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# Trial and testimony of sense of guilt in Nina Yargekov's *Vous serez mes témoins*

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**Abstract** • Since the last decades of the 20th century, there has been a growing interest in the study of emotions. The emotional turn (T. Anz 1999) has not only involved psychology (K. Oatley 2004, P. Ekman 2003, K. Scherer 2009) but is a true interdisciplinary approach (Affective Sciences). The sense of guilt, first studied in psychology by Freud in *Mourning and Melancholy* (1917), is a complex secondary emotion (C. Izard 1977) that is generated by the relationship with society and its norms and is therefore defined as self-reflexive, for it implies that the individual reflects on him/herself within his/her social context. In *Vous serez mes témoins* (2011), the French-Hungarian writer Nina Yargekov approaches the theme of the sense of guilt over the suicide death of her best friend Élodie. Balancing between a court testimony and a diary of mourning, the novel tells the story of a court trial where the narrator is accused of an unusual fraud: the simulation of mourning. The novel becomes simultaneously the courthouse and the diary in which to record the sense of guilt in a neurotic and chaotic manner. A painful writing full of fiction and humour, which thanks to the skilful use of parody and pastiche makes possible the literary transposition of what can hardly be said and understood.

**Keywords** • Nina Yargekov; Secondary Emotion; Sense of Guilty; Autofiction; Trial.

Ledizioni

# Trial and testimony of sense of guilt in Nina Yargekov's *Vous serez mes témoins*

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## 1. Brief overview of the main theories of emotions

The study of emotions is a complex field and it is not easy to find a comprehensive definition of what an emotion is. Scientific efforts to study emotional experience are still challenging researchers nowadays. Therefore, despite efforts to investigate the role and functioning of emotions, until now, only a partial and fragmentary understanding has been achieved, leaving wide debates on the subject still open.

William James first introduced a *working* definition of emotions in his *Peripheral Feedback Theory*. Generally, the belief held about the arising of emotions was as follows: first, one perceives the object that causes the emotion; second, this perception of the object (*emotigenic*) generates an emotion in the mind; third, this emotion is felt in the body resulting in a series of somatic changes that accompany every strong emotion (e.g., acceleration of heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, localized muscle contractions, tremor, blushing, and so on). Thus, the perception of a stimulus is followed by an emotion, which is accompanied by somatic-level manifestations. Emotions occur before bodily manifestations and are the cause of them. Well aware of going against all the common sense, James rectifies this model substantially:

> If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no " mind-stuff" out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains. [...] What kind of an emotion of fear would be left, if the feeling neither of quickened heart-beats nor of shallow breathing, neither of trembling lips nor of weakened limbs, neither of goose-flesh nor of visceral stirrings, were present, it is quite impossible to think. Can one fancy the state of rage and picture no ebullition of it in the chest, no flushing of the face, no dilatation of the nostrils, no clenching of the teeth, no impulse to vigorous action, but in their stead limp muscles, calm breathing, and a placid face? The present writer, for one, certainly cannot (James, 1984, pp. 193-194).

He defined the emotions as the awareness of neurovegetative changes that occur at the visceral level in response to a triggering event. According to James, an emotion-triggering event activates a series of visceral and neurovegetative reactions that the individual feels, and thus every emotional experience is based on the perception of these physiological changes. James observes:

> Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter -state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on the contrary is that *the bodily changes follow directly the* PERCEPTION *of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur* IS *the emotion* (James, 1984, pp. 189-190).

James argues that bodily manifestations are interposed to the mental state and therefore:

> we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be. Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colourless, destitute of emotional warmth (James, 1984, p. 190).

According to James' theory we perceive facts and feel bodily sensations, and based on perception that stimulates memory and imagination, we label physical sensations under the different names of emotions. Emotions are the organic changes of the body, and since we perceive their physicality first, any mental operation is secondary to it. This happens because at the basis of emotional experience stands a retroactive mechanism from the periphery of the body to the central nervous system. James is one of the first to posit psychology on solid physiological foundations and to think about behavior in terms of response to stimulation.

Despite this, James' theory faced some critiques especially from Walter Bradford Cannon. Cannon agreed that physiological responses played a crucial role in emotions, but did not believe that physiological responses alone could explain subjective emotional experiences. Specifically, Cannon argued that: a) same bodily changes can be present in multiple emotions and can also arise even in the absence of an emotional state; b) physiological responses can be very slow and so it is difficult to think of them as producing an emotional state, which usually arises quickly; c) if physiological reactions typically associated with certain emotional states are induced, people may not actually experience that emotional state associated with the physiological reaction. Cannon, reviewing Sherrington's research conducted on dogs, pointed out that the viscera had been separated from the central nervous system without any impact on emotional behavior in animal experiments. He asserted that this contradicted James' theory because James believed that the viscera were the center of emotion.

Cannon, together with his doctoral student Philip Bard, developed the *Thalamic Theory of Emotion:* centers of activation, control and regulation of emotions are not located in peripheral locations such as the viscera, but are centrally located in the thalamic region. Nerve signals from that region would be able to cause the activation of the expressive-motor and visceral responses of emotions, as well as determine the subjective components of emotions through connections with the cerebral cortex. Cannon describes that process as follows:

> An external situation stimulates receptors and the consequent excitation starts impulses towards the cortex. Arrival of the impulses in the cortex is associated with conditioned processes which determine the direction of the response. Either because the response is initiated in a certain mode or figure and the cortical neurons therefore stimulate the thalamic processes, or because on their centripetal course the impulses from the receptors excite thalamic processes, they are roused and ready for discharge. […] We may assume that when these neurons discharge in a particular combination, they not only innervate muscles and viscera but also excite afferent paths to the cortex by direct connection or by irradiation. The theory which naturally presents itself is that the peculiar quality of the emotion is added to simple sensation when the thalamic processes are roused (Cannon, 1927, p. 120).

While admitting the importance of peripheral physiological reactions in affective processes, Cannon considers these more a consequence than the cause of activation of the central nervous system, particularly the thalamus. His theory stands as an alternative and an extension of James' theory: Cannon shifts the origin of emotions to the level of the

central nervous system, which is why, referring to his position, it is also called the *Central Theory of Emotions.*

A new turn came in the 1960s, when Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer came up with a theory that could take into account both James' Peripheral Theory and Cannon's Central Theory[1]. Schachter and Singer's *Two-Factor Theory of Emotion* identifies two factors necessary to generate emotional experience: perceptual processes, which allow one to feel the increasing physiological activation (*arousal*), and cognitive appraisal processes, which allow one to choose the most appropriate emotion to consciously explain what one is feeling at the physiological level based on the surrounding stimuli. The two academics, in support of their thesis, performed a study that tested how people use clues in their environment to explain physiological changes. They demonstrated that "emotional states may be considered a function of a state of physiological arousal and of a cognition appropriate to this state of arousal" (Schachter, Singer, 1962, p. 398). However, Schachter-Singer's theory did not explain what it was that caused the emotional responses.

It is to Magda Arnold's theory for such an explanation. Arnold defines emotions thus:

> The felt tendency toward anything intuitively appraised as good (beneficial), or away from anything intuitively appraised as bad (harmful). This attraction or aversion is accompanied by a pattern of physiological changes organized toward approach or withdrawal. The patterns differ for different emotions (Arnold, 1960a, p. 182).

To arouse an emotion, perception of the object is certainly a necessary but not sufficient condition. A second process then follows, a process of appraisal that determines the generation of an emotion. There is, however, one condition for there to be emotion generation: the object must be appraised as good or bad for the individual at that time[2]. The emotions that are generated are two: a positive one, tending toward the object that is judged to be adequate (attraction) and a negative emotion, of escape from an inadequate object (repulsion).

Another relevant cognitivist theory of emotion is the *Component Process Model* of Klaus Scherer. Scherer's merit is that he defined emotion as a complex construction that takes shape over time and involves several components. Emotions in such a view are like an information system meaning a system of exchange between the organism and the environment. Incoming information goes through a series of checks as it is received by the organism; as Scherer illustrates there are 5 types of checks:

> 1. A novelty check; 2. A check for intrinsic pleasantness; 3. A check for relevance and/or conduciveness to meeting goals or plans; 4. A check for ability to cope with the perceived event; and 5. A check for the compatibility of events (including actions) with self-concept and social norms, at least in the case of humans. It has been hypothesized that these stimulus evaluation

[1] According to this theory, and other theories succeeding it, cognitive elements are the contents and causes of emotions, meaning that each emotion is equivalent to a specific meaning structure or cognitive evaluation of the situation. At the heart of these new positions is appraisal, which is a phenomenon consequent to perception and consists of an automatic evaluation, which in general is involuntary, about the presence or absence of a specific object or event and according to its positivity or negativity. The consequence of appraisal is the tendency to do something, which is experienced as an emotion.

[2] It is important to keep in mind that interaction with a particular object or event or its evaluation determines a different appraisal from one individual to another; based on past experiences, emotional reactions to the same event differ from subject to subject.

> checks (SECs) always occur in this order (at least in the initial evaluation of an event) as several of the later checks seem to require the outcome of earlier ones. These criteria for evaluation have been chosen on the basis of their adaptive significance, emotion generally being seen as a phylogenetically evolved mechanism that optimizes flexible adaptation to highly complex social and physical environments. In other words, it would seem that an organism requires the information obtained by these SECs in order to choose an appropriate response to a specific event (Scherer, 1987, p. 14).

In response to and in contrast to cognitive theories of emotion, rise so-called *non-cognitive theories*. These believe that judgments or evaluations are not part of the emotional process. The focus is on understanding what is involved between the perception of a stimulus and the emotional response. The non-cognitive position argues that the initial part of the emotional process is reflexive. According to non-cognitive theories, emotions are separate from the rational or cognitive operations of the mind, since cognitive operations are *cold* and logical, while emotions are *hot*, irrational responses. Main in non-cognitive theories is the figure of Paul Ekman.

Ekman's *Neurocultural Theory* is grounded in Darwin's studies[3] and claims the universality of emotions, which are given by inherited neurobiological patterns. In actuality, an event may not trigger the same emotion in everyone, as there are emotional triggers specific to a culture or individual (variations learned culturally based on one's personal experience). However, there are universal emotional themes that generate the same emotion in all people. In Ekman's view the basis of such themes is natural selection, whereby all humans are born with a predisposition to react emotionally to factors, to events related to the survival of our species. So the events, the triggers of emotion are determined by both individual experience and the experience of the species. Ekman's model considers two interrelated mechanisms: the *automatic appraisal mechanism* and the *affect programme*. According to Ekman, emotions arise from automatic appraisers. The process that triggers emotion is a fast process that occurs outside of consciousness, so there come into play such *automatic appraisal mechanisms* that continuously monitor what is happening in the world:

> Since the interval between stimulus and emotional response is sometimes extraordinarily short, the appraisal mechanism must be capable of operating with great speed. Often the appraisal is not only quick but it happens without awareness, so I must postulate that the appraisal mechanism is able to operate automatically. It must be constructed so that it quickly attends to some stimuli, determining not only that they pertain to emotion, but to which emotion, and then activating the appropriate part of the affect programme (Ekman, 1977, p. 58).

The *affect programme*, governs the various elements of the emotion response: the skeletal muscle response, facial response, vocal response and central and autonomic nervous system responses. Similar to Darwin, Ekman posits the existence of universal facial expressions in the same way as universal emotions. In support of this thesis, together with the psychologist Wallace Friesen, Ekman conducted a study in New Guinea. From such studies, Ekman and Friesen developed a facial expression coding system: *the Facial Action Coding System* (or FACS). This method is based on the discovery of the universality of emotional expression in response to the *primary emotions*, which are: sadness, fear,

[3] In his book, *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Charles Darwin laid the foundation for modern research on emotions and their nonverbal expression. His belief was that emotions and physical reactions to them are innate and universal.

anger, happiness, surprise, disgust. It is a proper atlas of the human face which, thanks to a systematic description consisting of photos, movies and texts, aims to measure facial movements in anatomical terms and break them down into individual units of movement called *Action Units*. FACS makes it possible to identify each movement of the human face without interpretive interference and only in a descriptive manner[4]. Ekman notes, however, that sometimes expressions are controlled and that not all individuals control these expressions in the same way and inside the same situation. The reasons to control may be different, such as education or a regulated gesture learned from the family in which the individual lives, or the need to express one emotion rather than another in the work environment, and even the intrinsic motivation in the culture of which we belong. Ekman hypothesizes then the existence of *display-rules*, social rules learned by each individual, which regulate the control that one should have over emotional expressions in any particular situation. As Ekman elucidates:

> These, I proposed, are socially learned, often culturally different, rules about the management of expression, about who can show which emotion to whom and when they can do so. It is why in most public sporting contests the loser doesn't show the sadness and disappointment he or she feels. Display rules are embodied in the parent's admonition – "Get that smirk off your face". These rules may dictate that we diminish, exaggerate, hide completely, or mask the expression of emotion we are feeling (Ekman, 2003, p. 16).

## 2. Affective Sciences: The Emotional Turn in Fiction

Since the last decades of the 20th century there has been a growing interest in the study of emotions, involving a wide range of disciplines in the humanities. This interest has been encapsulated under the term *Emotionsforschung* (*Affective Sciences*), which has involved not only psychology, but also fields such as sociology, anthropology, ethology, political, economic and legal sciences, linguistics, and cultural and literary sciences. Indeed, all fields of the humanities have been progressively involved in this research perspective, even opening the door to collaborations with the natural sciences, such as neurology, and with technologies related to artificial intelligence. This is the so-called *Emotional Turn*, which takes the form of an interdisciplinary approach (see Nienhaus, 2016, pp. 142-143).

Especially in the fields of cultural studies, there has been a veritable boom in in-depth investigations focusing on understanding the fundamental role played by emotions in the genesis, interpretation and appreciation of artistic works, as well as in other modes of communication. This growing interest has brought to light a number of new and fascinating perspectives that examine how emotions are intertwined with creative expressions, and how audiences' emotional experiences may influence the interpretation and assimilation of such works. This trend reflects a growing awareness of the importance of understanding the powerful link between human emotions and cultural expressions, offering a more comprehensive analysis of cultural and artistic dynamics.

Thomas Anz in 1999 published in *literaturkritik.de*[5] an appeal entitled *Plädoyer für eine kulturwissenschaftliche Emotionsforschung. Zur Resonanz von Daniel Golemans*

[4] Ekman and Friesen, to achieve this goal, relied solely on anatomical analysis of facial muscle movements.

[5] This is the review forum of the Institute of Modern German Literature at Philipps-Universität Marburg.

*„Emotionale Intelligenz" und aus Anlaß neuerer Bücher zum Thema „Gefühle."*[6] In his appeal, Anz claims the importance of the cultural-scientific study of emotions in literature, as it cannot be ignored that literature is a "highly emotional matter" (Anz, 1999, trans. mine). According to Anz, literary scholars have neglected to investigate the psychological effect and function of literary phenomena:

> According to neuropsychological research in recent years, it can be assumed that our brains process auditory and visual impressions simultaneously on a cognitive and affective level, but that affective processing occurs more rapidly. Our first reaction to text is therefore emotional and points the way for further intellectual processing. Perhaps with this the question of the priority of cognitive or affective perception, which is repeatedly raised in the psychology of emotions, has not been resolved. If we initially react with feelings of pleasure or displeasure on the basis of some understanding of the text, or if prior emotions shape our understanding, it is probably less important than the fact that reading literature is generally a highly emotional process. However, literature scholars largely leave the task of examining it to psychologists. And where at least the most recent, systems-theory-oriented approaches to literary studies recognize feelings of pleasure or displeasure in their fundamental importance to evaluative discourse about literature, these feelings are considered primarily as components of patterns of argumentation and "coding", but hardly as sensitivities of real subjects grappling with literature (Anz, 1999, trans. mine).

Significant turning point is identified by Anz in the thought of psychologist and writer Daniel Goleman. Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence Theory* proposes the concept of *emotional intelligence*, defined as that emotional ability of individuals that enables them to move better and live better and longer. According to Goleman each of us have two minds:

> In a very real sense we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels. These two fundamentally different ways of knowing interact to construct our mental life. One, the rational mind, is the mode of comprehension we are typically conscious of: more prominent in awareness, thoughtful, able to ponder and reflect. But alongside that there is another system of knowing: impulsive and powerful, if sometimes illogical—the emotional mind (Goleman, 2006, pp. 28-29).

For the most part, these two minds operate in harmony, interweaving their different ways of knowing to guide us in the world. There is a balance between the *emotional mind* and *rational mind*: emotions feed and inform the operations of the rational mind, and the rational mind refines and sometimes vetoes the inputs of emotions. However, the *emotional mind* and *rational mind* are semi-independent faculties, and although at many times these minds are coordinated, it may happen that passions rise and the balance shifts: in this case it is the *emotional mind* that takes over, overwhelming the *rational mind*. As Goleman explains:

> When emotions are too muted, they create dullness and distance; when out of control, too extreme and persistent, they become pathological, as in immobilizing depression, overwhelming anxiety, raging anger, manic agitation (Goleman, 2006, p. 77).

[6] The full German version is available here: https://literaturkritik.de/id/47#.

*Emotional intelligence* has 5 basic characteristics: 1) self-awareness and knowledge of one's own emotions; 2) ability to control and regulate one's own emotions; 3) ability to self-motivate (set up plans and purposes, tolerate frustrations and postpone gratifications); 4) ability to recognize and understand others' emotions; and 5) ability to build and manage social relationships and others' emotions. Key among these characteristics is the fourth, which refers to the concept of *empathy*. Goleman distinguishes 2 types of empathy*: emotional empathy* and *cognitive empathy*. *Emotional empathy* is the ability to feel what other people feel: our bodies connect with their moods, whether they are of joy or sorrow. *Emotional empathy* is visceral and is felt through the body. *Cognitive empathy*, on the other hand, means that we can understand another person's perspective, their way of seeing things and thinking. When *emotional intelligence* is not adequately developed, there is a risk of becoming *emotionally illiterate*, that is, becoming unable to recognize and control one's own emotions, and having difficulty recognizing the emotions of others as well, which makes it difficult to feel empathy and compassion. High levels of *emotional intelligence*, on the other hand, enable us to be empathetic toward others, understand them and know how to put ourselves in their shoes. *Emotional illiteracy* is a phenomenon that greatly concerns Goleman, and to eradicate it, he proposes an emotional intelligence education program, because "being emotionally literate is as important for learning as instruction in math and reading" (Goleman, 2006, p. 288). This new approach to em*otional literacy* in schools makes emotions and social life become topics of study themselves. Learning can be ingrained through simple lessons repeated many times over time. Because if experiences are repeated over and over, the brain reflects them as reinforced pathways, neural habits to be applied in times of duress, frustration and pain. According to Goleman, literature is suitable for promoting emotional competence.

This emotional turn in literature for Anz is a crucial step to take, because as Goleman states "while the everyday substance of emotional literacy classes may look mundane, the outcome –decent human beings – is more critical to our future than ever (Goleman, 2006, p. 290).

As a result of Anz's appeal and Goleman's theories, the interest of the study of emotions in the fictional field has been growing. According to the professor of English philology Vera Nünning, writing is a *process of communication* and:

> this process of communication is based on knowledge, conventions and experiences shared by writers and readers. In order to communicate emotion, authors have to inspire the imagination of readers, who have to become the author's "fellow-worker and accomplice" and take an active part in the process of literary communication (Nünning, 2017, p. 30).

Nünning argues that the study of writing emotion cannot be thought of as an isolated study, but rather must consider the relationship between text and reader and must relate presentation, allusion, and thematization of emotions inside the text to the emotions that the text evokes in the reader. This approach has two advantages:

> First, it is possible to integrate the findings of emotion theorists […] In addition, it is possible to combine the results of empirical studies on the emotions raised by reading literary texts with narratological categories in order to gain a deeper insight into the nexus between emotions and literature (Nünning, 2017, p. 30).

Prominent is the position of writer and professor of cognitive psychology Keith Oatley with his article entitled *Fiction: Simulation of Social Worlds*. Oatley defines fiction as "the simulation of selves in interaction" (Oatley, 2016, p. 618). Specifically, literary fic-

tion can be defined as a form of consciousness of selves and others, which is transmitted from the author to the reader/spectator who internalizes it, thus increasing his/her everyday cognition. Thanks to the contribution made by Oatley's studies, the perspective has radically changed. Oatley refers to recent studies in which a group of individuals are subjected to functional *magnetic resonance imaging*. Using *cerebral imaging* techniques, an unprecedented window was opened on studies of brain activity while reading literary works. This approach made it possible to explore the brain regions involved in processing the narratives, emotions and imagination elicited by reading. Through the *cerebral imaging* generated by these techniques, scholars have been able to map in greater detail how the brain responds to the nuances of texts, the emotional situations evoked, and the imaginary worlds that take shape during reading. This new dimension of research has shed light on the profound interaction between literary texts, emotions, and brain activity, opening new horizons of understanding about the cognitive and affective processes activated during reading.

Such results, Oatley argues, suggest that narrative fiction, especially literary fiction, can stimulate a kind of *social world*, promoting the development of greater understanding and empathy in the reader. To measure this *empathic response*, Oatley led a research team by resorting to the so-called *Mind of the Eyes test*. During that experiment, participants were shown 36 photographs depicting only a person's eyes, and then asked to choose from four terms to describe what that person was thinking or feeling. The study found that participants who had previously been assigned to read narrative texts corresponded with significantly higher scores than those who had read only nonfiction texts. Reading stories and narratives, in short, had increased their ability to recognize the emotions of others (See Oatley, 2016, pp. 619-620). Oatley clarifies that *empathy* and *Theory-of-mind* improvements are based on 2 types of accounts: *process account* and *content account*:

> One kind of process is inference: engagement in fiction may involve understanding characters by inferences of the sort we make in conversation about what people mean and what kinds of people they are. […] A second kind of process is transportation: the extent to which people become emotionally involved, immersed, or carried away imaginatively in a story. The more transportation that occurred in reading a story, the greater the story-consistent emotional experience has been found to be. […] One explanation of the effects of fiction based on content is in terms of literariness, especially in the exploration of character. Although in their reading, some people like to follow trains of action, others prefer to explore mental lives of characters. […] A second kind of explanation is in terms of expertise. A good way to think of fiction is in terms of its subject matter: principally about what people are up to in their interactions with each other. It involves what Bruner calls 'narrative thinking:' about people's intentions and the vicissitudes these intentions meet. […] A third explanation based on content is about pluralism. Fiction invites us to engage in many circumstances, and to experience many emotions in relation to many kinds of people (Oatley, 2016, pp. 621-624).

Oatley concludes that through narrative fiction, empathy and understanding of social experience can be improved. Literary fiction is particularly well suited for improving understanding of other minds, and literary texts themselves can change readers' personalities:

> Fiction is not well thought of as an imitation of life. For psychological insight and empirical study, it is better thought of as a kind of simulation that enables exploration of minds and their interactions in the social world. The social world is complex and, although we humans are good at understanding others, we are not always that good; literary simulations help us to im-

> prove. […] With this approach, results on how fiction can prompt empathy and the understanding of others have begun to accumulate (Oatley, 2016, p. 626).

Susanne Knaller classified the many perspectives on the study of emotions in literary and fiction into 4 main areas of interest:

> This pluralism of perspectives notwithstanding, regarding the relation between emotions and literary studies there are basically four potential areas of interest: a) the (historical, systematic and/or analytical) investigation of emotional concepts in aesthetic theories and in poetics; b) the (historical, systematic and/or immanent) analysis of emotion-related concepts and strategies in literary texts; c) the dimensions of emotional response and effect in reception; d) the (anthropologically, culturally, neurologically, phenomenologically, biologically and/or psychologically motivated) assumption of the presence of emotions in the production of artistic/literary works (Knaller, 2017, p. 20).

Among these areas of interest, the last one concerning emotions at the level of producing artistic-literary works is the least explored. Knaller identifies 2 categories of such emotions:

> specific emotions specifically generated and experienced during the writing process and generalizable emotions. The former can be identified through direct empirical experiments, documents, and via potentially very speculative conclusions based on generally valid social patterns, biographical circumstances, poetological features etc. The latter depend on the respective aesthetic models and epistemological presuppositions applied and entail distilling a "poetics of emotion" (Knaller, 2017, p. 20).

Knaller posits that it is necessary for artistic objects to have as a prerequisite condition that makes it easy to understand the emotional reactions of the protagonist of a novel and/or trigger an emotional reaction in the reader. Crucial in this regard are the so-called *paradgmatic scenarios:*

> They enable us to understand how emotions are classified and assessed and how they function; i.e., they essentially allow us to comprehend emotions as such, to put them into practice and to reproduce them. Regarding their experience, understanding and assessment, emotions are, thus, determined by their motivation, focus, causality and goal-orientedness (Knaller, 2017, p. 21).

The arts are instances of observation of such *paradigmatic scenarios*, and the emotions to be considered are not only real and cultural emotions but also *aesthetic emotions*, linked to aesthetic paradigms. Knaller notes that:

> Aesthetic emotions are also bound to take a specific form, appear in a specific mode, and place themselves in a relationship to existing and possible aesthetic paradigms (of emotion). In methodological terms, this is the most difficult aspect to resolve, since aesthetic emotions – contrary to real-life and cultural emotions – do not primarily answer the purposes of communication, gaining insight into the self and others, or coping with, reacting to and assessing certain situations. They observe scenarios and their vocabulary – i.e. the legitimizing discourses, the cultural, economic, political, powerful, knowledge-governing conditions resulting from this complex, and the way in which those conditions are treated aesthetically. Therefore, the arts epistemologically and poetologically position themselves via the representations of emotions and feelings (Knaller, 2017, p. 21).

The feelings generated by aesthetics in art and literature are not mere representations of real-world emotions and as Knaller continues:

> This is to say that the arts affirm or reject and convey the perpetuation or a renegotiation of the discourses which relate to the notions of emotion and the related vocabulary. In moderate cases, this should entail purification, sensitization and clarification processes; in extreme cases of dissolving the boundaries between the lifeworld and the arts it can result in direct interventions. Poetics of the former strand aim at intensification; those of the latter, on occasion, seek to vehemently disrupt common lifeworld and aesthetic standard scenarios. This often generates effects of immediacy or materially physical experiences which remain formally and narratively unsemanticized and unrelated, and which can be referred to as emotional events. Especially physical, phenomenal feelings often produce an effect of (artistic) provocation by transgressing taboos and disrupting expectations (Knaller, 2017, p. 22).

To better delineate the relationships between aesthetic levels and the life world, we need to take the aspect related to *productive emotions*, and thus place *writing* and the *writing process* at the center. In this way, literary production should be thought of as a process that, in addition to aiming at the construction of a text, aims to understand *productive emotions* as "an interface between cultural fields of action, between the medium-determined elements of writing, of the body and of knowledge, and between psychophysical and social life" (Knaller, 2017, p 22). Thus, writing depends on emotions and the whole process of writing, literariness, is not reduced to the traces of the text but is inseparably linked to real-life productive actions and practices. As Knaller remarks:

> This includes, for instance, intertextuality, processes of authors reading and commenting on their own texts, and the concept of writing as reading. Even though it stands to reason to synthesize writing, the writing processes and emotion, this nexus has rarely been systematically investigated (Knaller, 2017, p. 23).

Referencing Roland Barthes' concept of *écriture*, Knaller identifies 8 main aspects of writing processes:

> 1) The explicitness of writing (as traces in the text, an element of content or as program) brings into play an aesthetic element which moves towards the boundaries of genres and texts, such that these boundaries are almost dissolved. 2) Writing refers to and evinces life as it surrounds the writing process. 3) Writing determines the recording of what is present (language, the act). 4) The outcome of writing is, therefore, not the finished text (or several versions of it); rather, it encompasses the entire process and reveals the aesthetic potential of the entire complex. 5) Writing also leads to relinquishing the production of literature in favor of new texts concerned with writing (notebooks, diaries, essays etc.). 6) Writing causes important notions such as those of author, work or text to be renegotiated. 7) Writing creates innovative aesthetic possibilities. 8) Writing exposes the writer in the act of writing (intransitive, as a medium) (Knaller, 2017, p. 24).

In conclusion, to talk about writing as a process means to consider the relationship between writing scenarios and emotion scenarios:

> Artistic texts are based on, and at the same time trigger, psychophysical as well as epistemologically and poetologically motivated reactions and practices. The texts do so via emotions and feelings, i.e. via assessments, judgments, recognitions, and the activation as well as interpretation of physical and cognitive states. They are thus situated in a varyingly intense field of

> tension between the norm and its disruption, between breaking from and staying in character (Knaller, 2017, p. 26).

## 3. The Case Study: Nina Yargekov's *Vous serez mes témoins*. Judgement Theory, Moral Emotion and Sense of Guilt

The case study under analysis here is the novel *Vous serez mes témoins* (2011) by Nina Yargekov. *Vous serez mes témoins* is a peculiar autofictional novel, poised between judicial testimony and a diary of grief. It tells the story of a judicial trial, but also of a traumatic grief. It is the writing of a fictional trial, but also a confession of the *sense of guilt*. A painful writing, but also rich in humor, parody, and pastiche.

The genesis of this autofiction is complicated. As mentioned above, the story originates from a heavily traumatic event experienced by Yargekov: the suicide of her close friend, Élodie, on July 14, 2007. The novel takes its cue from a diary that Yargekov began keeping immediately after learning of the tragedy, as she mentions in the video reading featured on the P.O.L website[7] and as she later confirms during an interview with Michèle Bacholle-Boškovic:

> So there was already almost from the first day, with the accompanying sense of guilt, the fact of keeping a diary while having in mind that it would become a book (Bacholle-Boškovic, 2017, p. 126, trans. mine).

About seven months after the grief and the beginning of diary writing, Yargekov begins writing the novel, drawing from the diary itself and conducting the two writings in parallel. The *sense of guilt* that torments Yargekov is thus twofold: the guilt of failing to understand and help her best friend and the guilt of transposing this traumatic experience, not only for her but also for her friend's family members, into a fiction.

The novel shows a heterogeneous and multifaceted structure. Rich of documents, testimonies, indictments, expert reports, oral defenses, characters of all kinds from the most disparate interventions within the text; but also rich in parts where the thoughts intimate of the protagonist (author and narrator).

It is clear that this is a complex fiction story that breaches canonical expectations. As Nünning clarifies:

> such breaches with regard to culturally condoned ways of dealing with emotions may be helpful in a variety of ways. Since norms become more explicit when the consequences of their violations are shown, fictional stories can disseminate cultural norms concerning the emotions – for instance with regard to how much emotion a child, girl, boy, man, woman is allowed to display in private or in public. What may be even more important is that they can also highlight the characters' struggles during such breaches of the canonical, delineating the problems of individuals who find themselves unable to conform to the rules and have to face the gap between what they should feel and want to feel on the one hand, and those annoying or frightening feelings they actually experience on the other hand (Nünning, 2017, pp. 48-49).

The example provided by the novel enables an analysis of the emotions from which it springs, which are related to the traumatic experience of grief. The moment Yargekov is

[7] See the website: http://www.pol-editeur.com/index.php?spec=livre&ISBN=978-2-8180-1349-6.

informed of her dear friend's suicide, she is in shock and her emotional reactions are out of control.

Grief is a complex and deeply personal emotion, and Yargekov uses autofiction writing as a powerful tool to explore the depths of her experience. Yargekov's initial reaction to the news of her dear friend's suicide is characterized by shock and disbelief:

> It is a rational decision. It is not a poor misguided soul wandering in the grip of grief, but a thoughtful strategic turn: I do not accept her death. I do not see it, I do not believe it, I do not validate it, it is a State whose boundaries I refuse to recognize. I considered the pros and cons, studied the context, […] put the equation in all its possible forms in order to measure the comparative advantages of denial and lucidity and, unquestionably, the former took the upper hand over the latter (Yargekov, 2011, p.122, trad. by me).

Denial and avoidance of reality are attempts to escape from the grief. Yargekov's emotional reactions are a turmoil of confusion, anger and sense of guilt:

> List of things to do
> To be a grieving person in accordance with the standards described in the manuals,
> I must not forget:
> -The stunning -OK
> -Denial -OK
> -The anger -looking for supplier.
> -The sense of guilt -estimate in progress.
> -The search for causes -OK
> -Traumatic depression -inform about symptoms.
> -Suicidal impulses -choose accessories (Yargekov, 2011, p. 94, trad. by me).

It is as if the novel were floating, suspended in the air between the frames of the author's emotions: and the *sense of guilt* is what predominates. To better understand the emotion of guilt in Yargekov's novel, it is necessary to refer to *Judments Theory* in the Studies of Emotions. The core idea of such theories, as stated by Robert Solomon, is that an emotion is "a basic judgment about our Selves and our place in our world, the projection of the values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives" (Solomon, 1993, p. 126). An emotion is a complex and multidimensional process involving both subjective elements and interactions with the external context. From an individual perspective, emotions can be viewed as personal evaluations of situations or events that affect crucial aspects of an individual's life. Emotions can be regarded as *moral judgments*, as they often reflect an assessment of the adequacy or inadequacy of events, actions or circumstances according to an internal value system. Emotions serve as tools for evaluating situations according to moral norms and values, prompting individuals to respond consistently with their worldview. In a social context, emotions can also act as an appeal to shared moral norms. They can act as communicative signals that highlight the implication of ethical values and regulate interaction among individuals.

Martha Nussbaum defines emotions as a particular form of evaluative judgements "in which we acknowledge our neediness and incompleteness before those elements that we do not fully control" (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 184). In her essay *Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance* Nussbaum talks about the death of her mother and describes the emotions she experienced during that tragic event, and on this expedient, she rests the basis of her arguments regarding emotions. Thanks to her example, it is possible to analyze the emotional reactions underlying Yargekov's novel, as it too takes its start from a trau-

matic experience of grief. The moment Yargekov is informed of the suicide of her dear friend she is left in shock and her emotional reactions are out of control. The writing is fragmentary, confused, almost without punctuation marks and follows the stream of consciousness:

> Later in the darkened city, I taste white chocolate crepe in the street where I stagger supported by various compassionate arms, left foot in front of right foot, she is dead, right foot in front of left foot, she is dead, I have the right to eat a crêpe at midnight, it is festive, there are exceptional circumstances when everything is upset, normally take food late at night and sugars especially, but then not especially, calories will go directly into the buttocks there is supreme prohibition, however today everything is allowed, the internal regulation has imploded, I keep walking from bar to bar, desolate I close my eyes, it is that if my eyeballs fall out of their orbit you will guide me it's true? (Yargekov, 2011, pp. 33-34, trans. mine)

Considering this passage of the novel, the initial uncontrolled nature of the emotions becomes evident. But such moments of confusion, are inscribed within the framework of the fictional trial. Chaotic and visceral moments thus alternate with moments of analysis and emotional processing:

> On my desk a notebook, on the wall a timeline, behind me a flip chart blackened with diagrams. I collected the data, everything that directly or indirectly can explain her actions, everything that has a connection and everything that has no connection, because even what has no connection can have a link (Yargekov, 2011, p. 62, trans. mine).

The emotions felt by Yargekov, among which the sense of guilt is predominant, are tumultuous, dynamic. Nussbaum clarifies:

> we are conceiving of judging as dynamic, not static. Reason here moves, embraces, refuses; it moves rapidly or slowly, surely or hesitantly. I have imagined it entertaining the appearance of my mother's death and then, so to speak, rushing toward it, opening itself to absorb it. So why would such a dynamic faculty be unable to house, as well, the disorderly motions of grief? And this is not just an illusion: I am not infusing into thought kinetic properties that properly belong to the arms and legs, or imagining reason as accidentally colored by kinetic properties of the bloodstream. The movement toward my mother was a movement of my thought about what is most important in the world; that is all that needs to be said about it. […] It was my thought that was receiving, and being shaken by, the knowledge of her death. I think that if anything else is said it will sever the close connection between the recognition and the being-shaken of that experience. The recognizing and the upheaval belong to one and the same part of me, the part with which I make sense of the world (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 194).

The *sense of guilt* belongs to the category of so-called *moral emotions*, because it tends to promote ethical behavior by presenting itself with a negative valence in response to situations in which the subject enacts a transgression to a norm. Specifically, the feeling of guilt results from the negative judgment of a specific act (missed or performed) directed at another person, generating in the subject emotions of remorse and regret in reference to the previous behavior, resulting in a state of tension. The *sense of guilt* felt by Yargekov toward her beloved friend is present everywhere in the novel, as evidenced by this passage, for example:

> And today that I think back to this scene, I can see how mean I was, how I didn't know how to embrace her misfortune, as I despised her for not being as confident and strong as I wanted her to be, how I felt uncomfortable with her distress, when it would have been so simple, so simple

> and easy to help, giving or lending money is nothing, it doesn't solve everything but relieves […] (Yargekov, 2011, pp. 99-100, trans. mine)

Freud analyzed the concept of *sense of guilt* as an intrapsychic phenomenon, in relation to the *Oedipal complex*, a crucial stage in childhood development. In his works, Freud emphasized how the *sense of guilt* can result from the complex interaction between the individual, his/her desires, parents and family structure. According to Freud, the child goes through a stage in which he develops ambivalent feelings toward his/her parents, between desire and fear, and the management of these emotions can influence the *sense of guilt*. A key aspect of this perspective is the formation of the *Super-Ego*. Freud suggested that *sense of guilt* is closely linked to the development of this psychic instance, which represents moral consciousness and internalized norms. In other words, the *Super-Ego* acts as an internal judge, evaluating behavior according to moral standards learned during childhood. The *sense of guilt* can emerge when the individual perceives that he/she is not aligned with these internalized norms, triggering feelings of remorse and guilt (Freud, 1917/1924).

The *sense of guilt* is part of the so-*called secondary emotions*, which originate from the combination of the primary emotions and are developed with the growth of the individual and with social interaction. The *sense of guilt* is a *complex emotion* because it is evolutionarily delineated later than the basic emotions and has the role of inhibiting acts considered immoral. According to Izard, "usually people feel guilty when they become aware that they have broken a rule or violated their own standards or beliefs. They may also feel guilty for failing to accept or carry out their responsibility" (Izard, 1977, p. 423).

The *sense of guilt* is a *negative emotion*, which aims at punishing the individual when he/she acts inappropriately. In addition to the *sense of guilt*, *shame* also focuses on what it itself castigates. On the one hand, *shame* indicates what behaviors are considered socially unacceptable; on the other hand, the *sense of guilt* warns the individual that he/she is not acting in line with his/her values. *Shame* would thus have the function of safeguarding the individual's public image, while the *sense of guilt* would have the purpose of maintaining the individual's idea of moral integrity. Actually, the private/public sphere distinction in the emotions of the *sense of guilt* and *shame* is not so clear-cut, as both emotions can be experienced equally in the presence and absence of other people.

In Yargekov's novel, the sense of guilt arises as much in the public sphere as in the private sphere: her writing comes from an intimate diary that was then used by Yargekov within the fictional device of the trial against her, in which the public sphere is represented by the multiplicity of characters who take part (a total of 68 characters). For example:

> Civil party lawyer
> In addition to the family of the dead woman, the following legal entities have joined the public action and duly formed the civil party:
> 1. The French Order of Legitimate Grief [...] 2. The Professional Union of Best Friends [...] 3. The Club of Élodie's REAL Friends (Yargekov, 2011, p. 11).

Another term for specifying the *sense of guilt* as a *moral emotion* is *self-conscious*, which is a set of emotions that are inherently self-conscious. These emotions are so defined because through them individuals are able to evaluate their own behavior according to both external and internal norms, and are characterized by self-reflection and self-evaluation. They act as a *positive reinforcement* or *immediate punishment* mechanism for actions taken, and for this reason have a significant impact on moral behavior. Self-conscious moral emotions have a powerful effect on guiding one's behavior and ethical

choices, serving as critical feedback both about expected behavior (through anticipatory feedback such as shame, guilt, pride) and about actual behavior (through feedback resulting in feelings of anticipated shame, guilt, or pride). Anticipatory emotional reactions are based on each individual's personal history and can be inferred based on past emotions in response to similar situations that recall current events. It is essential to emphasize that these self-conscious emotions emerge when the individual is able to deal with both internal and external events and reactions, and especially when he/she is able to observe himself/herself from another person's perspective. This way, a level of self-awareness is developed that underlies the experience of these complex and deep moral emotions (see Lewis, 2000, pp. 69-70).

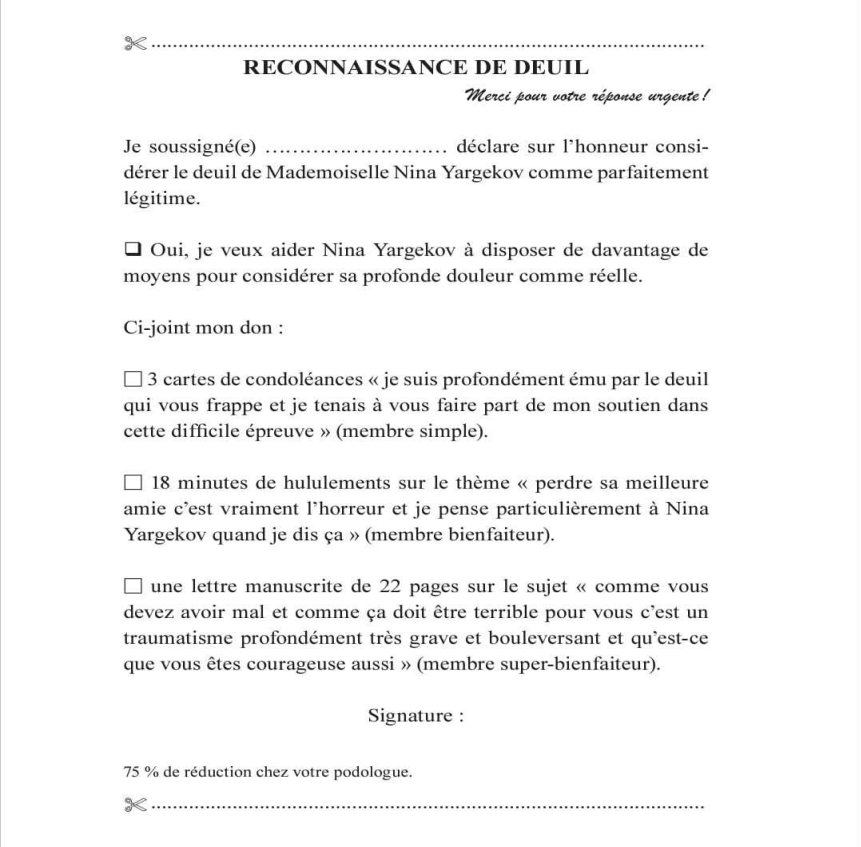
This ability to observe oneself from another person's perspective is evident from Yargekov's choice to adopt humor, comedy, parody and all those elements that make the novel an autofictional work, in order to protect not only herself from the seriousness of the subject matter, which could conceal not insignificant traps such as being able to lapse into ridicule, boredom, *already seen*. But mostly to protect Élodie's other loved ones and put a distance between the narrative and the event itself. As Yargekov herself explains:

> Something just came back to me about *Vous serez mes témoins*: I had a great fear of possibly hurting other loved ones [of Élodie] because everyone was devastated, it's horrible when it [suicide] happens. In the end they didn't read the book. I think it was a wise decision. I didn't hide it from them. But I really had this anxiety, terrible [...] There are of course some facts that are not true, we can easily guess them, I mean all the things that are a bit illusory we suspect, but the small facts, simple facts are all true, I didn't distort at all-it seemed to me the least (Bachelle-Boškovic, 2017, pp. 133-134).s

Moreover, within the novel, as already mentioned, there are multiple characters representing multiple points of view and emotions, and even Yargekov refers to herself by naming herself in different ways within the text, i.e., Nina, NY, NINA YARGEKOV. As Nünning points out, such

> shift between focalizers often implies a shift between empathically following the characters' thoughts and actions on the one hand, and a critical distance to the character on the other. Especially in multiperspective novels which show the events from the point of view of several characters, readers are induced to alternately take several – often contradictory – perspectives on the same situation. Reading fiction practices the ability to recognise affiliations and contrasts between different perspectives and to relate them to each other. To make sense of mutually exclusive perspectives on the same situation often requires the modulation and modification of empathy (Nünning, 2017, p. 48).

In conclusion, the *empathy* Nünning mentions is closely related to the *sense of guilt* as a *pro-social* restorative phenomenon. The sense of guilt is an emotional response that arises from the ability of human beings to empathically share sadness and suffering. The empathic sensitivity that generates guilt allows us to tune into the emotional needs of others and act pro-socially. This pro-social purpose of empathizing with her sense of guilt is made explicit by Yargekov in a very last pseudo-document that closes the novel definitively. That pseudo-document is presented as a peel-off item that is called *Acknowledgment of Grief*. With this document the reader is invited to firmly declare the legitimacy of the author's grief, and by acknowledging this legitimacy he/she reacts empathetically to the entire narration of her sense of guilt.



✂ .....

**RECONNAISSANCE DE DEUIL**

*Merci pour votre réponse urgente !*

Je soussigné(e) ..... déclare sur l'honneur considérer le deuil de Mademoiselle Nina Yargekov comme parfaitement légitime.

❑ Oui, je veux aider Nina Yargekov à disposer de davantage de moyens pour considérer sa profonde douleur comme réelle.

Ci-joint mon don :

☐ 3 cartes de condoléances « je suis profondément ému par le deuil qui vous frappe et je tenais à vous faire part de mon soutien dans cette difficile épreuve » (membre simple).

☐ 18 minutes de hululements sur le thème « perdre sa meilleure amie c'est vraiment l'horreur et je pense particulièrement à Nina Yargekov quand je dis ça » (membre bienfaiteur).

☐ une lettre manuscrite de 22 pages sur le sujet « comme vous devez avoir mal et comme ça doit être terrible pour vous c'est un traumatisme profondément très grave et bouleversant et qu'est-ce que vous êtes courageuse aussi » (membre super-bienfaiteur).

Signature :

75 % de réduction chez votre podologue.

✂ .....

Figure 1. *Acknowledgment of Grief*.

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