



Crying: A Natural and Cultural History of Tears

By Tom Lutz

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"Highly readable. . . . A fascinating and thoughtful book."Merle Rubin,
Los Angeles Times

In this wide-ranging and provocative study, Tom Lutz looks at the ways people have understood weeping from the earliest known representations of tears in the fourteenth century B.C. to the tears found in today's films. Drawing on works of literature, philosophy, art, and science from the writings of Plato and Darwin to the paintings of Picasso to modern medical journals, he unearths the multiple meanings and uses of tears. Illustrated

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Crying: A Natural and Cultural History of Tears By Tom Lutz Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1175089 in Books
- Published on: 2001-01-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.40" h x .90" w x 5.60" l, .89 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Behind the human eye lies a complex system of dozens of secretory and excretory glands bearing such names as "crypts of Henle" and "Wolfring's glands." These glands combine to produce basal tears that flow into the nasolacrimal duct, which in turn empties into the nose. Under the right conditions of irritation, emotion, or illness, the glands yield more liquid than the nasolacrimal duct can handle, causing tears to spill out and drain over the eyelids. Thus crying, a rare human universal that we share with no other creature, for which reason Charles Darwin called it "a special expression of man."

There you have the basic science behind crying, a branch of inquiry that in literary scholar Tom Lutz's view ought to but does not bear the name "lacrimology" or even "lamentology." Lutz considers the natural history of weeping, writing vigorously and accessibly about the mysterious workings of the human body. But more, he looks into the cultural rules that surround crying, especially those in Western societies that only in the last few decades have established norms whereby women are supposed to cry freely in times of stress and trouble, whereas men are not. Illustrating his cultural history with examples from literature and art, Lutz delivers a fine, eminently readable exercise in popular anthropology, one that will be of wide interest. --

Gregory McNamee

From Publishers Weekly

Observing that the act of weeping is exclusively human, though its interpretation is by no means universal, Lutz (*American Nervousness*, 1903) offers a fascinating, multi-disciplinary study of tears. With a fluid style and an astonishingly vast reach encompassing history, literature, the arts and the social sciences, Lutz explores how crying has been portrayed and perceived throughout history. In a dense but essential section, he examines the physiology of tears and cites theorists, Darwin among them, who considered crying a physical, muscular act. Of course, tears are more commonly viewed as expressing "a surplus of feeling over thinking," whether of sorrow, happiness, pain, relief, pride, empathy, catharsis, deception (as in crocodile tears) or any combination of these emotions. Lutz asks not only why we cry, but why we stop crying and how we react to another person's tears. His examination of gender stereotypes and the traditional division of emotional "labor" in our society, according to which women cry and men restrain themselves, is especially provocative. Turning to pop culture, Lutz comments on how contemporary American gender-typing has shifted in books, movies and real life, noting two iconic images: Jacqueline Kennedy's stoic reserve at her husband's funeral and Michael Jordan's open sobbing at a championship victory. This accomplished work is a rich treat for anyone intrigued by emotional displays. (Aug.)

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From Library Journal

Crying from emotion is perhaps the only activity that is uniquely human, yet its meaning is complex, sometimes signifying weakness and deceit and other times sincerity and strength. Lutz (*English*, Univ. of Iowa; *American Nervousness*, 1903) explores the fluid meanings of crying. Much in the spirit of Diane Ackerman's *A Natural History of the Senses* (LJ 3/1/91), Lutz looks at crying from the perspectives of physiology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, politics, and literature, tracing the shifting history of our understanding. His treatment is accessible and a pleasure to read. If the book is sometimes cavalier with peripheral facts and does not footnote sources, it is nevertheless a valuable contribution to cultural history.

-*A Thomas L. Cooksey, Armstrong State Coll., Savannah, GA*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Brenda Taylor:

Spent a free time to be fun activity to accomplish! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they performing activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you need to something different to fill your current free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book may be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of e-book that you should read. If you want to attempt look for book, may be the book untitled Crying: A Natural and Cultural History of Tears can be great book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

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