

**Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling:
A History of Emotions, 600-1700***

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Not ‘The History of Emotions,’ but ‘A History of Emotions:’ the subtitle of Barbara Rosenwein’s newest contribution to the field demonstrates her acknowledgement of the rapid growth in publications and methodologies for emotions work in the decade since she published the influential *Emotional Communities in the Middle Ages* (Cornell University Press, 2006). The book itself opens with a question: ‘How can there be a history of emotions?’ Rosenwein shows that we’ve come some way from the earlier, definition-oriented, ‘What is the history of emotions?’ to a more critical engagement with the history and development of the discipline. This new question, issued by one of its founders, gestures to how that same discipline has been occasionally called into question, sometimes by those from within, but also from those outside of the humanities. With this opening gambit, Rosenwein signals that her book will not attempt to define or redefine the discipline, but that it will act – at least in part – in its defence. By beginning with this challenge to the ahistoricity of emotions in scientific discourse – the human brain, Rosenwein quotes evolutionary psychologists on page 1, has remained ‘the same’ since the Neolithic era – Rosenwein launches a defence of the humanities in general.

If Rosenwein’s intended audience is understood to be both inter- and extra-disciplinary, and to be concerned about the intellectual status of the discipline in general, it comes as less of a surprise that it is with twenty-first century scientific evidence for the variation in emotions that Rosenwein begins her account of a history of emotions in the West. What is not surprising, however, is that she builds her own understanding of the function of emotional variation in the past on the back of her previous work. Emotional communities, Rosenwein, recollects, are ‘usually but not always social groups [...] that have their own particular values, modes of feeling, and ways to express those feelings’ (p. 3). By concentrating on variation and change in human emotional expression across a long swathe of history – 600 to 1700 – Rosenwein’s book aims to excavate a pre-modern history of emotional discourse across a number of cultural forms, from ancient philosophy and medieval science to literature, art and music.

Given this broad range, Rosenwein methodological approach to emotional communities through time and to discourses concerning the norms of emotional expression in different times and places, will be considerably useful for scholars working on a variety of Western historical periods and text-based sources. Each of the nine chapters in Rosenwein's book treats a different historical period, examining the variety of emotional norms in concentric communities, from Cicero (here, Rosenwein excavates the pre-history of her own history, reaching well before 600 AD), to Thomas Hobbes. For the most part, her study concentrates geographically on England and France and their duchies, examining a variety of textual materials – including philosophical and literary writing, chronicles, and letters – from the early to late Middle Ages. A number of useful appendices, including maps and genealogies, help support the focus on particular times and places in Anglo-French history. Rosenwein applies her methodology of close-reading emotional language to these multiple genres of writing, more or less convincingly: Rosenwein's insistence on the linguistic embeddedness of emotion – on 'emotional vocabularies,' 'emotion words,' and idea that emotion itself may only be articulated in language – occasionally risks losing sight of the nuance of (literary) text, and the roles of sounds, spaces and objects in communicating and shaping – not to mention as vital expressions of – human emotional experience.

Cognitive scientists and neuroscientists similarly rely on language in their investigations of emotion, as Rosenwein herself points out (p. 5). With her own scientific rigour, Rosenwein organises the emotional vocabularies she identifies in her chosen sources into tables, which give individual 'emotion words' alongside their (by her own admission 'rough') modern English equivalents. These tables are intended to allow for easier comparison across communities, and are intended both 'to suggest the relative importance of various emotions in particular communities,' and to 'show that notions of what is "emotional" have changed over time' (p. 6). Rosenwein identifies this last point as one of the most crucial findings of her cross-communal comparisons. In drawing attention to multilingualism, however, both across and within emotional communities, these tabular comparisons perform other important work, drawing attention to the variety of languages and linguistic registers in which emotions were expressed throughout European history. Although the geographical area covered by Britain alone was thoroughly home to speakers of many different tongues throughout the medieval period, consideration of the multilingualism of Europe in general has featured only rarely in historical studies of linguistic emotional expression; this is to say nothing of cases of individual multilingualism, or of diaspora, where an individual or group was confronted with an unfamiliar tongue. One especially interesting feature of Rosenwein's book is her comparison and analysis of moments of encounter between different emotional communities, such as when a member of the famous Norfolk-based Paston family, John II, witnessed the heightened expressivity of the French ducal court in Burgundy during the fifteenth century.

The book, which is structured chronologically, begins with an exploration of classical theories and concepts of emotion inherited by medieval writers. Further contextualising the idea of emotional ‘inheritance’ born out in her title, ‘Generations of Feeling,’ Rosenwein here concentrates especially on the works of Cicero and Church ‘father,’ St Augustine. In Chapter 2, a summary of the form and structure of ‘emotional communities’ in early medieval Francia, draws substantially from Rosenwein’s previous work. Rosenwein turns to newer material in her discussion of an eight-century century work *On the Virtues and Vices* written by Alcuin of York, one of Charlemagne’s most trusted advisors and courtiers, as a consolatory framework which offered its intended readers, in Rosenwein’s words, ‘a program for self help’ (p. 85). The next chapter compares the emotional values of two literal communities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one religious, the other courtly – the Cistercian monastery of Aelred of Rivaulx, and the courts of Toulouse in Southern France – and their treatments of *amor* in Aelred’s spiritual treatises and troubadour poetry consecutively. A chapter on Thomas Aquinas’ account of the passions takes us back from Occitan to Latin, and forms the foundation of the next chapter’s closer exploration of vernacular modes of emotional expression, in another unusual textual juxtaposition: the French chronicles of Enguerrand de Monstrelet, and the written account of late medieval English woman, Margery Kempe. The chapter ends with a comparison the English words that Margery attached to the heart with those most often used by the Paston family in the famous archive of their letters; Rosenwein concludes that attention to the emotional norms established in the Paston’s archive helps contextualise the personal ostracisation that Margery describes in her book.

In her closing chapters Rosenwein begins to make a subtle move away from the Middle Ages, into humanist and Enlightenment theories of emotional expression, while maintaining an emphasis on their shared inheritances. Her chosen transitional figure is fifteenth-century Paris-based scholar, preacher, poet and composer, Jean Gerson, whom she acknowledges is ‘hardly mentioned as an emotion theorist,’ but whose cross-genre theory of emotions – ranging across visual and textual media, as well as performance, gesture and song – Rosenwein convincingly outlines (p. 227). Word lists in this chapter move between Latin and Middle French, revealing Gerson’s scholarly bilingualism and the fluidity of his thinking about emotional expression across languages and forms. The jump to seventeenth-century England and Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* is more abrupt than chapter transitions in earlier periods, and Rosenwein spends some time in this chapter attempting to undermine the twentieth-century divide between Middle Ages and Renaissance. It is, perhaps, here, that Rosenwein’s defensive strategies and her insistence on the importance of the Middle Ages in shaping modern theories of emotion is most strongly felt. Rosenwein’s insistence on the importance of the medieval period in the history of various theories and discourses of emotion drives her analysis of Burton’s work and treatment of a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literary texts on the theme of

melancholy. It is another interesting comparative analysis, even if it doesn't completely solve the periodization problem with which she begins; it may, for example, have been more effective to compare the early modern 'obsession' with melancholy with literary works from the pre-modern era. The chapter nonetheless opens important avenues for thinking about the influence of twentieth-century critical traditions on how we think about the history of emotions in the present, especially in relation to particular periods.

Generations of Emotion concludes dramatically in the mid-seventeenth century with Hobbes' *Leviathan*, reaching back through its various discursive inheritances to consider Hobbes' own delineation of the passions alongside those of Augustine, Aquinas and Gerson. The chapter offers what is perhaps the most convincing method of the book for reading emotional discourses transhistorically, *through* time, rather than by cherry-picking points for comparison from different times and places. Rosenwein's emphasis on the fact that there are always multiple emotional communities, in any given time and place, is demonstrated most conclusively here, and it serves as a powerful reminder that each time we attend to one emotional community, or one specific place or time, we simultaneously bear witness to a long genealogy of emotional norms and ideas. Finally, it is this insistent attention to the many shifting and overlapping definitions of emotion, and the work that they do – socially, culturally, and communally; in the word and in history – that makes Rosenwein's book a valuable new contribution to the field.