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From Feelings to Text

Models of Discursive Arrangement in the History of Emotions

Emotions have become an important field of study in historical research. Looking at a few works held as important in this area, this article investigates the issue of order, that is, of the way historians of feelings organize the material they have selected. The texts in my corpus display two main models. First, arranging the data synchronically (e.g., Sanders, *Envy and Jealousy in Classical Athens*), they take the form of thematic tableaux accounting for the state of one or a set of emotions at a specific time and in a specific geographical area. Second, arranging the data diachronically (e.g., Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*), they take the form of stage narratives, that is, of narratives that proceed not from event to event, but from phase to phase. Whatever the model selected might be, these texts pose questions frequently asked in the epistemology of history. Are the models found in the data or constructed? If they are constructed, are historians free to go about that construction as they please? Debating the work of Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen and post-narrativist theorists of history for whom these questions are obsolete, the article argues that they in fact are still worth posing. A distinction, however, must be made between verifiability and acceptability, as only acceptability can be productively discussed at the level of the whole text.

1. Introduction

As Jan Plamper (2015, 40, 41) points out in the chapter of the book he devotes to the “history of the history of emotions,” the field whose development he traces there is not entirely new. Lucien Febvre, for example, had as early as 1941 “appealed to fellow historians to make emotions the focus of their work,” arguing that they already did so, though “in an unconscious and anachronistic manner.” Febvre, who died in 1956, would doubtless be happy to observe that the domain “history of emotions” has now exploded. Today, historians specializing in this area can publish in dedicated series such as *Emotions in History* at Oxford University Press, as well as in journals such as *Emotions. History, Culture, Society* and *Passions in Context. International Journal for the History and Theory of Emotions*. They, moreover, have the opportunity to work in centers specifically devoted to their domain of research, beginning with the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, the Queen Mary University in London, and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, with its branches in Adelaide, Melbourne, Queensland, Sydney, and Western Australia. People interested in this area, finally, can make their voices heard on Internet sites, for instance, on the “History of Emotions Blog” started in 2019 at Queen Mary University by

Thomas Dixon, a blog that includes contributions posted by scholars, writers, and artists from around the world.

The nature of the field “history of emotions” is already clearly indicated in the names of the series, journals, and institutions I have just mentioned. Whereas most historians are ready to admit that “psychological” events are in fact material, bodily phenomena produced by the human brain, they maintain that descriptions of those phenomena have changed over time, and that such changes are worth accounting for. In other words, leaving to neuroscientists the task of deciding whether the brain has always and everywhere been wired the way it is now, historians see their goal as investigating how what we today call “emotions” has been represented at different times and places. To put it still another way, and to borrow from the title of a recent study (Menin 2022), they see that goal as researching how emotions have been “thought about” in specific contexts, such as in this instance the “long-eighteenth-century” in France.

My purpose here is neither to trace the development of this relatively new area of research, nor to map out its different aspects. Jan Plampler (2015), Rob Boddice (2018), Thomas Dixon (2012), and several collective works (e.g., Corbin et al. 2016; Broomhall / Lynch 2020) have done the job, providing a comprehensive account of both the growth of the field and of its current state. Instead, I want to examine some formal aspects of the works that come under the label “history of emotions.” While historians often discuss their approach to the evidence they have selected, they are reluctant to reflect on their textual practice(s). Scholars working in the area I am considering are no exception. Katie Barclay (2020), for example, supplies her students with a 186-page “guide” to the “sources” to draw on and the “methods” to make use of when doing “history of emotions.” But she does not proceed to explain how these sources should be textualized, namely, how they have to be made into an article, a book, or a chapter in an anthology. Still, as the cliché goes, facts “do not speak for themselves.” Once historians have gathered their data, they have to move to what Paul Ricœur (2000, 169) calls the “representative stage.” That is, they have to decide which form to give their text in such areas as structure, enunciation, point-of-view, and diction. My aim here is to describe the choices historians of feelings have made in one specific domain, “disposition,” by which I mean ancient rhetoric issues pertaining to the order in which writers organize their material. Specifically, I ask whether all the texts in my corpus fall under narrative (as it is sometimes assumed that histories necessarily do), and, if they do not, what type of arrangement they may take on. My essay, in this regard, falls under poetics, defined as the examination of the codes, rules, and conventions that frame and shape any kind of text, from sonnets to sport reports to scientific papers. Forms, however, have consequences. Not restricting myself to identifying models of textual disposition, I also – to conclude – consider some of the epistemological issues that relying on those models may raise in the texts I am considering.

My admittedly small corpus is largely ecumenical. I selected works that deal with the historical dimension of emotions, whether they are classified under history, psychology, or anthropology in libraries and bookstores. These works in-

clude general “histories of” as well as studies focused on one single topic, such as shame or jealousy. They are, with a few exceptions, the output of well-known specialists of the discipline, beginning with Ute Frevert, Margrit Pernau, William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns. Since it is irrelevant to my formalist perspective, I do not take up the question of determining what should count as an emotion, i.e., of knowing whether there are a few basic emotions or a large number of highly differentiated ones. On the same grounds, I do not distinguish between “emotion,” “affect,” and “feeling.” The works in my corpus generally use these terms as synonyms, and I have no reason to question their choice of vocabulary. The word “emotion,” for that matter, has itself a history and a range that historians (e.g., Dixon 2012) and linguists (e.g., Pavlenko 2008) have researched, concluding not unexpectedly that its meaning varies depending on the social, cultural, and interpersonal environments.¹

2. Narrative Questioned, Promoted, and Defined

When it comes to “order,” discussions about the models adopted in historiography have often been confined to questions bearing on the relations between history and narrative. From the 1930s to 1940s, these questions were mostly formulated in normative terms. Philosophers of sciences in English-speaking countries, as well as historians who were members of the *Annales* School in France, argued that narrative provided an unsatisfactory model of scientific knowledge. Historians, they claimed, should work toward identifying the laws that cover the phenomena under investigation (Hempel 1942), and, instead of telling stories, needed to concentrate on problems (Furet 1975). These debates are now largely over. Philosophers such as Arthur Danto (1985), Louis Mink (1987) and Paul Ricœur (1984) have rehabilitated narrative, insisting that it is a perfectly valid “cognitive instrument” (Mink 1987, 182), one that can account for the occurrence of events when the covering law model does not. Going one step further, some theorists have contended that historians, when they organize their data, always give them a narrative structure. This view, later christened “narrativism,” has been popularized by Hayden White, who since *Metahistory* (1973) has submitted that historiographic texts always come under various models of “emplotment.” Similarly, in France, Ricœur (1984, 91) has put forth that history has an “ultimately narrative character,” adding that even “the most removed from the narrative form continues to be bound to our narrative understanding by a line of derivation that we can reconstruct step by step and degree by degree with an appropriate method.” More recently, observing that discussions about the value of narrative in history seem to have reached a dead end, some theorists (e.g., Kuukkanen 2019) have proposed the move to what they call a “postnarrativist” position. Since one plot, they contend, can never be shown to be more valid than another, theorists concerned with the epistemology of history should stop seeking to assess the merits of storytelling; instead,

shifting away from their focus on overall structures, they should investigate the diverse strategies of substantiation that are used to make a description to be taken, if not as true, at least as made in compliance with the rules in force in their discipline.

I will later return to these discussions. Before examining the models historians of emotions draw on to organize their material, however, it seems necessary to define the key word *narrative*. Indeed, as Marie-Laure Ryan (2005, 345) has shown, the term is now taken in several senses, such as “belief,” “interpretation,” “attitude,” “rationalisation,” “ideology,” “value,” “behavior,” “plan,” “memory,” or simply “content.” The definitions I turn to are more restrictive. With Gerald Prince (2012, 25), I define narrative as the “logically consistent representation of at least two asynchronous events, or a state and an event, that do not presuppose or imply each other”; and, with James Phelan (2007, 203), as “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened.” Whether they treat narrative as an object or as a transaction, these definitions say basically the same thing: to count as a narrative, a text must include at least two units located on a temporal axis, even if the first may remain implicit. Thus, to take examples related to emotions, the minitext “Emma is happy” is not a narrative, because it does not involve the representation of an event; but the subsequent minitext “Emma started crying” is, because it represents a change with respect to a state and could be parsed into “Emma was not crying, and then she started to cry.”

If we use Prince’s and Phelan’s definitions to ask whether histories of emotions rely on narrative, we cannot help noting that a large number does not fall under storytelling. Some of them arrange their data along a temporal axis but others do not, resulting in two main categories of textual disposition.

3. Synchronic Cross-Sections

Historians of emotions may first dispose their material in the form of synchronic cross-sections. That is, instead of tracing changes, they may provide a “flat” description of the state of feelings during a specific period and within a specific geographical area. The *Routledge History of Emotions in Europe 1100–1700* (Broomhall / Lynch 2020), for example, as well as its sequel, *The Routledge History of Emotions in the Modern World* (Barclay / Stearns 2022), have the form of what Antoine Prost (2010, 41) calls “tableaux.” Divided into six parts, both proceed by subject matter, going in the volume devoted to Europe from “Time and Space” to “Spirit and Intellect,” “Bodies,” “Communities,” “Encounters and Excursions,” and finally “Cultural Expression.” More generous when it comes to scope, the second volume grants two of its parts to “Emotions in Global Context” and “Geographical Perspectives.” This latter part includes sections about Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Asia, and the Pacific, illustrating the historians’ basic assumption that if the human brain is wired in such

a way that it can produce, say, “fear,” this emotion is also a social construct whose modes can vary depending on time and space. More restricted in coverage and titled in reference to a concept popularized by J.L. Austin and then reclaimed by Judith Butler, *Performing Emotions in Early Europe* (Maddern et al. 2018) is organized according to the same model. That is, the book does not proceed from moment to moment but from theme to theme, accounting for artistic, social, and religious performances in the temporal and spatial frame designated there as “early Europe.” Turning to a confrontation of past and current perspectives, the last chapter deals with reenacting earlier attitudes and being spectators of this reenactment; its author records the responses of both players and audience to a 2011 representation of John Webster’s 1613 revenge tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi*, asking to what extent the emotions of the actors and those of the audience can be aligned with those of the characters portrayed.

While the anthologies whose structure I have just sketched take up several subjects within a broad temporal and spatial framework, synchronic studies of emotions may also treat a limited number of topics in a specific setting. As its title indicates, Ed Sanders’ *Envy and Jealousy in Classical Athens* is narrowly focused. Sanders (2014, vii) describes his challenge as having to attend to the Greek way of representing these two “modern” emotions, while Ancient Greek had “no label for sexual jealousy,” and the “discreditable nature” of the word closest to “envy,” *phthonos*, meant that it was “never claimed for oneself.” Organizing his book thematically, Sanders examines the occurrence of *phthonos* in Aristotle, in the writings of the orators, in the tragedy, and in the old comedy. Turning to the audience of this last genre, he also seeks to retrieve the “emotional reactions” its members “might expect to have” as they were attending the performance of, say, Aristophanes’s *Wasps* (100). I will return below to the strategies Sanders adopts to account for “sexual jealousy,” an emotion for which the Greeks had no word, even though it was represented on stage.

Conversely, while still restricted subject-wise, synchronic studies of emotions may also cover a temporal and spatial domain much broader than in Sanders’s study. Ute Frevert’s *The Politics of Humiliation. A Modern History* (2020), for instance, considers occurrences of shaming that go from Daniel Defoe whiling away in the pillory in London in 1703 to university students being hazed and teenagers harassed on social networks in the United States in the 2000s. Frevert, however, does not trace an evolution. Taking as “modern” the period that extends from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, it is within this era that she identifies different types of humiliation and the resulting different types of shame. Divided into three parts, the book deals successively with state punishments, social sites of public shaming, and the language of humiliation in international politics. Frevert moves freely across time and space, taking up for instance, in Part 3, cases of humiliation in the United States of the 1970s, China of the late eighteenth century, and Germany of the 1920s. Reviewing in conclusion the current state of debasing, Frevert programmatically titles this last part of her study “No End in Sight” (206). Beyond the obvious problems brought about by online shaming, she argues, there has been over the past decades a

“considerable increase in sensitivity towards shaming,” and that increase has had paradoxical consequences (219). Today, “even the mobile, urban, autonomous citizen of high modernity” feels vulnerable to “social degradation and defamation,” and oddly more vulnerable than her “traditionally minded ancestors” (219).

Though providing “flat” description of the state of feelings at a certain time and space, synchronic cross sections are not devoid of a narrative dimension. Frevert, for example, illustrates her analysis of shaming with brief stories that constitute as many instances of humiliation. I mentioned Defoe being pilloried for three days in London in 1703 (26–27), but Frevert’s book includes numerous similar passages, the historian recounting – among other incidents – how Lord Maccarney experienced problems of etiquette during a mission to China in 1792 (141–148), how judges insulted young apprentice singers on the British TV show *Pop Idol* in the 2020s (135), and how German women were forced to sweep the market place because they had had sexual relations with the occupying French forces in the Ruhr Valley in the 1920s (59). Sanders (2014) proceeds in like fashion in his study of envy and jealousy in Classical Athens. Because ancient Greek, he explains, represented “sexual jealousy” even though it had no word for it, the task of the historian of emotions is to identify “scripts,” that is, scenarios which especially on the Greek stage epitomized that specific feeling (vii). Sanders views such a script, the “vengeance plot,” at work in Euripides’s *Medea*: a tragedy in which “a woman, abandoned by her husband for another woman, avenges herself by killing,” in this instance, not just that other woman, but the latter’s father and her own children (130–131). Sophocles’s *Trachiniae*, according to Sanders, offers a comparable though not quite identical scheme of sexual jealousy leading to several deaths (143). Deianeira, Heracles’s wife, is worried that her husband “intends to set up Iole as some kind of permanent lover (whether as a wife or concubine) within the household” (143). Hoping to make Heracles love her again, she sends him a charm (a robe dyed with blood) that in fact poisons him; she kills herself when she realizes that he is about to die, which he does after suffering horrible pain. In both Frevert’s and Sanders’s works, however, these narratives remain subordinated to the analyses that frame them. They mostly serve as examples, pointing to actual or imagined events that are not unique but representative of the kind of emotion the historian is investigating. Likewise, the characters that Frevert and Sanders stage, whether anonymous or well-known, real or fictional, are merely “cases of”; the historian is not interested in them as individuals, only as types that embody the type of emotion he or she is seeking to describe.

Synchronic cross-sections also have a narrative dimension insofar as they can be extended upstream or downstream. Barbara Rosenwein, for example, continues in *Generations of Feelings. A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (2016) the analyses begun in *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (2006). Her new book starts where the earlier one ended, namely, with a description of some emotional communities in the Francia of the sixth and seventh centuries. Rosenwein explains that this “summary” is needed, as the originality of Charlemagne’s courtier

Alcuin's theory of emotions, formulated in the early ninth century, could not be properly understood without references to earlier views (13). Adding to the examination of topic Z during period Y by looking at Z during the periods that preceded and/or followed Y is for that matter frequent in historiography. Viewed from the corner of poetics, such potential extension is important as it points to a major difference between fictional and historiographic discourses. Whereas fictional texts are closed, historiographic texts are open and may in most (all?) cases be continued. To be sure, fictional texts may be stretched, too: Gérard Genette provides in *Palimpsestes* (1982) several examples of sequels authors wrote for their own works (e.g., Dumas, *Vingt ans après*) or for someone else's work (e.g., Virgil, *Aeneid*). Yet these continuations originate in their authors' imagination; they do not exist because the characters staged in these texts lived a life independent of the authors' or because the world has evolved. The epistemological status of historiographic discourse is clearly different, since any change in the world may require a parallel change in the text itself. Such requirement of course is obvious in political, military, and diplomatic history; but it is not absent from cultural history, in which emotions are now an important part.²

Finally, one might ask whether synchronically organized histories of feelings might have an underlying narrative structure, more precisely, whether they might be supported by a "quasi plot" of the type Ricœur (1984, 217) uncovers in Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée* and other supposedly non-narrative works of the Annales School. To be sure, the analyses provided by the contributors to *Performing Emotions in Early Europe* and other anthologies such as *A History of Emotions 1200–1800*, edited by Jonas Liliequist, are carefully situated in time. It would thus be possible to reset them, more precisely, to rearrange in their chronological order the accounts that they supply of the role of emotions in music, art, religion, and other domains. But would such a reshuffling be productive? Would it lead to the identification of a sense-making operation similar to the scheme "decline of the Mediterranean as a collective hero on the stage of world history" that Ricœur (1984, 215) uncovers in Braudel's work? In other words, and to put it in White's (1973) terminology, is (re)establishing chronologies necessarily synonymous with locating modes of "emplotment?"³

Some of the histories of emotions in my corpus make it possible to pose these questions and they offer tentative answers. Johannes Lang (2018, 114), in his review of recent works on the history of feelings, notes for instance that the analyses of the vocabulary of emotions between 1700 and 2000 made by the contributors to *Emotional Lexicons* (Frevert et al. 2014) support an underlying plot of "contraction." This vocabulary has indeed been shrinking, not just in the cognitive sciences, but also in everyday language. The same remark, on the other hand, could not be made about the successive chapters in the anthologies *Performing Emotions in Early Europe* and *A History of Emotions 1200–1800*. However valid, the accounts of the different types of aesthetic, social, and religious feelings that these works supply do not point to a trajectory – to a move in the same direction (or in different directions) during the periods that the authors investi-

gate. Of course, theorists who posit that all texts fall under narrative in their deep structure (e.g., Greimas and Landowski 1979, 12) will doubtless find story-like schemes in the works I have described as thematically organized. With Thomas Pavel (1986, 5), however, I find this thesis too “powerful.” If all texts can be viewed as narratives, the term loses any significance as an analytical tool. I thus deem it more productive to distinguish between the texts that dispose their data “in time” (as all the studies in this section do) from those which dispose those data “along a temporal axis.” It is this latter type that I will now consider.

4. Stage Narratives

Synchronic cross-sections, as I submitted about Sanders’s *Envy and Jealousy in Classical Athens* and the *Routledge History of Emotions. 1100–1700*, could be continued, their analyses of feelings Y during period Z combining with analyses of that same subject during the preceding or subsequent periods to form a narrative. In fact, several classics in the field “history of emotions” are made of precisely such combinations: they slice time into a certain number of phases, which they successively characterize and piece together to make up a narrative. This narrative, however, is constituted not of events, but of situations, or stages. I therefore propose to call this type of arrangement *stage narrative*.

Stage narrative is one of the preferred modes of textual disposition in cultural histories, where it shows how habits, attitudes, and representations have changed over time. It is thus not surprising that histories of feelings should have adopted it to account for the evolution of what specialists of the field call “emotional practices” (Scheer 2012), “emotional regimes” (Reddy 2001, 124), and “emotional styles” (Stearns 1994). In the domain “history of emotions,” this type of arrangement even has a template in respect to which several studies are explicitly situated. It is of course Norbert Elias’s *The Civilizing Process*, published initially in German in 1939, then republished and translated into several languages in 1969. Elias’s version of the development of civilization in the West is well-known. Rob Boddice (2018, 209) outlines it as the account of how the “unrestrained, unchecked and barbarous courts of the medieval world” were transformed, “through a process of the consolidation of power,” into “bastions of controlled emotions and refined courtly manners.” Leaving to experts the task of assessing Elias’s thesis, I will only note that the historian organizes his argument as a narrative (we move from A to B on a temporal axis), and a narrative that proceeds from phase to phase. While disagreeing with Elias’s view of the Middle Ages as barbarian, several historians of emotions have turned to a comparable scheme to sort their data. Rosenwein (2006, 10), for example, objects as a specialist of the Middle Ages to Elias’s take on the period as being “emotionally childish, impulsive, and unrestrained.” But she orders her material just as Elias does, identifying successive moments in the evolution of what she calls “emotional communities.” The fact that her scheme includes three phases (and not two as in

Elias's book) is irrelevant. What matters, from the corner of poetics, is Rosenwein's election of a certain mode of arrangement, not the individual manner in which she makes use of it.

Stage narratives of emotions may deal with one or several topics, cover periods of diverse lengths, and break up the era under investigation into a varying number of phases. In *Sensible Moyen Âge* (2015), for instance, Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy survey emotions in a "long" medieval West that extends from the third to the fifteenth century. Over eight chapters that correspond to an equivalent number of stages, they describe how an initial Christian type of affectivity elaborated in monasteries between the third and the fifth centuries penetrated the whole society, interacting with other models developed in universities and the courts of the feudal aristocracy. A last chapter attempts to determine to what extent the theories produced by an elite could also describe "common emotions," such as the feelings shared by the anonymous crowd in situations of violence and conflict. William M. Reddy's *The Navigation of Feeling* (2001) covers a shorter period than *Sensible Moyen Âge* and includes a smaller number of stages. In a first, theoretical part, Reddy reviews ideas about emotions proposed by cognitive psychology and anthropology; he then submits his own system, which he derives from Austin's theory of speech acts. He, in the second part, moves to a study of historical change, specifically, to an examination of the way emotions in France evolved from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Reddy (2001, xiii) breaks down this period into three phases, each corresponding to an "emotional regime": (1) the repression of feelings and subsequent emotional suffering in the absolutist courts of the late seventeenth-early eighteenth centuries; (2) the sentimentalism that in reaction developed in the salons in the eighteenth century, triumphing with the Revolution; and (3) the banning of emotions from the public arena while allowing them in private, a redistribution that characterized the Romantic period. Reddy devotes his last chapter to several case studies, in this instance, to "personal destinies" reported in the daily newspaper *La Gazette des Tribunaux* (257). These narratives illustrate his thesis about the state of emotions in France in the early nineteenth century, providing, after the "aerial photography" of his preceding chapters, a "closer look at part of the terrain" (258).

While the stage narratives I have just gone over deal with emotions in a general manner, others focus on one specific feeling whose journey they follow across a certain number of moments. Frevert, as we saw, treats humiliation in a thematic manner, providing a synchronic description of the different types of shaming she has identified. Peter N. Stearns (2017), on the other hand, traces the history of the neighboring topic "shame" along diachronic lines. After exploring, as Reddy does, the interdisciplinary context, Stearns organizes his material as a narrative that unfolds into four large stages corresponding to specific periods in Western history: (1) premodernity, when shame and shaming rituals played an important role; (2) modernity, when that role was reduced; (3) the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when shame was attacked before being reassessed; and (4) the contemporary period, when a revived shame is playing an

important part in the disputes between liberals and conservatives. But stage narratives that revolve around one, particular emotion may also be more detailed and cover a shorter time than Stearns's study. As its title and subtitle indicate, Marco Menin's *Thinking About Tears. Crying and Weeping in Long-Eighteenth-Century France* (2022) covers by and large the same period and the same geographical area as Reddy's *The Navigation of Feelings*, yet its thematic range is much narrower. While Reddy deals with emotions generally speaking, Menin centers on one physical manifestation of feelings: tears. After reviewing the available scholarship, Menin tells a three-stage story that goes from (1) the acceptance of tears in the late seventeenth century, to (2) their election as the expression of a legitimate sensibility in the eighteenth century, to (3) their becoming synonymous with excess of "sensiblerie" in the later part of the era. These debates, Menin concludes, represent a "decisive moment in the history of emotion" (309). For they "question the primacy of reason," foreshadowing the current research that sees emotions, as Martha Nussbaum puts it, "as part of reasoning itself" (qtd. in Menin 308).⁴

Whether they treat emotions in general or focus on one, particular feeling, the studies I have just examined have several features in common. For one thing, they faithfully observe chronology in presenting the main phases. If we designate textual order with the letters A, B, C . . . Z, and chronological order with the numbers 1, 2, 3 . . . n, the basic model of the stage narratives in my corpus comes in the form A1, B2, C3 . . . Zn. For all its simplicity, this model is no more "normal," no more "natural" than that of the synchronic cross-section I probed earlier. Its conventional nature is especially obvious in works whose last stage is "today," since such works clearly invert the order of the historian's investigation. Stearns, for instance, devotes most of the Preface to *Shame* to reviewing the competing definitions of the feeling he is investigating and the current debates about the value ascribed to it. But Stearns does not, then, move backwards; he devotes the first stage of his narrative to shame in "premodern societies" and the last one to the revival of the emotion in "contemporary history," thus restoring the chronological order at the expense of the order of the research.

While the stage narratives in my corpus are organized chronologically, they also – when it comes to periodization – are charted according to well-accepted temporal divisions: the century, to be sure, but also such preset compartments as the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. Taking into account the fact that such divisions are basically those available to map Western history, one can ask whether expanding the geographical range of the inquiry would lead to modifying the narrative types I have identified. If the emotions that a facial expression such as a smile reveals do not everywhere and forever have the same meaning, would establishing its significance in a non-Western area Y during period Z oblige the historian to come up with a new way of organizing his or her narrative? Margrit Pernau takes up precisely questions of this type in *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India. From Balance to Fervor* (2020). As its subtitle already foreshadows, Pernau's work consists of a two-stage story. Other historians, as we saw, have challenged Elias's model, contending – among other

things – that the Middle Ages were more sophisticated and the eighteenth century less reason-oriented than they are presented in Elias’s *Civilizing Process*. Pernau argues along the same lines, though the periodization and the narrative she proposes are different from Stearns’s, Reddy’s, and Rosenwein’s. In colonial India, she contends, most of the texts about emotions written in the first part of the nineteenth century related feelings to virtues. Drawing on Aristotle, they advocated discipline, self-control, in short, “balance.” During the second part of the century, however, and especially after the Revolt of 1857, Indian society experienced an “emotionalization” (Pernaud 2020, 249). Literary, religious, and journalistic texts started championing such attitudes as compassion, solidarity, and friendship, feelings towards the other that they urged to be displayed with “fervor.” Obviously, this emphasis contrasts with the decreasing value lent to emotions in the West during that same period, for instance, with the shift from prizing “sensibility” to disparaging “sensiblerie” observed in France by Menin. Such asymmetry, Pernau concludes, shows that current periodizations must be revised to account for distinct temporalities, in the case of India, for the fact that colonial modernities do not coincide with Elias’s and other historians’ of the “modern” West (265). Pernau goes so far as to suggest that fellow researchers turn to “empty time,” that is, renounce “filling time with their definitions of periods” (267). Instead, she holds, they should aim to devise temporal categories that agree with the actors’ interpretations of their personal experiences, as they can be derived from the available source material. Pernau thus reaffirms one of the main goals of history of emotions, which is, as she puts it, to “defamiliarize” the study of the past.⁵

Whether they adopt standard periodization or challenge it, stage narratives are submitted to rhetorical exigencies of size and proportion. Data, however numerous and diverse, must fit into a number of categories that is neither too high nor too low for prevailing discursive conventions. Too low: there is no such thing as a one-stage narrative, even though, as we saw, tableaux might be regarded as forming one phase in a virtual plot. Too high: the eight-stage narrative that Boquet and Nagy propose in *Sensible Moyen Âge* probably constitutes a rhetorical ceiling, all the more so since the stages occasionally overlap, making chronology difficult to follow. Conservatively structured, however, most of the stage narratives in my corpus include two, three or four phases, a formula that seems to satisfy the sometimes conflicting demands of completeness and readability. It would be pointless to assign a meaning to this kind of disposition, using, for example, one of the many “numbers keys.” Yet one might ask whether the frequently relied upon division into three parts (adopted for instance by Reddy, Menin, and Stearns), in addition to conforming to accepted standards, also has ideological implications. In an oft-quoted review of *La Méditerranée*, Jack Hexter (1979, 137) has contended that Braudel’s ternary division of time might be the “residue” of a “*mentalité* once Christian.” Braudel’s “new” conception of temporality, according to Hexter, would thus still be heavily steeped in thinking patterns that originate in religion. From my formalist corner, I would only point out that historiography’s so-called “emotional turn” has not come with parallel

changes in ways of disposing the material. Whether historians of emotions have made their own or challenged established temporal divisions, in the domain “arrangement of the data” they have followed the conventions that govern most of current historical discourse.

While I have used literary theory to describe stage narrative, stage narrative, in turn, can help revisit an issue in literary theory. What is at stake here is the definition of narrative, in this instance, the question of knowing whether a narrative, to count as such, must include events, or whether it can be made of successive situations. Quoted earlier, Prince’s definition of narrative as “the logically consistent representation of at least two asynchronous events, or of a state and an event, that do not presuppose or imply each other,” leaves open the status of texts made up of consecutive “states,” that is, of texts that unfold in what I call “stages.” Offering an implicit rejoinder to this question, works such as Stearns’s *Shame*, Menin’s *Thinking About Tears*, and Pernau’s *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India* show that texts of this type may in fact be regarded as narratives. Indeed, the relations they establish between the situations that they describe are temporal, not spatial or thematic. As for the links between situations and events, stage narratives show that changes do not necessarily originate in single, easily identifiable occurrences. They may also arise from sets of events, grouped in such categories as “turn” (Frevert 2020, 88), “revival” (Stearns 2017, 96), “flowering” (Reddy 2001, 141), “erosion” (Menin 2022, 221), and “renewal” (Bouquet and Nagy 2015, 259).

One consequence of this lack of pivotal, direction-altering events is that stage narratives of emotions often lack what Prince (2003, 65) calls “narrativity,” and Monika Fludernik (2013, 133), “experientiality”: they do not offer intense conflicts, sudden shifts, or unexpected endings, and – because no evidence can provide direct access to minds in the past – they rarely evoke the real-life experiences of individual human beings, especially of members of the underprivileged classes.⁶ Stage narratives, however, still must be viewed as narratives, since they include what literary theorists hold to be the most distinctive feature of the genre: they report changes, and changes that take place on a temporal axis. Given the fact that several other histories, beginning with literary histories (whether they proceed from century to century or from movement to movement), take the form of stage narratives, I would argue that the definition of narrative should be modified. Specifically, reworking Prince’s definition, I would submit that a narrative can be made not just of two asynchronous events, but also of two similarly asynchronous states, situations, or stages. This more inclusive definition of narrative should help describe not just a specific set of historiographic studies, but some fictional genres as well. The *Bildungsroman*, for instance, also proceeds from stage to stage, events serving as examples of an individual’s or a group’s behavior, or marking the shift from one stage to the next.

5. Conclusion

Whether they draw a tableau or tell an admittedly uneventful story, histories of emotions raise a certain number of properly historical issues. In a survey, Quentin Deluermoz, Emmanuel Fureix, Hervé Mazurel, and M'hamed Oualdi (2013) have identified some of the main ones as bearing on the relations between nature and culture, language and experience, and the individual and the collective. For these scholars, in other words, the task of the historian of feelings is above all to establish whether the human emotional apparatus has universal features, whether what people undergo is shaped by language, and what the proper scale of inquiry about emotions might be. I want, in conclusion, to briefly take up two additional issues that pertain to the topic I have tackled, namely, the order in which the material is organized in the texts I have selected for my corpus.

The first such issue is a familiar one. It could be formulated as follows: are the models of arrangement that historians of emotions deploy found or constructed? To put it differently, do these models originate in the data, or are they imposed upon the data by the historian? Philosophers of history have often treated this question, and their answers pit “realist” against “constructivist” theses. The most eloquent representative of realism is David Carr (1986, 2014), who, reflecting about the relations between storytelling and human actions, has argued in a series of books and articles that since those actions unfold in time, they have a narrative structure that precedes the story the historian may tell and is independent from it. The constructivist position has of course been defended by Hayden White (1973), and then by philosophers such as Louis Mink (1987), for whom the idea that the past is an “untold story” that must be retrieved from the archives does not agree with the way historians actually go about their work. What scholars do, according to Mink, is fashion a narrative using the available data, not uncover “the story already hidden in what the data are evidence for” (188). Even though Carr and Mink debate about the nature of traditional, event-centered historical studies, the issue they raise certainly applies to the models favored in histories of emotions: the tableau and stage narrative. Indeed, one may ask whether the editors of *Performing Emotions in Early Europe* found in the records the thematic divisions they use in their anthology, or whether they merely repurposed a conventional division between aesthetic, social, and religious data. The same question may be asked about the frequent turn by historians of emotions to the three-phase model in stage narrative: a model which they may not have come across in the evidence, but – as Hexter suggests that Braudel did in *La Méditerranée* – borrowed from a stock of available textual patterns. I have neither the intention nor the competence to decide between the two positions. Yet the constructivist thesis seems difficult to disprove, especially in Richard Rorty’s (1989, 5) succinct formulation: “The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not.” A statement that, rephrased in terms of the discussion I have just sketched out, could be rephrased as: the past is out there,

in the form of traces; but descriptions of the past are not out there, and only historians can provide them.

The second question proceeds from the first one: if we assume that historians construct their accounts of the past, are they free to go about that construction as they please? If they are not, what are the constraints placed upon them? The philosophers who have attended to this issue in historiography propose to distinguish between the discrete statements that make up a text and that text regarded as a whole; or, as Donald Polkinghorne (1988, 61) puts it, between “the information contained in the sentences” and “the information generated by the specific kind of coherence used to order the sentences into a discourse.” According to this thesis, only individual statements or sentences can be shown to be right or wrong from an epistemological standpoint. Thus, to take examples in my corpus, Stearns’s (2017, 87) assertion that Harvard University football coach Bill Reid “used shame abundantly” can be held as correct; it is indeed grounded in such documents as a letter Reid addressed to one of his players to berate him for not using as he could (and should) his “big body and splendid physique.” Similarly, Boquet and Nagy (2015, 314) base their statement that “public penance” involved an “emotional interaction between actors and on-lookers” in an eleventh-century treatise, *De vera et falsa poenitentia*, which describes how a self-imposed atonement can lead the Christian community that witnessed it to pardon the sinner. In both cases, because they are made according to the rules in force in the historical profession, individual statements about the past can be taken as valid; to disprove or qualify them, scholars should come up with other records establishing, say, that Reid was more indulgent with his players, and sinners not as easily pardoned, as Stearns as well as Boquet and Nagy affirm in their studies.

Organizing one’s material into a certain number of parts or phases, on the other hand, is not susceptible to the same type of “by the rules” confirmation procedure. If we, as Frank Ankersmit (2001, 239) does, accept constructivist assumptions, such arrangements are indeed “interpretations” which are projected onto the past, and not discovered “as if they existed in the past itself.” Consequently, the way tableaux and stage narratives are disposed cannot be attested or invalidated by turning to the evidence. As Hayden White (2001, 379) has argued in his discussion of studies of the Holocaust, textual schemes can only be assessed on aesthetic and moral grounds, not on epistemological ones. Thus, for White, the problem in Andreas Hillgruber’s *Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reichs und das Ende des Europäischen Judentums* does not reside in the facts that Hillgruber reports; it lies in the way he emplots them, specifically, in the way he makes the German army’s tenacious defense of the homeland during the last months of the war into a tragedy. For White (2001, 379), tragedy is indeed a genre in which “even villains are noble, or, rather, villainy can be shown to have noble incarnations.” The German army, however, because of the countless crimes it had committed, cannot for White be viewed as a “noble villain,” nor its final collapse, as “tragic.” If we follow Ankersmit and White, it thus would not make sense to ask whether Stearns as well as Boquet

and Nagy located in the archives the division of their studies in three and eight stages. Yet it would be legitimate to ask, on moral grounds, whether Stearns was not too even-handed in his analysis of what he calls in his last chapter the “revival of shaming”; and, on aesthetic grounds, whether Boquet and Nagy’s eight stages are not “too many,” making the narrative difficult to process.

Are these questions worth debating? Kuukkanen, as I mentioned in my introduction, takes what he calls a “postnarrativist” position, arguing that since plots can never be shown to be right or wrong, discussions about their validity are beside the mark. The point, it seems to me, is first to extend Kuukkanen’s critique to other kinds of textual disposition (e.g., the tableau) whose correctness can never be established from an epistemological standpoint. Then, it is to break up the very concept of validity and distinguish, as White and Ankersmit do, between acceptability and verifiability. If the ways historians dispose their material are not verifiable as such, what is the range of their acceptability? White (2001, 224) acknowledges that all the choices historians make are not equal, for instance, that it would be difficult “to accept the emplotment of the life of President Kennedy as a comedy” – a story with a happy ending. Still, since according to White “real events are tragic or comic or epic or farcical only when viewed from the *perspective* of the interests of specific agents or groups involved in them” (2010, 230; italics in the original), the refusal to see the life of Kennedy as a comedy should be qualified. In this case, such refusal should be taken as originating in the “interests” of liberals who approved of the President’s policies. Yet it is conceivable that Kennedy’s violent death, if seen from another political “perspective,” could have been held if not as “comic,” at least as opportune by people on the far-right or the far-left for whom the President was doing too much, or not enough.

Unlike questions of verifiability, it seems to me, questions of acceptability are thus still worth discussing, insofar as they make it imperative to be explicit about the conditions under which a textual arrangement can be regarded as acceptable or not. I mentioned above that the structures that Stearns as well as Boquet and Nagy adopt in their studies could possibly be critiqued for moral or aesthetic reasons. To take another example in my corpus, scholars less worried than Frevert about the role of hazing in colleges and harassing on social networks could conceivably argue that shaming has now decreased and give the tableau they want to map a different scheme, providing the last section with a title more positive than “No End in Sight.” Going one step further, however, could those same scholars claim that shaming has actually disappeared? While Ankersmit (2001, 241) maintains that structures are not found in the data, he also states that data can be “arguments in favor or against” the interpretation of the past that those structures imply.⁷ To contend that shaming has disappeared would thus involve, in Ankersmit’s terms, uncovering records that could function as “arguments in favor” of the thesis of shaming’s disappearance, as well as “against” Frevert’s statement that in matters of humiliation, there is “no end in sight.” In short, to contend that historians organize their material along a textual model that they freely select does not mean that anything goes, or, more generally, in Gertrud

Himmelfarb's terms (1997, 158), that constructivism is synonymous with “[fly- ing] from the fact” and “telling it as you like it.” While models are not unearthed in the evidence, the evidence, in turn, limits the range of the models historians can draw on to make sense of the past. Or, to quote Ankersmit again, the “in- terpretations” of the evidence that the choice of a pattern involves are not un- limited. One of the merits of histories of emotions lies in making it possible to pose these questions once again – if not to solve them.

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¹ I owe the reference to Pavlenko to the University of Lausanne linguist Marianne Kilani-Schoch.

² I am only considering cases of continuation. Historical studies, however, may also be (and often are) entirely rewritten on the basis of new evidence or new questions. This option of course is not available to authors of fiction, who do not work from evidence, and it constitutes another major difference between factual and fictional discourses.

³ With Dorrit Cohn (1990), I find it useful to distinguish between “plot” and “emplotment.” Working from the available evidence, historians select and then “emplot” the data that will serve their research. To guarantee the validity of their endeavor, they frequently refer to the records in the form of quotations and notes. Authors of fiction, on the other hand, “plot” materials that they have invented. Even when they rely on sources, no discipline-related rule obliges them to make this documentation part of the text.

⁴ Works devoted to one emotion may be organized chronologically but not have a narrative structure. The studies collected by Michael Laffan and Max Weiss in *Facing Fear* (2012), for example, go from “Fear in the Thirty Years War” to “Fear in Colonial California and in Borderlands” to “Dutch Islamophobia’s Past and Present.” While they follow chronology, however, these studies do not emplot their data in a way that would constitute an identifiable trajectory, such as “growth,” “waning,” or “metamorphosis.”

⁵ Devoting an article to the topic “periods in emotions history,” Stearns (2019) identifies as key moments of change the Enlightenment, pre-Romanticism, the early twentieth century, and today. His system of reference is thus still the century or the artistic-intellectual movement.

⁶ On this subject, see for instance the chapter that Boquet and Nagy (2015, 303-346) devote to “émotion commune”: the question of knowing to what extent the emotions described or prescribed in treatises can be viewed as shared by a large percentage of the population.

⁷ In this respect, Ankersmit’s constructivism (like Polkinghorne’s above) falls under the type that Fabrice Pataut (2011, 190) calls “determined.” History, according to this version of constructivism, has established a set of theories and methods for the interpretation of evidence, which, consistently applied, lead to a plausible if not “true” representation of the past. A more radical kind of constructivism would point to the fact that the theories and the methods on which historians rely were not found “out there.” They have been worked out over the years, and in this regard are just as “constructed” as the models of arrangement favored in historiography. They, therefore, cannot function as guarantees of the validity of the historical endeavor.