

World Literature Studies
Journal of the Institute of World Literature, Slovak Academy of Sciences

Call for Papers

Reading Medieval and Early Modern European Literature Emotionally

Topic for the issue 2/2027

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In recent years, the role of emotions in medieval and early modern European literary cultures (up to the mid-18th century) has attracted growing interest among scholars, particularly in Anglophone and Francophone contexts. Building on pioneering monographs on the history of emotions from the turn of the 21st century (e.g., Rosenwein 1999; Boquet – Nagy 2015; Corbin – Courtin – Vigarello 2016), research has focused on both literary depictions of emotion (i.e., the inner worlds of characters) and the emotional impact of literature on contemporary audiences (e.g., Larrington 2024; Mathieu-Castellani 2012; Dion 2012). The latter area is inextricably linked to the collective and oral reception of literature, which dominated in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and persisted in rhetorical and folkloric genres long afterwards. In contrast, the potential of medieval and early modern literature to resonate with modern audiences (post-19th century) has received far less attention. Yet this is precisely the issue that justifies the engagement of literary scholarship with older texts, assuming that we do not intend to treat them as mere historical documents. Recent theoretical works on immersive, empathetic, and value-oriented reading (e.g., Bloch 2010; Patoine 2015) make such questions even more pressing.

Although the study of medieval literature emerged in the 19th century in close association with philology and critical editions, early attempts to adapt or translate older texts into modern languages were often motivated by a desire to enchant readers and evoke emotion. As Alain Corbellari (1997) notes, the initiatives of the French medievalist Joseph Bédier are particularly emblematic in this respect. Both his highly successful *Roman de Tristan et Iseut* and his scholarly writings constantly remind readers that “one can truly love medieval literature” (Corbellari 1997, 30). More recently, Christopher Lucken (2014) has argued that today’s consensus about the enduring ethical and aesthetic value of *La Chanson de Roland* is largely due to the somewhat subjective scholarship of Léon Gautier, who vividly described French laborers weeping at the scene of Roland’s death in the second edition of *Les Épopées françaises* (1878). Fascination with the poetry of François Villon likewise has a strong emotional basis. Sympathy for the presumably tragic fate of this repentant criminal poet is evident not only in the opening lines of Auguste Longnon’s biographical study (1877), but also in the writings of Slovak and Czech Villon scholars, including Jozef Felix. Similarly, Alexandre De Craim (2013) describes how the 17th-century novel *L’Astrée* by Honoré d’Urfé was reimagined amid tensions between liberals and religious conservatives in the 19th century. While from the 1940s onwards, Anglo-American New Criticism distanced itself sharply from what it termed critical impressionism and the “affective fallacy” (Wimsatt – Beardsley 1949), readers’ emotions were later rehabilitated in literary scholarship by reception aesthetics, fiction theory, cognitive literary studies, as well as feminist and postcolonial approaches.

The issue 2/2027 of *World Literature Studies* aims to further these reflections by examining the various forms of emotional communication between modern readers and literature from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment in different European countries (France,

Great Britain, German-speaking regions, Spain, Italy, the Czech lands, Romania, etc.). Articles written in French, English, Czech, or Slovak may address the following areas:

1. Emotional and value-oriented reading as a means of bringing medieval and early modern European literature to life today

To what extent should literary scholars and teachers of literature (cf. Baroni – Rodriguez 2014) emphasize axiology and the pleasure of reading in order to demonstrate the lasting relevance of medieval and early modern literature? Why is it useful to explore not only the emotions of literary characters and the original context of older texts' reception, but also the emotional responses of present-day readers? Can such an approach be adopted without falling into the trap of post-theoretical pathos, which can petrify the canon and stifle constructive skepticism towards fiction (Bouju – Gefen 2013)? What insights might this perspective yield? Contributions may focus on the readerly appeal of specific literary works or on theoretical matters, but empirical studies of reading practices grounded in sociology, fiction theory, or cognitive literary studies are also welcome.

2. Aspects of enchantment and affectivity in the work of major literary historians

As mentioned above, it is hard to discuss the appeal of medieval and early modern literature without considering the history of literary studies as an academic discipline and the works of literary historians whose vivid, evocative, and personal styles distinguished them in their respective fields. After all, epistemologists today increasingly criticize the fallacy of perfect critical distance in both the humanities and the exact sciences (Héas – Zanna 2021; Petit 2022). The issue editors are particularly interested in metacritical contributions (cf. Tourdoire-Surlapierre 2013) that demonstrate how affectivity and enthusiasm shaped individual branches of literary historiography (medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque/Classicism studies) and helped prove their academic and societal relevance.

3. Readerly or scholarly enthusiasm and the risk of anachronism

Although Léon Gautier's enthusiasm helped popularize *La Chanson de Roland* in the late 19th century, many of his interpretations were heavily influenced by nationalism. Tania Van Hemelryck (2009) has recently shown how these ideologically problematic and anachronistic elements were perpetuated in France throughout the 20th century. As with other attempts to revive the past, emotional readings often suppress the "alterity" of earlier literary periods (Jauss 1977) in favor of a "past without history" (Bartholeyns 2010). While Gautier's ideas bear some resemblance to current reactionary appropriations of the past (e.g., on far-right online forums; François 2020), this issue will focus primarily on the academic sphere. Anachronisms appear in a wide range of socially and politically engaged methodologies, regardless of their ethical frameworks and degree of reflexivity. Social and literary phenomena of the past can be detached from their original contexts either deliberately, with full background knowledge (Besson 2025), or inadvertently. To what extent, and under what conditions, are anachronisms productive or even creative (Montandon – Neiva 2018)? How should one approach "uninformed" anachronisms that arise from the commodification of methodological approaches (for a discussion of ahistorical gender studies readings of *La Chanson d'Yde et Olive*, cf. Podetti 2019)? The editors welcome case studies of specific anachronistic readings, as well as broader theoretical contributions.

Please send an abstract of approximately 1,800 characters (incl. spaces) and a short author bio (700 characters incl. spaces) to: jana.truhlarova@savba.sk, jan.zivcak@savba.sk.

Deadline for abstracts: **May 15, 2026**
Notification of acceptance: **May 30, 2026**
Deadline for submission of full articles: **November 15, 2026**
Article length: up to **36,000 characters** (incl. spaces and bibliography)
Peer review results: by **February 28, 2027**
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