Affect and Aesthetics

Introduction

ABSTRACT In this book perspectives from affective narratology are applied to study emotional structures in literary works of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Ibsen, Hamsun, J.P. Jacobsen, Schoenberg and Knausgaard. Based on perspectives from literary studies, philosophy, cognitive psychology, neurobiology and media studies, professor Per Thomas Andersen analyzes characters in the novels, temporal and spatial aspects of the narratives, sources of emotional impulses and different ways in which the streams of affects turn out to be as important as events in the narrative style of the chosen authors.

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KEY WORDS affective narratology | emotion | literary studies | affective turn

In the great Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky’s 1842 novel fragment, published in English translation as *Netochka Nezvanova*, we encounter the poverty-stricken musician Efimov, who is virtually obsessed with his own talent. He compensates for his miserable existence by delusions of grandeur that prove to be completely unfounded the day he hears a genuine virtuoso play. In his own eyes his megalomania had propelled him to the stars, and his downfall is shattering.

The real tragedy in the story is that this character has a family – a wife who is weak and ill, and a step-daughter who idolizes him and is willing to do anything for him.

We are confronted with a typical Dostoevsky configuration: on the one hand a person so caught up in his own feelings that he is enclosed within his own solipsistic reality. A rational grasp of the world slips away. The realities that surround him and all other people, including his own family, are in his view only there for his sake, and are valued exclusively according to how they contribute to his grandiose project, that of becoming a great artist. He doesn’t just neglect his family; despite the fact that it is his sick wife who supports him with her meager income from cooking dinners in the boarding house, Efimov proclaims to everyone that
she is his ruin. It is her fault that he can never realize his grand plan. He exploits little Netochka contemptibly, among other things by persuading her to steal money from her mother. The mother finally dies, and is the unambiguous victim of the story.

Netochka, on the other hand, represents the other well known position in Dostoevsky’s constellation of relationships. She is a person with an apparently unending ability for empathy towards the existence of others, a self-effacing and overly sensitive compassion for the lives of chosen pivotal people, virtually hour by hour. She shows an unbounded commitment to discovering what she can do to contribute to the well-being of the people she focuses upon. She trembles with anxiety for them, cries for them the bitterest tears, is constantly at their service, and rejoices without ambivalence when they are happy. Netochka focuses first on her step-father Efimov, and after she is taken in by a prince and princess as their daughter, she becomes especially fixated on the prince’s daughter Katja, who is about Netochka’s own age.

Both of these positions seem emotionally determined: Netochka’s position involves emotional self-effacement, while Efimov’s position implies obliteration of any ability for intimate understanding of the emotional world outside of the self. The feelings are fundamentally different, but in both cases they explain something basic about Dostoevsky’s literary world. Feelings in Dostoevsky’s world are not something that spice up or color the human universe, feelings are not something that occur in addition to existence in the world; emotions are not something that his characters “have.” Affects, feelings and emotions determine the world, how it appears, how one lives within it, and what kind of coexistence is possible with others. Feelings have people in their power. Feelings are a dominant element in Dostoevsky’s poetics.

II

Feelings and emotion have played an important role in many conceptions of thought throughout the ages, especially in ideas of art and literature. The contrast between reason and emotion remains central to widespread common perceptions, often accompanied by the idea that reason is the authority that first and foremost must be relied upon. Reason is factual, polemic and capable of distinguishing between the subjective and objective, the essential and the nonessential. Feelings do not have these characteristics, and therefore can easily mislead, lead astray and make us capricious and inconsistent. Feelings are not suitable as a basis for decisions; they obscure the facts, and it is unclear if they have informative value that
can be used for anything. This conception is consistent with the rationalism of the father of modern philosophy, René Descartes. He believed that we gain knowledge of the world by using reason, not through the senses.

But at the same time, everyone realizes that life would be poorer without feelings. Maybe one could well imagine existing without grief or fear, but most would refuse a life without joy, love, desire, or pleasure. The common-sense point of view is that feelings have their place in existence, but preferably under the control of reason. The opposite appears an aberration, derangement or illness. Overly sensitive people often seem as if they lack the capability for living and the requisite sturdiness, and people who exhibit excessive uncontrolled anger appear overpowering, threatening or downright dangerous.

Nevertheless, most people have experienced that in apparently factual debates the world’s best arguments may slide like water off a duck, while the ones that directly assault the self-esteem of the discussion partner and make that person uncomfortable, anxious or shameful, may gain ground and score, seen objectively, undeserved points. We also know that not all of our choices, even the most important, are based only on rational deliberation. Most of the communal activities we are affiliated with are based upon and contain strong elements of feelings, passion and affects. If we understand the human as primarily a social being, there is much that suggests that feelings are just as fundamental to our existence as reason. If our most basic need is belonging together with someone, then feelings are the most important condition of existence; and if sense of community is a primary necessity, there is certainly also reason to believe that our reason and our ideas to some extent are guided by – or at least are influenced by – our feelings about the communities to which we belong. Communal feelings take part in determining our collective forms of judgement and our ideas about matters where a more or less cultural consensus prevails.

Robert C. Solomon was among the first to ameliorate the view of human emotional life with his classic *The Passions. Emotions and the Meaning of Life* from 1976, in which he launched an idea that has subsequently been expanded upon by several scholars, among them Martha Nussbaum, namely that “emotions are judgements” (Solomon 1993, viii). Since Solomon’s book, a series of philosophers and psychologists have written about emotions in a manner that gives them a more prominent position than what was customary earlier. Among others, the British scholar Thomas Dixon mentions Ronald de Sousa, Michael Stocker, Dylan Evans and Peter Goldie, in addition to Keith Oatley (Dixon 2003, 2). Then in 1994, Antonio R. Damasio in *Descartes’ Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* assigns emotions a central place in human existence from a purely biologi-
cal point of view. In his next book, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, Damasio writes “…the presumed opposition between emotion and reason is no longer accepted without question” (Damasio 1999, 40). He asserts that “…emotion is integral to the processes of reasoning and decision making, for worse and for better” (41). It is clear to him that “It certainly does not seem true that reason stands to gain from operating without the leverage of emotion. On the contrary, emotion probably assists reasoning, especially when it comes to personal and social matters involving risk and conflict” (41–42). He certainly admits that “emotional upheavals can lead to irrational decisions” but in toto he insists that “Well-targeted and well-deployed emotion seems to be a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate properly”. (42)

III

In the world of art, feeling and affects have almost always been central in reflections over what music, pictures or fictional works “do” to us. Ever since the dawn of Romanticism in Europe, as Robert Wilkinson writes in his article “Art, Emotion and Expression,” it “has been held that art can be defined in terms of emotional expression.” There is the widespread conception that good art is usually created with an origin in “an emotional crisis of the artist” (Wilkinson 1992, 179). It is also customary to think that what a work of art first and foremost evokes in the recipient are diverse feelings. Feelings do not play the same role in all theories about art, but they have an important place, and they are not tied specifically to the art theories of Romanticism.

The foundations of the central conceptions regarding emotion and art were established by Pythagoras (c. 570 – c. 495 B.C.E). Most of his philosophy is known only in fragmentary transmissions, but it is nevertheless clear that his theories were constructed on speculative numerology with great metaphysical superstructures. He discovered that musical intervals were determined by mathematical proportions, which he then extrapolated to the entire universe, establishing the concept of the *Harmony of the Spheres*. He also believed that these numerical relationships could be transferred to values in human life; that is, he established the foundation for the concept of musical elements having ethical value, and prepared the foundation for the aesthetics of both Plato and Aristotle. Plato’s theory was that there was an actual mechanical relationship between types of scales and emotions, and on that basis he banished Ionic and Lydian modes as soft and insipid. They were only suitable for drinking songs. The Mixolydian mode also had to be
completely disregarded. Plato writes about this in *The Republic*, where he has Socrates say:

“I don’t know the modes,” I said. “Just leave that mode which would appropriately imitate the sounds and accents of a man who is courageous in warlike deeds and every violent work, and who in failure or when going to face wounds or death or falling into some other disaster, in the face of all these things stands up firmly and patiently against chance. And, again, leave another mode for a man who performs a peaceful deed, one that is not violent but voluntary, either persuading someone of something and making a request – whether a god by prayer or a human being by instruction and exhortation – or, on the contrary, holding himself in check for someone else who makes a request or instructs him or persuades him to change, and as a result acting intelligently, not behaving arrogantly, but in all these things acting moderately and in measure and being content with the consequences. These two modes – a violent one and a voluntary one, which will produce the finest imitation of the sounds of unfortunate and fortunate, moderate and courageous men – leave these.” (Plato, 77–78)

Glauccon, Socrates’ conversant in the dialogue, informs Socrates that the two modes are the Dorian and the Phrygian. Accordingly, there is a direct connection between aesthetics and ethics, and concrete artistic expressions presuppose the evocation of specific emotions and attitudes. Of course, such an aesthetic makes art both useful and dangerous, an effective instrument in the ethical and political education of the state, but at the same time a threatening force if one “plays it wrong” – that is to say if one uses the wrong scale.

The Doctrine of Ethos and musical theory of antiquity were important presuppositions for *Affektenlehre*, The Doctrine of the Affections, of the Baroque period. Here the conception of a direct relationship between aesthetic agents and definite affects was pursued and continued. For example, the composer, singer and conductor Johan Mattheson wrote a work entitled *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* (1739), wherein such a doctrine was developed.¹ Several others contributed with different variants of the doctrine; Andreas Werkmeister, for instance, and towards the end of the Baroque period this concept was universally accepted. Carl Philip Emanuel Bach and the so-called Mannheim School were important exponents of the doctrine.² It was held quite conclusively that a composer or musician could evoke spe-

¹. The presentation here is constructed upon Finn Benestad 1976. [Quotations from Johann Mattheson are translated from Benestad’s text: *Musikk og tanke. Hovedretninger i musikkestetikkens historie fra antikken til vår egen tid.*]
cific emotions in the listener by utilizing unequal melodic intervals or by playing in specific keys. Large intervals were to evoke joy, for example, while small intervals brought about sadness. The doctrine was developed in such detail by some composers and music theorists that it resembled the teachings of stylistic devices in the linguistic rhetorical tradition. G Major was a light and optimistic tonality, D Major was powerful and energetic, while E Flat was masculine and heroic.

Johann Mattheson referred directly to the philosopher René Descartes, who about a hundred years earlier had occupied himself with questions about both music theory and human affects, respectively, in *Musicae Compendium* (1618, printed 1650) and in *Les passions de l’âme* (1649). The reason that Mattheson and others were inspired by Descartes, was, as Mattheson wrote “For Descartes, affects were determined physiologically, and there was no reason that one could not control the affects by simultaneously controlling the means that had led to the physiological reaction” (Benestad, 134). According to Mattheson, Descartes believed that different rhythms could influence the spiritual life of a person and encourage specific moral qualities. In contrast to what we are accustomed to associate with musical qualities after the epoch of Romanticism, it appears that music in Mattheson’s conception had the function of controlling feelings and guiding mankind into the realm of reason. In any case, this is how he construes Descartes, to whom he refers with great respect:

As a logician it was essential for Descartes to point out that reason was superior to all passions and feelings, and as long as reason managed to prevail, man could not be led on the wrong track by arbitrary flights of imagination. The greatest mission of music was as an agent for advancing the intellectual study of science’s science, that is – philosophy. (ibid. 135)

The psychophysical conception was accordingly a frame of comprehension that above all was about control and instruction, similar to Plato’s. It was not strange, therefore, that *Affektlenhre* was used normatively. For example, it was an accepted rule that a musical composition could contain only one affect. Intermixed feelings had no place in music, and it is implicit that *Affektlenhre* was not understood expressionistically. What was expressed in music was not the composer or musician’s individualized feelings; it was a matter of evoking universal human affects. Descartes operated with six fundamental emotions from which all others were derived: wonder, love, hate, desire, joy and sorrow.

2. However, Albert Schweitzer in his famous book about Johann Sebastian Bach, Carl Philip’s father, meant that the Master himself could be understood through *Affektlenhre*.
IV

The liberation of individual feelings came with Romanticism. It hardly happened because people suddenly became more sentimental, pathetic or affected. It was rather the case of a development that took place in company with an ideological shift in which the view of the human self and even the conception of reality changed. Historians of ideas work with concepts such as “the boundless self.” A principle point is that the human being is something more than, perhaps also something other than, reason and that this human self incorporates that which lies outside the self, instead of being included in it or being effaced from it. The self expands its borders and contains the world. This conception of the self is also related to a new conceptualization of nature.

Romanticism’s philosophy of nature marks a clear break with Rationalism and all kinds of mechanical notions of nature. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes, among others, had advanced the point of view that nature’s clock advanced of its own accord, nature followed its own inherent laws. By the eighteenth century, many had adopted a “clockwork universe theory” for their view of nature and the universe. There was, per se, a place for a creator behind it all, who had originally wound the clock up, but just in the first instance. Thereafter it ticked away by itself. Even Aristotle had said, “God doesn’t need any friends,” and to the extent that the rationalists of the eighteenth century imagined a deity, it was a withdrawn authority that had entrusted creation to its own devices, that is, to the laws of nature.

In Romanticism we encounter another mentality. Divinity or the spirit are not something other than, or withdrawn, in relationship to our universe. Quite the contrary. The spirit is in nature, in the universe, in creation, in the grass, in the air and the light; and yes, as in Wergeland, “Heaven” is in “a moss blossom.” In summary: The idea of a completed work of creation is set against the concept of the eternal and unfinished creation. And against the conception of a transcendent or withdrawn deity, stands Romanticism with its conceptualization of an immanent spirit. That is, a spirit that is present here and now, not as in the Middle Ages when God could only reach mankind through vehicles of divine grace, communion and the clergy. Indeed the spirit is in nature, in the universe, even in our own bodies.

But even if the divine spirit is present here, it is nevertheless “hidden” to everyday cognition and the cognizance of common sense. Not only the conception of an ever present spirit, but also the idea of a hidden God belong to mysticism’s traditions of ideas. That is why the hidden truth requires another form of gaining

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3. From Henrik Wergeland’s 1833 poem “Til en Gran” [To a Spruce].
understanding than rationalism’s perception of reason. “Closing them [intuitions] out gives him with the Hoof the choicest bait” says the Button-Molder in *Peer Gynt* (Ibsen 1980, 196). Accordingly, the highest form of obtaining insight is a feeling, intuition, the inchoate idea. The present but hidden deity in existence can manifest itself in an illumination, in a mystical vision, most often just as an epiphanic flash, an extraordinary momentary experience.

And also in art. Romanticism’s artist was comprehended as a genius with a privileged eye; the romantic poet was a seer who could perceive the concealed, as a mystic. He could see the unity in the many, the connections in existence. The literary work, especially poetry, became a form of gaining understanding and insight; it became the very highest form of comprehension. It is important to be reminded of this theoretical and epistemological aspect of Romanticism’s mode of thinking since we so often read that Romanticism represents the longing for an escape from reality and a flight into a world of dreams. That is Realism’s judgement of Romanticism, and of course it can be relevant. But it hardly corresponds to the self-understanding of the Romanticists themselves. The cultivation of an obscure hunch, the mysteriousness of night’s aura, the always restless striving and yearning for the horizon beyond the visible – these are all expressions of an endeavor that is based in epistemology. Rationalism before and Realism afterwards operated with other concepts of reality, and their forms for understanding had to correspond with their conceptualizations of reality. The romanticist had his understanding of reality – and a form of understanding that matched it: Romanticism’s longing was no escape, but an effort at comprehension.

What the cognition of Romanticism gave insight into was the infinite diversity and interconnections of existence, its differences and its unity. Nature and spirit are one. We are not surrounded by dead and finite matter and do not live in an uninspired physicality. We exist in a living nature that consists of spirit and matter in fusions of dissimilarity. This way of thinking implies not just that spirit is in nature, but that nature is the spirit’s objectification; that is, an expression for the essence of the spirit. Not all of Romanticism’s natural philosophy was Christian, and not all Christian Romanticism was theologically orthodox. In the Christian variant, however, the diversity in creation was regarded as an expression of God’s own manifold being, and unity was expressive of the oneness of God. The creation was God’s great work of art. The analogy of God as creator and human as artist is found as early as in Friedrich Schiller, and in this artistic metaphor lies another element that is important in understanding Romanticism’s image of the artist. The art work of the romantic artist is an expression of his personality in the same way that the creation is an expression of God’s being.
Such a theory of manifestation likely seems foreign today because of its analogy with the divine. Nevertheless, this conception has exerted an enormous influence on the view of art in modern times. The idea of a unique, original personality who expresses himself through his art work is deep-seated even in the conceptions of art in our own day. And perhaps, even if we do not believe in intuition or believe art as the highest form of perception, we still fasten upon ideas about the artist as a person with a kind of privileged eye that can see something other than the rest of us.

Romanticism’s nature-philosophy and its expressive aesthetics involved a completely new emphasis on the distinguishing emotional quality of the self and the position of feelings in art. Instead of reflecting an outer reality, art should now express the artist’s inner life, which, of course, did not just consist of thoughts and rational deliberations, but just as much of feelings. Feelings and the force of feelings became almost a guaranty that an artwork was good. William Wordsworth expressed it this way in his famous preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems*:

> For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply.

(Wordworth 1800, n.p.)

The artist is not just anybody, but an exceptional person with deep thoughts, and the work of art is marked by spontaneity and strong emotions.

The new examination of emotional expression in art had already begun earlier, in movements of Pre-Romanticism, in trends of *Sturm und Drang*, in what has been called the expressive style, the “romanticism of the enlightenment,” the Mannheim School, or, as Lessing expressed it, “Empfindsamkeit” in art. These trends found expression both in literature and in music. One source of inspiration was Goethe’s *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers*, where it is recounted how music causes the hero to cry (Goethe 1962, 99). The dynamic relationship between affects, and the transition between one affect and another in developing outbursts found its place in the art work, while in the Baroque period, it had been a rule that only one affect could be represented in each musical composition. These circumstances had a very direct and concrete meaning for experimentation of emotional expression in music, and on musical dynamics on the whole. Sudden changes between loud and soft (*forte* and *piano*) were exploited, likewise the contrast
between fast and slow *tempo*. A small stylistic detail also attained great meaning in music history, namely a specific method of executing a musical suspension, a detail that received the designation “Mannheim sigh.” A sigh is also the expression of an emotional event. In addition, advances in using musical sequences evolved. Sequencing was a well-known technique from the Baroque: a small musical motif was restated, but transposed to a new pitch level. In the Baroque, the technique was considered a simple “architectural” method of musical composition. Sequencing became “affected” in Romanticism, that is, the technique was used to shape an emotional rise in tension. The technique was developed to perfection in late Romanticism, and can be experienced with full effect in, for example, the first movement of Rachmaninoff’s famous third piano concerto. But perhaps the most important musical effect that was invented by the expressive schools of Pre-Romanticism was nevertheless the effects of *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, that is, the gradual increase or gradual decrease in the volume during musical phrases. On wind and string instruments this effect can also be produced while playing the same tone. This represents a revolutionary rupture with the Baroque “terraced dynamics” in which the degree of intensity could only be altered in between clearly bounded musical phrases. It is said that the first time an audience experienced *crescendo* effects, they found themselves suddenly standing in the concert hall, lifted up by the dynamic effect, subsequently to gasp breathlessly for air when the *diminuendo* effect was used. *Crescendo* and *diminuendo* became such important elements in romantic music that they shaped entirely new methods of composition. As an example, the famous third movement in Johannes Brahms’ third symphony would be totally without the strong emotional effect it has if it were performed without the emphasis on such dynamics. The relatively short musical phrases of the work’s main theme are combined with *crescendo* and *diminuendo* in such a way that the music acquires a “breath” that resembles a sigh, a gasp, or powerfully emotional, deep breaths, followed by a breath of relaxation.

V

In *Emotions. A Brief History* (2004), professor of cognitive psychology Keith Oatley claims that the basic conception for working with the distinctive affective qualities of being human is *emotion*. The concept of “affect,” which, according to Oatley, has its root in the early seventeenth century, has also been revitalized, but in general emotion is recognized as the overall term for the “family” of phenomena that characterizes mankind’s emotional existence. As a point of departure, Oatley distinguishes between reactive emotions, moods, sentiments and prefer-
ences. The duration of feelings and what evokes them are important distinctive features.

Reactive emotions are evoked suddenly when something unexpected occurs. That is, something happens that does not have a place in our “assumed world.” “Emotions give life its urgency,” Oatley writes (4). A sudden, unexpected event evokes a reaction that is of both a cognitive and physical nature. Reactive emotions indicate alteration, and they most often imply a preparedness for action. They are tied to consciousness in the sense that our “assumed world” is experience- and knowledge-based. Moods last longer, for many hours or days. In contrast to reactive emotions which have clear causes, moods can be due to circumstances that are hidden or unknown. Sadness, joyfulness or irritability can surround our existence and set a frame of mind for an attitude towards life that is forceful, but that does not always have a concrete, obvious cause. Sentiments can last for many years, and can, for example, determine our relationships with other people for long periods or a lifetime. Love would be an obvious example – while falling in love would rather classify as a reactive emotion. Reactive emotions bring about a change in commitment, while sentiment is an indication of a continuing commitment. Preferences are a type of feeling that is defined in quite a vague way: “one may think of it as a silent emotion waiting for an opportunity to express itself in a choice we make” (4).

One of the conspicuous characteristics of Dostoevsky’s character portrayals is the density of intense emotions that break out almost eruptively in an individual’s psyche. People tremble in fear, rant and rave and wring their hands, cry and are overcome with joy or despair. These are feelings of an acute character that give life urgency, but that also have the hallmark of coming in rapid order and high tempo, and barely give the characters any breathers in a neutral emotional state. This causes

4. It is appropriate to mention here that literature about what we today call emotions also has a long history preceding the tradition in the field of psychology. According to Thomas Dixon in From Passions to Emotions. The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category (2003), not just a philosophical but also a theological literature about human emotional life has existed since early times, and it was both sophistical and conceptually subtle. Concepts such as affect and passion played an important role in this literature. Augustine, one of the fathers of the Christian church, was inspired by Cicero and his notion of four fundamental emotions: cupiditas (desire), timor (fear), laetitia (joy), and tristitia (sorrow). Aquinas developed these viewpoints further and ended up with eleven passions (Dixon 2003, 40–43). According to Dixon, it is anachronistic to use the concept of emotions in connection with this older literature about human passions. It also seems to be a dubious assertion when Oatley writes that the concept of affect has its origin in the seventeenth century. Dixon’s book is a timely reminder that there exists a good deal of literature about and knowledge of human feelings beyond current scientific disciplines. The field of creative literature is one such area, which the studies in this book lend a hand in legitimating.
their emotional lives to appear not just as a series of emotional experiences, but as personality characteristics. It often appears that different people pass through the same type of feelings time and again – as the case is with Netochka and her stepfather. The emotional pattern of progression looks like what the psychologists Roger Schank and Robert Abelson have called scripts (Schank and Abelson 1977). A script appears as a narrative pattern or a sequence of events which is repeated in people’s lives. Sylvan Tomkins elaborated on the idea of scripts towards the concept of emotionally based life-scripts (Tomkins 1979). In the first place, Tomkins believed that emotions are the most important motivating factor for behavior. He claimed, secondly, that when an emotion is developing, a whole collection of processes are recruited in the brain and body in order to bring about responses that compose an entire entity. In the third place, Tomkins claimed that people act based on scripts to solve particular emotional problems in their lives. As soon as a person is encased within a script, it becomes a principal component of the personality, and the entire sequence of reactions can be triggered by any individual element in the script. Many of Dostoevsky’s central literary characters appear to be constructed, not just as especially sensitive people, but as persons with powerful emotional life-scripts. In this way a close connection between short lasting and possibly reactive emotions and the more long-lasting sentiments or preferences comes into existence.

VI

One day about 150 years ago, Charles Darwin took a walk to the zoo and sat down close to a glass cage that contained a poisonous snake. He had only one thought in mind: He would do everything he could to avoid recoiling if the snake should strike at him. He knew very well that the snake would not be capable of breaking the glass cage. In other words, he knew that the experiment was completely safe. What happened? The snake struck towards him and Darwin jumped back. Darwin’s explanation was that the snake’s attack aroused emotional reactions that had been established in the human brain at an earlier stage of evolution. It was a matter of responses that at one time had contributed to insure the survival of the species. The intelligence that informed Darwin that the experiment was safe belonged to a later stage of development. The emotional reaction was therefore primeval in relationship to reason, and set reason aside completely automatically. Darwin related his experiment in The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals (1872), and this work is considered by many to be the beginning of modern scientific research into human emotion. In other words, scientific research on emotion began about a hundred years later than the great exploration of feelings in the art of Romanticism.
Both Keith Oatley and Martha Nussbaum refer to the Stoics and Epicureans in their historical mooring of theories about human emotions (Oatley 2004, 41ff.; Nussbaum 2001, 22ff.). The Stoics were already aware that an emotion consisted of two movements; the first was involuntary, unconsidered, physical – like Darwin’s reaction to the snake. The other was more considered, conscious and was concerned with what could be done with the emotion that had been mobilized. For the Stoics, this was the real emotion, maintains Oatley, and it was possible to have control over it. This was namely the goal of the Stoics, of course; to have full control over desires and feelings.

The conception of the two components of emotions can be traced from the Stoics forward to modern research on the brain. Darwin claimed that evolution had led to the addition of new layers of neurons in the brain, while the disappearance of earlier strata was rare. In the 1990s Paul MacLean asserted that the brain had developed in three main phases that corresponded with developments in the activities of mammals. The first phase corresponds to the interior and oldest part of the brain and is called the corpus striatum. The impulse to establish a domicile, patrol and defend a territory, establish social groups, greet, mate and migrate are found in this part of the brain. The next layer in the brain is called the limbic system, and is regarded as the seat of the emotions. It attends to three specific functions: mothers’ care of offspring, who on their side feel attachment to the mother, communication between individuals by means of vocal signals, and rough and tumble play, especially among younger individuals. The third stage of development took place over a period of about six million years, and saw to it that human beings separated from their “ancestors.” This new layer in the brain is called the neocortex, often only cortex. In the human, it constitutes about 80% of the volume of the brain. One of its principal functions is to increase our social capacity, so that we not only socialize with others as a group, but also can recognize and establish relationships with individuals. With new technological tools for research of the brain, a part of the limbic system called the amygdala was discovered. The neural scientist Joseph LeDoux has argued that the amygdala has a “low road” by means of which it communicates with the rest of the brain and the body. This “low road” can send rapid signals of approaching danger without going through conscious analysis. The conscious deliberation and analysis of stimuli takes a much longer time, and forms the brain’s “high road” which is the cortical pathway (LeDoux 1996, 161ff.). In many ways, these two “roads” correspond to the two movements or components of the emotions as they were discussed as early as the Stoics.

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5. See MacLean 1990 and MacLean in Lewis and Haviland-Jones 1993, 67ff. The following summary of MacLean’s three phases is condensed and paraphrased from Oatley, 64–65.
ern cognitive psychology also operates with two such components of emotions. They often follow each other in two phases. The first functions as a type of alarm, and prepares the body, without really giving very much information. The other component includes evaluation and understanding, as one tries to understand the emotion and decide what actions should be taken.

VII

A comparable division plays a fundamental role for Brian Massumi, who is often referred to in connection with the so-called “affective turn.” According to Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth in *The Affect Theory Reader*, this trend within modern theory has its stimulus in two influential essays from 1995, Brian Massumi’s “The Autonomy of Affect” and Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 5). Patricia T. Clough, who appears to have coined the term “the affective turn,” refers especially to Massumi, who is a professor of communications and has concerned himself particularly with perceptual reactions in connection with new media and new technology. Despite Keith Oatley’s assertion that there is converging consensus that emotions are the basic concept within psychological scientific literature, Massumi advances the viewpoint that one must make a sharp division between “emotions” and “affects.” In the aforementioned influential essay from 1995, Massumi differentiates between qualities and intensity in connection with emotional experiences. The point seems to be that there is no accordance between our evaluations of qualities and our measurable senses’ intensity. The physical reactions that can be measured by heartbeats, breathing and skin live their own lives. Here Massumi uses the concept of affect. Emotions are combined with cognition; they are semantically and semiotically subject to qualification, which means they have conventional contents. I understand this division as largely in agreement with the psychologists’ distinction between the “low road” and the “high road.” However Massumi seems to put much more emphasis on the distinction than do the psychologists. While the psychologists claim that the spontaneous amygdala reactions are quite quickly dealt with in the cortex, and gain their interpretation with attendant instructions for action, Massumi seems to believe that affects are autonomous and have a subversive potential. He realizes that “Affects is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion.” However he himself claims that “emotion and affect – if affect is intensity – follow different logics and pertain to different orders” (Massumi 2002, 27). He inserts affects into a philosophical tradition from Spinoza, Bergson and Deleuze, and appears to mean that because affects are of such short duration,
they represent “something that happens too quickly to have happened” (30). In reality, affects are virtual. They contain potential. Affects will be consciously registered true enough, but, with reference to Bergson, Massumi asserts that consciousness is “subtractive and inhibitive” (31). Affects are fundamentally physical. They are characterized by an “irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature…” and “…affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique” (28). As far as I can see, Massumi has presented interesting analyses of perceptual encounters with new media, and has included the especially transitory perceptual stimuli we can experience. He associates them with “late-capitalist, image- and information-based economies” and specifies:

Think interruption. Think of the fast cuts of the video clip or the too-cool TV commercial. Think of the cuts from TV programming commercials. Think of the cuts across programming and commercials achievable through zapping. Think of the distractedness of television viewing, the constant cuts from the screen to its immediate surroundings, to the viewing context where other actions are performed in fits and starts as attention flits. Think of the joyously incongruent juxtapositions of surfing the internet. (42)

A point here is that one can be influenced by such transitory, perhaps even imperceptible physical stimuli almost without being consciously aware of it. In the decadence literature before the turn of the twentieth century, many authors were preoccupied by so-called “fractional feelings.” In Scandinavian literature, writers such as Knut Hamsun and Ola Hansson were engaged with how such miniature, often incidental sensory stimuli could undermine “greater” feelings and consciously chosen values. Perhaps Massumi could be positioned within such a tradition.

However, it is evident that he also proceeds normatively in his categories. Affects are what are interesting to him, emotions are associated with an obsolete concept of the individual, (ushered in by deconstructionism), and is dismissed from the field of interest. Emotions are semantically and semiotically subject to qualification, that is, they have a conventional content. Nevertheless, it is unclear how “autonomous” affects really are in Massumi’s judgement. That is, he nevertheless contemplates them as contextually dependent: “The body doesn’t just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds contexts, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated” (30). Affects are also in a certain sense tied to sociality; they are asocial but not prosocial, claims Massumi. The field of research he wants to inaugurate is
…not prosocial. It is open-endedly social. It is social in a manner “prior to” the separating out of individuals and the identifiable groupings that they end up boxing themselves into (positions in gridlock). A sociality without determinate borders: “pure” sociality. (9)

Affects can contain social elements and be tied to contexts whereby “…the trace of past actions, including a trace of their contents, were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body…” (30). In my judgement, it is difficult to maintain Massumi’s underlying division between affects and emotions based on the specifications he cites. It is difficult to see how affects can be both autonomous and tied to context. And further, it is not easy to see that they can be “unqualified, “not ownable” and “not . . . recognizable” while they simultaneously contain “the trace of past actions, including a trace of their contexts.” It appears that Massumi is driven more by ideological fear of an old-fashioned concept of the individual than by concepts about human feelings and reactions that are capable of verification. It also appears that many of those who have let themselves be inspired by the affective turn have found it difficult to attend to Massumi’s distinction in analytical work. In a certain sense, it is Massumi who comes to represent an antiquated concept of the individual in the sense that he operates with a division between the semantic qualifiable that exists in consciousness, and the physical. This division, which resembles the division between reason and feelings, seems more and more to appear as an abandoned position. As mentioned, Antonio Damasio claims such a viewpoint. This fundamental division is what he calls Descartes’ error in his famous book of the same name. In The Feeling of What Happens, Damasio primarily seeks to get on the track of consciousness. And Damasio’s perspective is plainly biological, that is to say, physical. Consciousness as well as emotions are within the organism, in the body. It is nothing other than body.

VIII

Damasio approaches consciousness as well as emotions on a neuro-biological basis. As mentioned, he believes that emotions have great meaning for rational thought. However, he has a different method of categorizing emotions than has the cognitive psychologist Oatley. Damasio works with the traditional primary or universal emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust. Then he utilizes secondary or social emotions such as embarrassment, jealousy, shame and pride. In addition, he launches an original concept, background emotions, as, for example, feeling well or unwell, calm or tense. We can often note background
emotions in each other without a word being said about a state of mind. We notice background emotions through subtle details in body language, the form and speed of movements, minimal motions in muscles of the eye or facial expressions. Background emotions are often provoked by inner factors, asserts Damasio and can, for example, be caused by prolonged processes of mental conflict. Background emotions are highly persevering and can survive neurological illnesses.

Another division that is important for Damasio is the distinction between emotion and feeling. One first experiences a feeling when one knows one has it, that is, when one becomes aware of it. Other organisms besides humans have emotions, and they cause the organism to enact a change, even if most organisms are not aware that they are experiencing a certain emotion. At a level below the emotions, we find what Damasio calls basic life regulation, that is, simple patterns of reactions that encompass regulation of metabolism and reflexes. It is a matter of an innate survival kit. For organisms who are equipped to notice emotions, those who have consciousness and can realize that they have a feeling, emotions have a stronger regulating effect. Consciousness “allows emotion to permeate the thought process through the agency of feeling” says Damasio (1999, 56). Accordingly, it is clear to Damasio that organisms that do not have consciousness also have emotions, but probably not feelings. People too can have emotions that do not become feelings, if I have understood Damasio correctly. But this is not the same as postulated by Massumi, that the one is physical and the other is not. It is also not the case that the focus is directed at something preconscious. On the contrary, for Damasio feelings are one of the human organism’s most important and most advanced systems of homeostasis.

Damasio actually quite frequently uses literary references when he is explaining his meaning. But when he does this, a lack of clarity often arises with regard to who is experiencing the feelings: the literary characters, the reader or the author. It is also a little unclear how his use of literary examples should be understood, to what extent they are illustrations of scholarly points on a level with metaphor, which Damasio also often uses, or if he means that they actually contain scientific truths. One ambiguity consists in Damasio initially categorically insisting that emotions can be induced by two factors, “objects” in the external world, or memories that come from within.

Emotions occur in one of two types of circumstances. The first type of circumstance takes place when the organism processes certain objects or situations with one of its sensory devices – for instance, when the organism takes in the sight of a familiar face or place. The second type of circumstance occurs when
the mind of an organism conjures up from memory certain objects and situations and represents them as images in the thought process – for instance, remembering the face of a friend and the fact she has just died. (56)

The emotions that Damasio refers to in literary works, have an unclear status as inducers, at least if we comprehend them as works to be read. Certainly we understand drama and film directly through our senses, but written works are comprehended via conceptions and inner images. It is unclear to me in what way literature is an emotional inducer in Damasio’s universe. Actually I think it is somewhat unclear how he understands dreams as inducers of emotions also.

What I find lacking in Damasio is that he does not pursue the two elements he makes concessions to, namely individual and cultural differences. He clearly admits that they are there, but as far as I can see, he has little to say about them. They fall completely outside of his biological focus. He draws his examples and scientific instances explicitly from patients with different forms of physical brain damage. He apparently is not interested in those variations caused by psychological peculiarities, neuroses or psychoses. The same is true of cultural differences and historical movements in the repertoire of feelings. One could entertain the misgiving that this makes it a bit easier for him to hold so steadfastly to his neurobiological and theoretically developmental point of departure.

IX

One theoretician who, similar to Brian Massumi, concerns herself with feelings more through philosophical considerations than with those from psychology, and definitively more from cultural theory than biology, is Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum is absorbed by “the intelligence of emotions.” Emotions are not considered just as “animal energies or impulses that have no connection with our thoughts, imaginings, and appraisals” but as “intelligent responses to perception of value” (Nussbaum 2001, 1). On this basis, it has been a central concern for Nussbaum to give emotions a place in her ethical thinking. This was already a main point in Love’s Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature from 1990. She argued for “ethical value of the emotions,” with, among others, references to the philosophy of Antiquity, including Aristotle and the Stoics. She continues this point of view in the expansive volume Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions from 2001. In Political Emotions (2013) she transfers her viewpoints to the political arena too, and asserts that emotional education of the general populace is needed to contribute in expanding the ability to empathize beyond those closest to
us. In *Love’s Knowledge*, she introduced the concept of *narrative emotions* in an analysis of Beckett’s *Molloy* trilogy:

…emotions are not feelings that well up in some natural and untutored way from our natural selves, that they are, in fact, not personal or natural at all, that they are, instead, contrivances, social constructs. We learn how to feel, and we learn our emotional repertoire. We learn emotions in the same way that we learn our beliefs – from our society.

(Nussbaum 1990, 287)

But in contrast to much of our understanding, we do not learn our emotions by means of argumentative assertions about the world. We learn them above all through stories, claims Nussbaum. It is a matter of cultural narratives that shape dissimilar narrative emotions in different parts of the world and in different places. Place shapes emotional geographies. The feeling of individual freedom has a strong position in our part of the world. The collective sense of honor is stronger in Muslim areas of the world. Such emotional geographies are not static; they change, but usually they change slowly. The collective sense of honor was also much more important than feelings of individual freedom in our part of the world during early Norse times.

Literature occupies an ambiguous position in such cultural narratives. On the one hand, there is no doubt that literature takes part in educating, developing and internalizing fundamental narrative emotions. The story of Tristan and Isolde is both an expression of, and has been a part of shaping, the grand idea of passionate love in the western world. The literature of Søren Kierkegaard and Henrik Ibsen has contributed in establishing and evaluating a set of Nordic narrative emotions: strong individualism, an enormous passion for truth – with accompanying hypocrisy. But literature’s narratives do not just take part in creating narrative emotions; they show, on the other hand, how cultural stories appear oppressive, restrictive and reactionary. They display the individual captured in dead cultural narratives or limited emotional space. They depict lives that are destroyed by attempting to adjust to fixed narrative emotions. Literature offers resistance, is revealing, inspires rebellion, and sets established narrative emotions in motion. In a Norwegian context, it is enough to refer to all the stories of the emotional darkening of the mind, sexuality and aptitude for life due to Pietism, from Arne Garborg, via Hans Jaeger and Jens Bjørneboe to Kjell Askildsen. Martha Nussbaum’s example of the relationship between literature and narrative emotions is Samuel Beckett’s
so-called French trilogy *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, in which she shows how the novels reflect and struggle with narrative emotions in which feelings of love are methodically linked together with feelings of guilt. In summary: Literature gives us both the possibility to study narrative emotions we are embedded within, and to reflect about them and develop critical attitudes towards them. Narrative emotions concerning gender and gender roles are probably amongst the cultural narratives that have slowly changed the most drastically in our part of the world in the last forty years. Literature has played a decisive role.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed writes, in conformity with Nussbaum, about emotions from a cultural and political perspective, but her fundamental ideological position is different from Nussbaum’s. Ahmed’s point of departure is Marxist and psychoanalytical, and she adopts a feminist perspective. Nussbaum is likely more of a liberal humanist. Nevertheless, they both stress that emotions cannot be studied meaningfully through a one-sided perspective of individual orientation. Ahmed takes a position critical of what she calls the psychologizing of emotions, and asserts that “emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices.” She refers to Emil Durkheim, and writes that for him, “emotion is not what comes from the individual body, but is what holds or binds the social body together” (Ahmed 2015, 9). Ahmed contends that most of what has been written about emotions is based on what she calls an *inside-out* perspective. For her part, she advocates for an *outside-in* perspective. In principle, this resembles Nussbaum’s idea of narrative emotions. Grounded in a cultural and political perspective, Ahmed deals with emotions such as grief, hate, fear, contempt, shame and several other fundamental emotions.

X

In the first scene of Norwegian literature’s most important quintessential text, Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, we encounter the main character in conversation with his mother, Aase. She begins with the famous words “Peer, you’re lying!” This is followed by a dialogue in which Peer lies through his teeth about his perilous trip up in the mountains. She is angry and scolds him because he is lying. But at the most dramatic part of his tall tale, when he falls from the cliff’s edge and down towards the water, her maternal instinct takes over, and she expresses concern and anxiety for him. She vacillates back and forth between anger and concern – until she finally recognizes the entire tall tale as an old local legend. This same vacillation between different feelings is repeated several times in the
drama’s portrayal of mother Aase. What Ibsen depicts is a very central aspect of the human mind: ambivalence. One can be ambivalent in many ways, and most people experience this quite often. We can be in doubt about what we should believe, what we think, and we can vacillate back and forth between different alternatives. We experience dilemmas of choice. But above all, we experience dissimilar feelings struggling within us simultaneously. Reading theoretical literature about emotions, we have seen that it is customary to work with different fundamental emotions in addition to several additional secondary emotions. They are often enumerated, and many people believe that there are some emotions that are universal. But when all is said and done, it is plain that in the individual’s psychological life, not all the feelings we have are simple or unambiguous. We often vacillate back and forth between different, perhaps conflicting feelings about the same person or a single matter. We can also be frustrated by conflicting feelings at the same time. The love/hate paradigm of Strindberg is a famous literary example. Sigmund Freud was concerned with ambivalent emotions, also by love/hate relationships and by attraction and revulsion at the same time, desire and repulsion. Many psychologists who have written about grief know very well that it also can be an ambivalent feeling. While grieving at the loss of the departed, one can also feel an underlying anger at being “abandoned,” even though the dying party did not do so on purpose. To be angry with someone you miss is, in reality, a widespread feeling in more banal situations also. Children react with anger against parents who have traveled away for the sole reason that they feel the loss of them. When it is a question of the pure and clearly differentiated types of feelings, then emotions are capable of being registered and measured physiologically as brain activity. But to my understanding, it is not possible to localize the different emotions we experience in distinct, separate parts of the brain. It is not possible to determine from an EEG or brain scans what type of feeling the person is experiencing. Later in this book we will encounter Mitya Karamazov who commits the most contemptible betrayal of a woman for whom he, at the same time, has high respect. Even in Dostoevsky, where especially strong feelings occur, the feelings can be quite intricate.

A stimulating theoretician who has attached special importance to compound feelings is Sianne Ngai, who wrote *Ugly Feelings* (2005). She refers to the feelings she writes about as “negative feelings,” but there is no doubt that what makes several of these negative feelings burdensome is precisely that they are compound or ambivalent. She creates new designations for new feelings that she considers compound and characteristic for our period of late modernity, for example, *stuplimentary*, which describes an intertwined emotion composed of “shock and bore-
dom.” She also asserts that it is characteristic for people of our time to be in a “…state of feeling vaguely ‘unsettled’ or ‘confused,’ or, more precisely, a meta-
feeling in which one feels confused about what one is feeling.” She also writes
about “this very specific state of affective indeterminacy as the negative feeling of ‘disconcertedness’ – the feeling of not being ‘focused’ or ‘gathered’” (Ngai 2005,
14). For Ngai there is no doubt that these feelings are culturally and historically
determined. They characterize people of our time, in our part of the world. In this
sense Ngai has the same fundamental perspective as Nussbaum and Ahmed. Per-
haps one could say that they are within the theoretical tradition from Freud’s
famous Civilization and its Discontents with respect to the intermediate position
between the individual and the cultural.

XI

Increased interest in emotion and affect is in evidence in many fields and disci-
plines. Not all of the contributors who are mentioned in this introduction can be
said to have had a direct influence on the study of literature. However, Sianne
Ngai is a professor of American Literature. Martha Nussbaum is a philosopher,
but has been interested in the relationship between philosophy and literature for a
large portion of her career, and both Sara Ahmed and Brian Massumi are often
referred to in literary studies. However the litterateur who has been the most
direct inspiration for the following studies is Patrick Colm Hogan and his book
Affective Narratology. The Emotional Structure of Stories (2011). Hogan has
attempted to make affective based concepts usable in concrete narrative analysis,
and he has done this in ways that inspire further attempts along the same lines.
Hogan will be mentioned and credited subsequently in the analyses. It must be
mentioned here that it is Hogan’s expansion of the vocabulary of narratological
concepts that interests me, not his theoretical point of view. Hogan moves close to
universalization of a very limited number of basic literary narratives. He asserts
clearly that it is the human “mind” that causes people everywhere on the globe to
tell the “same” stories. Hogan is not at all blind to the cultural aspects of stories,
but he moves continually towards generalizations and universalizations that allow
him to see “the same” in “the dissimilar.” I have difficulty in following Hogan par-
ticularly far along in these universalizations. In spite of this skepticism, he has
nevertheless inspired my efforts at an “affective narratology.”
The following studies share an affinity relationship to “the affective turn” and to newer narratology. With respect to the relationship with narratology, it should be emphasized that it is hardly a matter of a close connection to classical structuralist narratology, à la Greimas, Todorov or Genette. However, there are already today several generations of researchers who are working on the continuation of classical narratology. The publication of David Herman’s *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis* (1999) and Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik’s *Post-classical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses* (2010) have been depicted as representative for two such postclassical narratology generations (Alber and Fludernik 2010, 1). A number of post-classicists seem to be most engaged in discussing and adapting the classicists’ core concepts, “focusing on theoretical blind spots, gaps, or indeterminacies within the standard paradigm” (ibid., 3). In my opinion, this pursuit is not the most interesting. Another general tendency is that the analysis of narrative elements is spreading beyond the field of the novel, much further beyond the literary field, to other media and other professional areas, for example medicine, law and so forth. This is a development that I think is productive and inspiring. In such a context, it should not surprise anyone that the narrative elements in the following analyses are traced in dramatic, lyric and philosophical genres. In the postclassical context, these are very circumspect extensions of the narratological field. Another general tendency within postclassical narratology is the extension of the field of validity to multi-aesthetical areas. I also think this development is productive and interesting. In this book, the aesthetic interdisciplinary connections between literature and music play a central role in the chapter about *Gurrelieder*.

In spite of the postclassical development of narratology in several different directions, I have not seen that the perspectives that are concerned with affect and narration have received any central place in narratologists’ self-representation in publications like the ones mentioned above. With his *Affective Narratology*, Patrick Colm Hogan is relatively solitary in a comprehensive examination of affect and narration, even if he names a few other researchers within the cognitive tradition. To my understanding there is therefore ample opportunity for a study of this current type.

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6. There are many who have accomplished this earlier, among others Brian Richardson, Monika Fludernik and Ansgar Nünning. See Alber and Fludernik, 9.
7. Good examples are Werner Wolf, Marie-Laure Ryan and Jörg Helbig. See Alber and Fludernik, 9.
8. See Hogan, 15ff.
The book consists of five close readings of texts in the literary canon, one of which has an inter-artistic focus, plus an article with a more conceptual or culturally-historical focus. The objective is to contribute to the research tradition about the discussed works, but at the same time I wish to test different perspectives and concepts that will be able to contribute to the development of an affective narratology. This implies that the different analyses have the extra goal of aiming to gather insights and methodical elements that hopefully can have transfer value for other analyses with a corresponding focus. In the concluding chapter I will undertake a short summary where I call attention to such elements.