have hinted at the fluctuation of Joyce’s creative energy as measured through his emotional life, there is conspicuously little exploration of his composition as it relates to his familial environment. As Joyce’s time was given over to caregiving (or at least the performance of it in his letters), he adapted his compositional method to accommodate the demands of his emotional and familial life. For Sartor, this insight is crucial to a larger critical project of contextualizing Lucia’s role in the *Wake*’s compositional environment: “we need not just to genetically investigate how Lucia might function as an influence on *Finnegans Wake*, but also to explore how this can help achieve a deeper understanding of the text itself” (Sartor 2018b, p. 81). Thus, certain periods of hiatus from Joyce’s work can be interpreted for the impact they have on his return to work and the materiality of the text produced thereafter.

Critics often isolate discussion of Joyce’s fatherhood as pure biography, only relevant to his work in a thematic capacity. Crispi’s discussion of chapter II.2’s genesis, for instance,

points out that Richard Ellmann's landmark biography of Joyce "focused almost exclusively on Lucia's condition and her treatments rather than on Joyce's continuing literary work" (Crispi 2007, p. 234) in covering the period between July 1933 and July 1935, suggesting that the personal is entirely separate and separable from professional and creative concerns. However, in considering Joyce's emotional devotion to Lucia's care, we find many material consequences of this relationship in his working method and documents. On several occasions, Joyce mentions sending books or newspapers to Lucia in his correspondence and she was an important presence as a scribe and reader for his correspondence and literary notetaking in the 1930s; she is identified as scribe for 50 letters in Joyce's total correspondence. In such a way, mutual care has evidenced impact on Joyce's material output.

Lucia's role as scribe can be traced further back in Joyce's working environment. Another early *Wake* notebook, Buffalo MS VI.B.5, composed between mid-May and late July of 1924, provides a final example. In early April, Joyce's ophthalmologist had advised that he needed another operation on his left eye, directing him to "limit" his work "to a half or a third" (Joyce 1966, p. 92) to prevent further deterioration before the operation, as Joyce reported to Weaver. The operation took place on 11 June and his recovery for the month immediately after proved especially difficult; he expressed his depression in no uncertain terms to Weaver in a letter on 27 June (Joyce 1957, pp. 215–16). This letter was the first he had written himself since the operation; all the others had been written by or dictated to Lucia. In addition to these letters, Lucia's hand is found on pages of VI.B.5, writing notes at her father's dictation. In this instance, Lucia helps Joyce while his ability to read and write is temporarily reduced. We know that many of the notes in Lucia's hand were written in the early stages of Joyce's recovery while his eye was still bandaged—one note was recorded on 16 June (Bloomsday). Further notes in Joyce's own hand seem to date to July when he went to Brittany with his family for a holiday and recovery period. While there, Joyce seemingly resumed his reading practices as evidenced by reading notes in VI.B.5. Amongst these reading notes, he records family events and dramas in fragments, reflecting the tension arising from the close quarters he shared with his wife, son and daughter while there (Hayman 1990). This holiday to assist Joyce's physical recovery forced a proximity which created other emotional pressures.

In this preliminary consideration of the affects that shaped Joyce's later writing process, it is thus necessary to consider the interdependency of his relationship with his daughter. Owing to their respective states of unhealthiness and mutually felt obligations of care, we see how Joyce's method and environment are shaped by the affects of his closest relations. Lucia's health is sometimes as important as her father's to the resultant compositional decisions and strategies as evidenced in the workings of *Finnegans Wake*. Attention to her health and wellbeing pulls his working method in different directions, variously distracting him from work or inspiring him to engage her in its progress in the hopes of focusing her and stabilizing her mental health.

6. The Case of Chambers

The second case for reinstating the bodily experience of the author in critical approaches to literary genesis is based on the author's own representation of how his body influenced his writing. Reliant on the anecdotal medical record of the author's personal diary, this case imposes no medical discourse or diagnosis external to the author's own words. Reading the author's diary together with his work-in-progress as complementary records of his creative process makes it, in fact, urgent when reconstructing that process to see how literary genesis encompasses the author's transitory embodied states of being.

Distraction from writing by related issues of physical, mental, and financial wellbeing caused unproductive dips in Aidan Chambers' writing process during the years he wrote *Breaktime* (1978) and *Dance On My Grave* (1982). Reading the genesis of these YA novels with an affective lens, a parallel emerges between the fictional representations of adolescent bodies and the adult author's bodily health. Chambers' personal diary and writing

notebooks from this period show that he was a close observer of his body who noticed its impact on his creativity. He used his embodied experience to resolve some of the problems interfering with his creative process.

Chambers was in his mid- to late forties. He had left full-time teaching ten years prior in order to pursue authorship. Midlife crisis came to be a fruitful theme for his writing, as Vanessa Joosen (2021) has shown through a non-affective genetic approach to Chambers' oeuvre. Adding affect theory's insight into how ageing is entangled with embodiment affords even more context to the relationship between author and his texts-in-process: not only was midlife an experience that inspired Chambers' creativity, but it was also an experience that he felt creatively. According to an oft-told anecdote, Chambers' midlife career change was motivated by an illness that he interpreted as symptomatic of a creative crisis. In one version, Chambers (2020) viscerally describes, "I started writing fiction because of a headache [. . .] which felt like a tight fist was squeezing my brain while a sharp knife sliced it open, an operation without anaesthetic" (Chambers 2020, pp. 7–8). Causing him to "collapse[] semi-conscious onto the kitchen floor" and diagnosed by a medical professional as a sign that there was "something missing in your life, young man", this intrusion of Chambers' body on his work could only be cured by giving in to the compulsion that he felt to write (ibid., p. 8). Chambers recalled that the pills his doctor prescribed "fogged my thoughts, my feelings, my memory, my energy, even now and then my hearing and sight" until he quit taking that "medical poison" and took up writing instead (ibid., pp. 9–10). Although writing was the cure, it did not end his pain: he once described drafting a manuscript as "painful; there is still the fear of getting it wrong, the legacy of those canings" when he was a schoolboy in the 1940s (quoted in Fox 2001, p. 11).

During writing, symptoms of Chambers' feelings presented in productive and unproductive ways. The same goes for symptoms of viral illness, sleep deprivation, and side effects of medications that he took to cope with other symptoms. Chambers compounded certain symptoms and how they made him feel, both physically and emotionally, with plot development and characterization in his novels. However, sometimes the negative affects of his symptoms blocked his writing progress so that Chambers even interpreted them as writer's block. Chambers lived with aches and pains during the autumn and winter of 1979 that plagued him with periods of frustration when the manuscript of *Dance On My Grave* did not grow or change at all. Although the geneticists' "movement of writing" (Deppman et al. 2004, p. 2) did not spread across the manuscript during these periods, Chambers' unproductivity neither must nor should be invisible in the genetic dossier of *Dance* because what the author experienced bodily (in movements that happened off the page) would eventually feature in the manuscript because Chambers chose to represent them. Chambers' creative process, on and off the page, can after all be reconstructed when the genetic dossier is expanded to include documents and testimonies showing the author at work, rather than only those records of the work-in-progress developing. Genetic critics (Scheibe 1998; Van Hulle 2014) have distinguished between artists who create 'in their heads' (*Kopfarbeiters*) before recording their works-in-progress and those who create on the page (*Papierarbeiters*), but this binary does not account for the non-cognitive creative activities, especially sensation.

Furthermore, while writer's block has hitherto been constructed by scholars as a consequence of cognitive struggle with the creative process (Boice 1985; Ahmed and Güss 2022), foregrounding instead the affects that Chambers associated with blockage reveals the relevance of his creative frustration to the work-in-progress. Aligning with Seigworth and Gregg's (2010) approach to affect theory as the "displacement of the centrality of cognition" (p. 8), more dimensions of the writing process become visible when the author's embodiment, symptoms of his passing illnesses, and his medications are accounted for.

Genetic approaches to the study of Chambers' oeuvre have recourse not only to the author's archive, but also to the author himself. He has blue eyes, a firm handshake, a tall build, and a vested interest in what scholars write about him, as, after all, he is able to correspond with many of them. Literary genetic research on living authors has

particular risks and benefits. For example, crossing the boundary between creative process and private life to take an affective genetic approach to Chambers' works involves taking responsibility for his privacy and consulting documents that genetic critics traditionally exclude from the genetic dossier: oral testimony and personal diaries (as opposed to working notebooks—Chambers kept both).

Even though it is non-archival, selectively transcribed and entrusted to the researcher by Chambers himself at his discretion, the diary that Chambers kept during *Dance's* genesis is the most useful source for describing the author's affective experience. He seldom uses the notebooks that he dedicated to outlining plots and planning characters and scenes for the novel to record his responses to writing. Those responses belonged to the same, more personal record where he kept track of symptoms, illnesses, and medications. In the diary, he recorded good writing days that "left me with an incipient migraine & feeling weak physically" (Chambers, *Diary*, 28 September 1979) and blocked days when he felt "energy-less, incipient migraine [. . .] Serenid [sleeping pill] made me lethargic also" (ibid., 5 October 1979). Chambers rationalized these symptoms, and a sleeplessness that kept him awake until dawn, as "the usual anxiety pattern, and I'm sure it is all tied up to the book, plus probably the physical phase I'm in", linking creative and bodily processes together (ibid., 12 October 1979). This physical phase marked his first month of drafting: not yet having been blocked, nor yet having resorted to representing the negative affects of authorship in the manuscript itself—that was still to come as his struggle to write in an uncomfortable body continued.

When it arrived, the creative frustration of writer's block both stalled the progress of literary genesis and caused Chambers a familiar physical pain. The symptoms of being creatively blocked parallel the negative affects that Chambers tends to use to describe the headache and collapse he interprets as the physical expression of his compulsion to write. One entry in his diary records, "blockage again. . . I keep feeling that if only I can get the raw bones down, reworking will produce the flavor & style. Which I think is fine. But I cannot get the bones: the anatomy won't show itself" (ibid., 25 March 1980). Thinking about the novel as a body with bones and an "anatomy", by which he seems to mean muscles and organs and flesh, Chambers took an embodied approach to writing that also encompassed his body and his narrator-protagonist's. Writing a body that will "show itself" by revealing its anatomy apparently entailed writing about bodily pain. He wrote his anguished experiences of writer's block right into the novel, which results in *Dance* demonstrating how the affects of authorship and character may overlap.

7. Representation

Chambers' bodily health so influenced his creative process that he determined to explore the impact of illness on narrative. After all, Chambers (2011) explained that the six YA novels that compose his Dance Sequence explore "the secrets of the body, the mind, and the heart" that surface in "drama of everyday life, of place, of language, of states of being" (p. 251). Although the ways in which he did so changed over his 30 years of writing the Dance Sequence, Chambers always situated those secrets and dramas in teenage British characters caught between working-class family life and their middle-class-aspiring educations. In the second of three working notebooks for *Dance*, Chambers reflected, "Few writers for the young write through illness as a life-event. A kid's response to illness is story & dramatically useful as well as being something kids should meet & contemplate in their reading. Use a sickness scene in *Dance*?" (Chambers AC/01/36, 22 August 1979). So he did, representing how the simultaneous onset of sickness and writer's block afflict *Dance's* teenage protagonist, Hal; as it was for Chambers himself, writing is part of Hal's cure.

In his personal diary, Chambers wrote that one of his objectives for this novel was to display the "unexceptionable richness" (Chambers, *Diary*, 27 September 1979) of adolescent life. In the same entry Chambers also wrote about the novel's genesis from the point of view of how it made him feel. "It is interesting (& encouraging)", he began, "the way as

a TS [typescript] grows a book gains its own strength & allows you to do more with it. I want this one to have numerous overlays which make the reader feel vividly the everyday reality—and unexceptionable richness—of this boy’s daily life”, which would include “the body; illnesses; crises; everyday events like eating, getting up etc.” (ibid.).

Chambers’ protagonists are also narrators, metafictionally writing their own stories. As they observe themselves in the act of writing, the protagonists often make associations between their creative practice and coming of age in a culture that perceives adolescence as a period of bodily flux and emotional turbulence. Through his adolescent narrators, Chambers makes a link between this affects-centered adolescence and the act of writing. When Chambers has his narrators observe themselves writing, he also links their creative acts with affects of his own authorship. In *Dance*, Hal’s emotional life expresses itself through symptoms of illness: headache, vomiting, as well as word vomit in a part of the novel Hal calls his “Diary of a Madman”. Writing about his pain and its cause (grief) seems insufficient to Hal, who storms, “The words are not right. They just ARE NOT RIGHT. [...] I read the words and I can feel—FEEL—what they should be saying and they aren’t” (Chambers [1982] 2000, pp. 163–64). Names for Hal’s feelings come to him gradually as the novel progresses towards Hal’s climactic dance on his late ex-boyfriend’s grave. Those words for “how [he] really felt” are physical states, expressed affectively in painful extremes: he feels “mashed, minced, chopped, granulated, flensed, mangled, mortified” (ibid., p. 190). What these words recall is the language that Chambers uses to express his combat against writer’s block: creative frustration for Chambers has felt like “an operation without anaesthetic” and “like a tight fist was squeezing my brain” (2020, pp. 7–8), while his task as an author was to “squeeze it all out” (Chambers, *Diary*, 7 March 1980). He once reflected, “[h]ow does one apply a vice to the squashy lump of the mind and squeeze the juice out?” (ibid., 7 April 1980).

Chambers’ descriptions of pain that he felt due to the double blow of blockage and unwellness also mirror how his adolescent narrators feel, including when their storytelling is blocked. From November 1979 through to April 1980, Chambers suffered a viral infection “in the face glands” (ibid., 14 November 1979), “causing depression & tiredness” (ibid., 5 January 1980), an “illish” sensation (ibid., 20 February 1980), and a “long gap” leading to a succession of days he describes as “lost” or “stalled” (ibid., 5 January 1980, 23 March 1980). Thus the manuscript sections that Chambers would write in 1980 came less easily than the fifty pages written in 1979. These later sections describe Hal descending into the grief that leaves him (echoing Chambers’ diary) “sleepless [until] after dawn I slept” (Chambers [1982] 2000, pp. 184–85); desiring to end his life but only having access to “aspirins and they didn’t even cure my mother’s backaches” (ibid., p. 203)—perhaps something Chambers learned from his own middle-aged body; and “[a]ll the time, feeling physically weak, heavy, lethargic” (ibid., pp. 205–6). Hal eventually snaps out of this state, as Chambers must have done since *Dance* was finished and published two years later but, throughout the novel’s excruciating genesis, the body of the author intruded until Chambers incorporated its affects into the text itself.

8. Conclusions

The embodied experience of the writer provides insight into practices of accommodation, taking of medication to treat symptoms, and periods of rest, among other affective states, which genetic criticism has overlooked, despite the evidence of such phenomena in writers’ archives. Affective genetic criticism thus provides another layer of understanding to the complexity of a writing process, the limitations of the archive, but also (paradoxically) the material traces that shape the writing process through circumstances forced by health and emotion. If a writer, then, chooses to write by hand, it might be reasoned by means of cognitive clarity, for the purposes of slow thinking. But it can equally be a decision of affect, perhaps brought on by screen fatigue or RSI, or simply an attention to ergonomics. With this methodological intervention, we hope that such bodily concerns will receive attention in reconstructions of writing processes.

As suggested by the exploration into Chambers' process, it is also possible to make connections between literary creation and symptoms of illness, the (side) effects of medication, and other types of self-care that might be employed when writing in a state of bodily distress. Alongside medicalized understandings of physiological experiences, there is yet room for other applications of writerly affect that arise from embodied experiences of grief or advancing life stage, including when the onset of physical symptoms may be linked to the negative affects—the frustrations and blockages—of writing or to the contents of the work-in-progress. Traversing the boundaries between medicalized experiences and their accompanying social and emotional affects, as explored through the lens of care in Joyce's case, helps us understand the communal stimuli and communal impacts of writing processes. For Joyce and his critical legacy, it is important to consider the gendering of emotional labor and obligations of care as exemplified by, but not limited to, the relationship with his daughter. Such social configurations anchored by affective interdependencies encourage us to consider the agency behind document creation and writing processes; that agency is not singular nor absolute but moves between people, shared in acts of co-creation and creative facilitation.

We have suggested, then, that affect is not only a useful lens to apply to genetic criticism, but equally that genetic scholarship would benefit from the intervention of scaffolds such as affect theory, among others, to broaden its purview. These two examples demonstrate the potential to exercise an affective genetic stance on authors from different fields of study to further our understanding of the material subjectivity and circumstances of writing processes. Rather than limiting new genetic studies to investigations of newly discovered or acquired manuscripts, this approach reminds us that genetic criticism is a method open to refreshed, revisited and revised interpretations.

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Notes

¹ This is an expanded exploration of an approach developed by Andrea Davidson.

² While not a Joycean nor genetic critical study, an early and important engagement with social and affective networks of illness in modernist studies is Mary Burgan's *Illness, Gender and Writing: The Case of Katherine Mansfield* which analyses Mansfield's experience of illness by identifying the (woman's) body as both a vessel of subjective experience and as a culturised object. Central to Burgan's stance, like ours, is the "materiality of the body" which she suggests is "the site of important truth not only about illness but also about the dynamics both of writing and of cure" (Burgan 1994, p. xiv).

³ 4E cognition defines the mind as embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive.

⁴ In Joyce studies specifically, archival absence has had remarkable critical consequences, namely in the reconstruction of missing *Wake* notebooks by scholars. When Joyce employed France Emma Raphaël in the 1930s, he tasked her with transcribing unused notes into clean notebooks. This has provided such certainty of these missing notebooks' existence (and some of their contents) that several missing notebooks are listed in SUNY Buffalo's Joyce Collection catalog.

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