



Naked People in Modern Literature and Culture. Imaginations, Practices and Epistemologies of Nudity from the 18th to the 20th Century

This study develops theoretical and historical perspectives of a literary and cultural history of nudity and nakedness from the 18th to the 20th century. It traces how, in the modern reflection on the naked body, local ways of experiencing and forms of knowledge of nudity are intertwined with a global frame of reference and associated with ideas of the distant and the foreign (such as the 'naked savage'). Adopting a current paradigm of culture theory, the study mobilizes the concept of similarity to demonstrate that nudity in literature not only produces difference and 'othering' but also generates continuities, proximities, and overlaps.

The study pursues this program of a European and global *histoire croisée* (entangled history) on a discursive macro level on the one hand, where forms of knowledge and connections to cultural history become evident, such as its function in illustrating knowledge ('naked truth'), but also its distancing in space and time or its entanglements with colonial and gender history. On the other hand, it examines at a textual micro level how literary texts aesthetically and poetically reflect the problem of nudity through their form, for instance, in the dichotomous sign structure, the textile metaphor of poetry, or the idea of a progressive revelation of meaning through text and reading.

The focus of the study is on German- and French-language texts which are accompanied by selected Graeco-Roman and Italian-language examples. Through these comparative readings, the study shows that the literary figurations of nudity occupy a prominent position comparable to that of the nude in art and the epistemologies of nudity always aim at the projection of a 'modern world'.

Keywords: Nudity, Nakedness, similarity, modernity, culture theory