Review: *Doing Emotions History*, edited by Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 224 pages.

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If the recent appearance of a spate of new research centres in universities across the globe is any indication, the study of the history of emotions has seen something of a renaissance. Embarrassingly, it is also an area about which, I confess, until recently I knew very little. Thankfully, the book under review, *Doing Emotions History*, edited by Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, has proved helpful in redressing this lack.

Owing a debt to the twentieth-century emotions scholarship of Lucien Febvre and Peter Gay, and providing something in the way of a general overview of the scholarship within the field, *Doing Emotions History* is divided into four parts. Beginning with a broad discussion of the methodological concerns inherent in tracking something as ambiguous as emotional content or qualia, we are then led into emotions history (Part II), analyses of China and Eastern Europe that serve to highlight not only the fact that emotional content is temporally contingent, but also spatially and culturally so. Part III, meanwhile, provides examples of scholarship that probes the history of specific emotions, and how the characters of certain emotions—such as joy or romantic love—are necessarily subject to certain social, political, or economic realities. Finally, Part IV—the

longest section—presents a series of papers analysing the relationships that emotions have with social order and the structures that help constitute it: religion, political systems, and the media.

Of the historical and philosophical issues touched on within *Doing Emotions History*, there are two that are, I think, of particular interest—especially for those scholars, such as myself, who may be new to the subdiscipline. The first is a historical claim, regarding how the texture of emotional life in the West has shifted in response to prevailing political and technological norms. Particularly among those scholars writing about the historical expression of emotions in the West, there is a clear assumption that modernisation has caused a concomitant shift towards emotional interiority, and that this emphasis upon interiority has had a material effect on our collective emotional experience. That is to say: just as the Industrial Revolution sowed the seeds for the rise of the middle class, so too did it sow the seeds for "middle-class respectability," at least insofar as industrialisation provided the base conditions under which those mores could develop. The newly minted middle class, being deeply and irrevocably aspirational, began to actively emulate their social betters, thus propagating a new kind of emotional disposition wherein one must at all times preserve their unflappability, restraint, and politeness. However, with the adoption of this new emotional disposition, public displays of emotion were slowly and inexorably rendered forbidden. Emotional experience, rather than being performative and exterior, became a primarily interior phenomenon.

In chapter six, Pamela Epstein maps some of these changes, with specific reference to the feeling of romantic love, and by examining personal ads in Victorian newspapers. According to this scholarship, it is only during and after the Industrial Revolution that experiencing romantic love became part of the selection criteria for finding a spouse. Although youthful limerence was undoubtedly experienced prior to this period (cf. *Romeo and Juliet*), it was only when internal emotional content became prioritised, by virtue of

a decreased emphasis on public displays of emotion, that partners would select one another on the basis of sustaining that feeling of excitement and mutual attraction. No longer were relationships understood solely with regard to their social, performative function; instead, they were also expected to fulfil an internal function. If Stearns and Epstein are to be believed, romantic love is but one emotion that has experienced material changes at the hands of various social and economic exigencies—and the book is littered with many more similar examples.

However, assuming the scholarship is sound, there is a second, more philosophical view that these claims raise—a question which seems to have attracted only very short shrift in this volume, both at the hands of the editors and the contributors. That is to say: if emotions are historically, economically, socially, or geographically contingent, as is the overriding claim, then to what extent are our emotions constructed? Although we might naïvely hold the view that our emotions, by virtue of their power and seeming authenticity, are somehow essentially just so authentic, the work in *Doing Emotions History* makes it quite clear that this view is little more than a conceit or convincing fiction. So what then are they? It seems to this reviewer that, in least in this respect, this volume leaves us with an unfortunate paucity of satisfying answers. This is a focus on which one hopes Stearns and Matt will concentrate in their later work.

Nonetheless, it is clear that Matt and Stearns, rather than attempting to provide a comprehensive précis of one particular corner of the emotions history corpus, are attempting to make clear the breadth and richness of emotions history as a whole. Although a dedicated scholar of the history of emotions may be disappointed by the lack of historical depth, and a philosopher or neuroscientist disappointed by the dearth of definitional provisions, it is likely that new researchers or readers in the field will find this work of significant value.

The review copy of *Doing Emotions History* was kindly provided to *Philament* by **Footprint Books**. See www.footprint.com.au for this and other titles.