Early Career International Research Fellowship 2016
Miranda Stanyon
‘Feeling Bookish: Bodmer and Breitinger’s Wunderbücher’

As part of its international research collaboration, the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions funds outstanding international scholars in the field to visit one or more of the Australian nodes for a period of between four weeks and two months, to work with members of the Centre on a research program of their choice. Visitors are invited to present their work in lectures or symposia, where they will receive feedback from and engage in discussion with members of the Centre, promoting collaborative research.

Miranda Stanyon held an Early Career International Research Fellowship in 2016 and travelled to Australia to work with the Centre for a period of two months. Miranda is a Lecturer in Comparative Literature at King’s College, London, and was previously a Junior Research Fellow at Christ’s College, Cambridge. She completed a PhD in Literature at Queen Mary University of London. Miranda works on literary culture in the very long eighteenth century, with a special focus on intersections between different arts and senses. Her publications include: “‘What Passion cannot Musick raise and quell!’ The Pindaric Ode and the Musical Sublime in the History of Emotions’, in Understanding Emotions in the Medieval and Early Modern World, edited by Andrew Lynch and Michael Champion (Brepols, 2015) and ‘Serpentine Sighs: De Quincey’s Suspiria de Profundis and the Serpentine Line’ in Studies in Romanticism 53.1 (2014). She is completing a book on music in the literary sublime and has a new project on book love and the religious, philosophical and aesthetic meanings of wonder in the eighteenth century.

Miranda reflects on her time as an Early Career Research Fellow with CHE, below.
I had the great pleasure to spend July and August 2016 as a research fellow at CHE. Before visiting nodes in Melbourne and Perth, I joined members of the Centre at the CHE-Freie Universität conference, ‘Emotions: Movements, Cultural Contact and Exchange, 1100–1800’, in Berlin. The conviviality, calibre and intellectual vigour of the conference was a testament to the Centre and its mark on academia internationally. I was led to reflect on changes in the field that seem to me to have emerged since the Centre was founded, particularly the confidence of the humanities in engaging with what was often considered the unhistoried domain of psychology and the hard sciences, and a shift in emphasis from searching for new methods and genealogies of emotions to integrating emotions history into the toolkit and narratives of humanities research. It was a privilege to continue conversations from this conference over the course of the fellowship.

My time in Australia allowed me to work on several projects related to the role of passions and emotions in the emergence of aesthetics, as a discipline and as a key modern technology of the self. In a nutshell, I’ve been interested in how the eighteenth century and Romantic period leave us with ideas both that art is inherently emotional and that art is disinterested and dispassionate – or rather that the aesthetic subject experiencing art will transcend everyday emotions.

Members of CHE encouraged me to push my thinking in new directions, connecting aesthetics more closely with questions about ethics, the practice of history, sociology, contemporary culture and longer and broader traditions in European thought. I was particularly grateful for conversations, seminars and reading groups with Charles Zika, Stephanie Trigg, Andrew Lynch, Jacqueline Van Gent, Jane Davidson, Yasmin Haskell, Stephanie Downes, Kirk Essary, Lisa Beaven, Robin Macdonald and other postdocs at the Centre, with Associate Investigators David Irving, Louise D’Arcens and Michael Champion, and with other visitors, especially V. K. Preston, Louis Charland and Sally Holloway. The collaborative and warm atmosphere of the nodes I visited was clearly underpinned by the work of professional staff – Pam Bond, Jessie Scott, Tanya Tuffrey and Leanne Hunt.

The research support at CHE allowed me to make significant progress on a number of specific projects. I completed two book chapters towards a monograph on the sublime, currently under submission to Cambridge University Press: ‘Hillarians, Handelians, and the History of Emotions’ and ‘Earth-Mannikins and Barking Dogs: Bodmer and Breitinger’. The latter feeds into a new project on book love and the religious, philosophical and aesthetic meanings of wonder in the eighteenth century.

My interest in the Zurich writers Bodmer and Breitinger lies in their slippery use of the term ‘wunder’ within their novel psychology of the sublime, in a theological context in which the status of ‘wunder’ as miracle is under threat, and a local scholarly and civic context of close
and loving attention to books and textual heritage. Linking these contexts is Zwick’s ‘Wunderbuch’, an enormous Reformation collection of news or wonders still drawn on by eighteenth-century Zürichers. As an eighteenth-century literary researcher, it was immensely valuable to think about this project at a Centre with so much expertise in pre-modern history, not least in Charles Zika’s work on Zwick and print culture.

Alongside this project, I presented at The University of Melbourne’s English and Theatre Studies seminar and drafted a chapter on Romantic-era feelings for war, focusing on Thomas De Quincey’s reception of Thucydides’ classical war writings (‘A Treasure for Eternity: Thomas de Quincy’s Feelings for War’, 3 August 2016). This clarified for me the parallels between aesthetic and scholarly detachment as ‘emotional styles’ connected with order and pleasure in violence. The book chapter will be a co-authored contribution, with Michael Champion, to the collection edited by Andrew Lynch, Stephanie Downes and Katrina O’Loughlin, Writing War in Britain and France, 1400–1854 (Routledge).

In Perth, I presented a paper to The University of Western Australia’s English and Cultural Studies seminar on eros and education in Edmund Burke’s writings, exploring the statesman and theorist’s little-known early poetry (‘Educating Edmund Burke: Music and the Incorrigibility of Eros in “Samson’s Feast”’, 6 September 2016). This allowed me to think explicitly about the place of the passions in a project that had been focused on sound and poetic form, and contributed to revisions of a journal article on the same topic.

Finally, my time at CHE contributed to more amorphous work on mixed feelings in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture. Growing from the common idea that the sublime concerns ‘mixed emotions’, this project involves on one hand case studies of musical objects held to evoke or reflect wildly differing and/or conflicting feelings, and on the other hand conceptualising mixed feelings as an object and method of study. That is, mixed feelings are a ‘thing’ which people identify themselves as experiencing, but also a category that might help us to theorise the emotional meanings of historical objects. One outcome of this thinking was a public lecture with Matthew Champion at Queen’s College, The University of Melbourne, as part of our tenure as Sugden Fellows, generously supported by the Master, David Runia, and the fellows of the College. Called ‘How to Handel Mixed Emotions’ (22 August 2016), the lecture is likely to be published in the College’s journal Aedificamus, and will I hope form the basis for more formal publication.

The work on mixed emotions also contributed to a recent public event I organised for King’s College, London’s Arts & Humanities Festival, ‘Play it Again, Romeo’. It combined literary readings, historically informed performances and commentary to think about a forgotten Napoleonic-era aria once prized, among other things, for its emotional malleability. One of the incarnations of this aria was as a lament for the character Andromache, a popular figure on the European stage and in visual and material culture, including in plays, printed
caricatures, oil paintings, fans and porcelain figurines. On this score, an unexpected benefit of my visit to Melbourne was the opportunity to discuss a new exhibition of eighteenth-century porcelain at the National Gallery of Victoria with curator Matthew Martin.

A final highlight of the fellowship was the stimulating conference at UWA, ‘Feeling (for) the Premodern’. Acting as a roundtable respondent again provided a moment for reflection on the varied work of the Centre and its contribution to the humanities. As at the Berlin conference, cultural comparison, reception and translation were for me keynotes of the Perth papers, and sparked promising conversation about possible collaborations with members of the Centre.