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Introduction (to Emotional Expressionism)

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INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of *Emotional Expressionism: Television Serialization,*
The Melodramatic Mode, and Socioemotionality is to explore the forms,
functions, and nuances of emotions in popular, mediated narratives. Clearly,
emotions constitute a key means by which audiences experience and make
sense of narrative media, in that mediated stories make compelling arguments or
take up resonant positions through their emotional methods and meanings. The
value of developing an emotional template for screen media lies in generating
new analytical and interpretative approaches to narrative aesthetics, especially in
terms of their pains and pleasures. As this study seeks to demonstrate,
emotional analysis opens up a wealth of alternative ways to interpret aesthetic
works, the audiences who attend to them, and the cultural contexts in which
narratives and those who engage with them meet in order to co-exist, collide, or
otherwise make contact.

At the same time, the difficulty posed is that emotions, as either aesthetic
or social practices, cannot be analyzed as 'doing' only one thing; their
multifaceted makeup and complexity of use render them challenging, slippery
but, ultimately, exciting objects of study. Emotions demand pluralization in every
sense of the word. Many different emotions may be identified in any cultural or
aesthetic context, while any particular emotion manifests in multiple, potentially
boundless ways, as it constantly moves, merges with other emotions, adapts,

and reformulates. Similarly, comprehensive analysis urges a pluralized account of what emotions do.

I adopt *emotion* as the most inclusive designation in English for the extensive and diverse arena of activities we recognize as feeling states. Encompassing a range of previous terminology and largely distinct concepts from "troubling desires and passions" to the less troublesome, even laudable, "affections and sentiments," Thomas Dixon explains that *emotion* did not come into use for feeling states until the mid-eighteenth century, and only solidified as predominant term when implemented by the various, developing psychological disciplines from the mid-nineteenth century on (2010, 339). By the twentieth century, *emotion* "assimilated and subordinated all other concepts" in widespread, general practice (Frevert 2014, 21).

Emotions as core designation carries certain benefits. For instance, Dixon remarks that historically it remained unclear whether emotion describes "a mental or bodily state," a distinction that continues to be debated across various disciplines concerned with the study of emotionality (339). The set of circumstances by which emotions do not belong wholly to either category – mind or body – but exist as interactive permutations of both provides conceptual appeal and flexibility (Scheer 2014, 34). Lack of clarity on emotions' physiological/psychological status helps avoid dichotomous assessments of the phenomena as belonging uniquely to one or the other category, that is, it enables debates about what emotion 'is' to continue. In contrast, ambiguities about emotions' ontological status depart from more firmly delineated applications of

affect, even when those occur in quite antithetical applications, for instance, as preconscious somatic impulses or as unconscious psychic drives.

At the same time, limitations exist around the vocabulary of *emotions,* foremost for this project in their association with singularized minds and bodies, rather than as socialized and socializing events. Researchers who interpret emotions as primarily personal responses to events tend to see them "as largely cognitively controlled and located in individual bodies and biographies" (Harding 2019, 216). From such perspectives, emotions 'belong' to the individual entity, whether as the functions of innate biological mechanisms or idiosyncratic past experience. Indeed, so proximate is the correlation between individuality and emotion that the onset of modernity witnessed the contemporaneous stabilization of both concepts. Thus, emotions became "located within the subject as an important category that crystallized, together with other elements of psychic life, to form the core of individuality" (Campe and Weber 2014, 1). The solidification of *emotions* from the nineteenth century facilitated a life of feeling that grew into being, first, internally situated, privatized experiences and, second, increasingly medicalized or pathologized occurrences evaluated through criteria of normal and abnormal.

Moving away from individualistic accounts, whether psychological or physiological, this study explores emotions in their sociocultural dimensions. Although necessarily referencing individualized approaches at certain junctures, whether psychological/cognitive or affective/embodied, *Emotional Expressionism* emphasizes the social productivity of emotions in the aesthetic and cultural work

they do towards making both narrative worlds and social relations possible. Towards this end, I develop the notion of socioemotionality in which, as they circulate, emotions link social beings to other beings, to social ideas, and to social practices and institutions. Through their flow across cultural contexts, emotions enable social relations.

Emotional Expressionism is divided into two Parts. The three chapters in Part I, "Outlining the Field," provide conceptual groundwork, beginning with the notion of socioemotionality which is advanced in Chapter One. In my proposed formulation, emotions take shape as sociocultural activities through three avenues that, together, comprise *socioemotionality*. First, emotions encompass sociality in that they are the products of relational communicative practices. Emotional expressions function as always-present relays operating within sociocultural spectrums, networking social beings to each other in a vast array of potential configurations that are constantly being felt, performed, or exchanged. As relay systems, emotions involve the effects we have on others, resulting from our exertions in countless, diverse social situations. Emotions also leave impressions upon us, as we become 'touched' or affected by the others we encounter in the social environments we inhabit.

Second, emotions are cultural in that they are caught up in processes of meaning making. Emotions alight upon the figures, objects, and events that surround us, charging – in the sense of energizing – them with specific felt affiliations. Social entities serve as repositories for our feelings, whether for long-term periods or relatively fleeting moments. Emotions come into existence and

are made available to us as expressions operating "in the realm of cultural meanings" (Gould 2010, 27). Felt values attach to the objects and events we encounter, determining whether and in what ways we engage with them. In this manner, emotionality directs what we attend to, engage with, or care about in the worlds we occupy. Interacting with other social factors (political, economic, ideological), emotions play out through complex cultural scenarios that generate felt meanings or meaningful feelings.

Third, emotions structure social life when they exist as widely felt or commonly shared public phenomena. In this sense, socioemotionality works to "secure collectives" (Ahmed 2009, 225), enabling social groups to recognize and express communally held or shifting emotional sensibilities. Such public sentiments delineate the broader emotional relations of a particular time and place, its structures of feeling (R. Williams 1975). Publicly shared or excluded emotions develop historically, in the service of complex social purposes that come to designate the tenor of a populace. They also function as a ground of conflict, contradiction, and contestation as communities continually establish, work to maintain, or alter who they 'are.' Public sentiments organize and help make sense of collective ethics, values, and practices, self-reflexively explaining to groups why they behave and believe as they do. Emotions facilitate the solidification of certain publics as self-recognized collectives while, simultaneously, creating differentiation from other publics by means of distinct ways of feeling (Rosaldo 2009).

Chapter One, "Socioemotionality and Popular Mediated Narrativity,"
details the three facets of socioemotionality described above by means of several
influential contemporary theories. Socioemotionality's relational and
communicative aspects are outlined through notions of performativity. Emotions
are performative in that they do things in the world, creating, maintaining, or
altering social relations, from the immediately interpersonal to the widely
institutional and ideological. As one of the most dynamic of social processes,
emotions instigate outcomes and transform attachments. Whether as
performative utterances or performative actions, such as gestures or behaviors,
emotional forces generate social effects.

Next, the idea that socioemotionality is meaningful, conveying felt values,
begins by looking at contemporary affect theory's characterization of emotion as
inundated with socioculturally informed experience. Then, turning to Sara
Ahmed's work, emotions are understood to circulate throughout the social
formation, etching impressions and forging connections as they move about
(2004). Emotions do so by sticking to objects, people, events, and ideas,
saturating what they attach to with specific associations and emotional values.
Finally, socioemotionality's incorporation of public sentiments is addressed via
the notion of a cultural public sphere that, in the modern era, is often mass
mediated. Providing public arenas for the recognition and expression of shared
sensibilities, popular dramatic narratives establish one type of mediated forum
around which imagined cultures may gather. Imagined communities, in Benedict
Anderson's sense of relationship among physically dispersed, unknown others,

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can be secured instead through emotional affiliations (Anderson 1991). In order

to demonstrate its conceptual points, Chapter One reworks a single passage

from *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), between spouses Walter and Skyler White, to

illustrate how the sequence might be interpreted when viewed through the lens of

each of the three subcategories (relationality, meaning-making, public

sentiments) of socioemotionality.

Chapter Two introduces the other two terms in *Emotional Expressionism's*

subtitle: television seriality and the melodramatic mode. My arguments for the

plurality of functions performed by emotions in mediated storytelling, as they

pertain to socioemotional relations, are developed through the exemplifying

dynamics of recent Anglo-American television serialization in the reception

context of the United States. As noted, this study understands mediated fictional

narratives, particularly in popular or vernacular modes of storytelling, as securing

community through felt commonality. Film and television programming provide

public spaces where forms of socioemotionality can be imaginatively

experienced, taking into account their implications, repercussions, and

constraints as well as their horizons of productive power and potential. Screen

storytelling serves as a ground upon which collectives rehearse the emotions

accessible to them, the ways they may or cannot be experienced, expressed,

and enacted, and with which affiliated meanings, based on explicitly specified

sociocultural sites and circumstances. Simultaneously material and virtual, such

communicative fora provide spaces where members of collectives meet to

experiment with and act out socioemotional alternatives by means of complex

aesthetic processes that always remain politically and ideologically infused.

American television currently is enjoying another 'golden age,' this one

largely built around serialized dramas (Newman and Levine 2012, 36).

Television content in the US, across transmedial delivery modes, has taken over

from film as the more daring and innovative form of storytelling in the assessment

of many critics, scholars, and practitioners. Now widely recognized as a

significant cultural mode of expression, recent television serialization occurs

across a striking range of genres. Examples by (non-exhaustive) generic

grouping of wholly or significantly serialized, twenty-first-century, American

dramas are featured in Table One.

Police/Detective Shows	*The Wire* (2002-08) *The Following* (2013-2015) *The Bridge* (2013-2014) *Blindspot* (2015-2020) *True Detective* (2014-present)
Crime Stories	*The Sopranos* (1999-2007) *Dexter* (2006-2013) *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) *Ray Donovan* (2013-2020) *Ozark* (2017-2022) *Good Girls* (2018-2021
Prison Narratives	*Oz* (1997-2003) *Prison Break* (2005-2017) *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-2019) *Mayor of Kingstown* (2021-present)
Legal Series	*Damages* (2007-2012) *The Good Wife* (2009-2016) *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020) *Better Call Saul* (2015-2022) *Billions* (2016-2023
Historical/Period Dramas	*Mad Men* (2007-2015) *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014) *The Knick* (2014-2015) *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017-2023) *Bridgerton* (2021-present)

Political Thrillers	*24* (2001-2010) *Homeland* (2011-2020) *Scandal* (2012-2018) *House of Cards* (2013-2018) *The Americans* (2013-2018) *Designated Survivor* (2016-2019)
Family-centered Dramas	*Big Love* (2006-2011) *Jane the Virgin* (2014-2019) *The Affair* (2014-2019) *Empire* (2015-2020) *This Is Us* (2016-2022) *Succession* (2018-2023)
Science Fiction	*Lost* (2004-2010) *Orphan Black* (2013-2019) *Mr. Robot* (2015-2019) *Stranger Things* (2016-2024) *Westworld* (2016-2022) *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present) *Severance* (2022-present) *The Last of Us* (2023-present)
Fantasy	*Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) *The Witcher* (2019-present) *House of the Dragon* (2002-present) *The Rings of Power* (2022-present)
Horror	*True Blood* (2008-2014) *The Walking Dead* (2010-2022) *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-2023) *Yellowjackets* (2021-present)
Westerns	*Deadwood* (2004-2006) *Justified* (2010-2015) *Yellowstone* (2018-2023) *The English* (2022)
Superheroes	*Arrow* (2012-2020) *The Flash* (2014-2023) *Supergirl* (2015-2021) *Jessica Jones* (2015-2019) *Luke Cage* (2016-2018) *Black Lightening* (2017-2021) *The Boys* (2019-present)

Table 1 – Serialized Television Dramas by Genre

A notable measure of television's aesthetic and cultural arrival was exemplified well over a decade ago by the March 21, 2010 *New York Times Magazine* cover story featuring David Simon, creator of *The Wire* (2002-2006), *Treme* (2010-2013), and *The Deuce* (2017-2019), under the caption: "The HBO Auteur" (Mason 2010). Such press coverage signals that, in the twenty-first

century, high art and television have become compatible terms. Yet, current prominent models for twenty-first century television, such as complex narratives (Mittell 2015), do not adequately explain the extensive advent of serialized programming. Modern serialization developed historically with the rise of mass media, first with serialized novels in nineteenth century newspapers (Charles Dickens, Eugène Sue). Yet, the current wave of dramatic TV seriality has not been sufficiently contextualized within those historical developments (see L. Williams 2014 for an exception).

In some accounts, contemporary TV seriality seems to emerge as a largely unique, self-constituting occurrence around the time of *Twin Peaks (*1990-91). For instance, *New York* magazine characterizes *Twin Peaks* as "the great-granddaddy of television-as-art," overlooking the serial history that, in part, made it seem novel (Seitz 2018, 66; also Dunleavy 2018, 8-9). More frequently, the recent wave of serials is dated, in journalistic and academic venues, with the origin of *The Sopranos* in 1999 (O'Sullivan 2013, 65). In January 2019 *The New York Times* hailed "The 20 Best Television Dramas since the Arrival of *The Sopranos"* (Poniewozik, Lyons, and Hale 2019, AR1).[1] Under the article headline, "First, There Was *the Sopranos,"* James Poniewozik explains:

> It may be that no TV show does anything entirely new….
> But *The Sopranos* was as clear a marker of the beginning
> of an era (even as I hate the term 'Golden Age') as anything
> in TV….[From January 1999] TV series, we saw, could rely
> on audiences to pay close attention to a long-running story.
> They could have high visual and narrative ambitions. They
> could resist quick answers and tidy moral conclusions.
> (Ibid. AR14)

While Poniewozik cites seriality as an aspect of the new television drama, in the shape of the "long-running story," what is it about serials that apparently enable narrative ambition and a complicated morality? Do previous or alternative forms of popular seriality (comic books, early film serials, radio, soap operas) lack such ambition or moral outlook? How might we account for the recent emergence of serialization as an important development in narrative televisual content, and how does it function differently from episodic series? Given the extensive trans-genre makeup of contemporary serials, as illustrated in Table 1, what elements unite them as a correlated form of storytelling?

Indeed, in contrast to recent laudatory acceptance of television serialization, seriality often has been denigrated as a narrative form, both historically (nineteenth-century serialized fiction) and more contemporarily (soap operas). Viewed as popular entertainment appealing only to mass publics, serials were regarded as geared towards the lowest common denominator of various audiences, such as women and/or working classes. An additional question posed is how might we then account for seriality's emergence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as a form of quality or complex programming, in particular as the enabling format for television auteurism? Such issues can be productively addressed by turning to important scholarship on melodrama as narrative modality (Brooks 1995; Gledhill and Williams 2018). *Emotional Expressionism* contends that current dramatic TV serials belong predominantly to the category of melodrama in its broader, modal sense.

Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams describe the melodramatic mode as a "genre-generating machine" (2018, 5). In their conceptualization, melodrama is an historical and contemporary transmedial form of narrativity that, amongst other characteristics, embraces the capacity to continually create new genres while adhering to certain melodramatic principles. Their perspective helps account for the flourishing across genres that we find in contemporary television seriality. Mass-mediated seriality has long been associated with melodrama, from nineteenth century serialized fiction through early film to radio and television (Hayward 2009; Singer 2001; L. Williams 2018a). Thus, melodrama offers a frame for the study of seriality, providing it with an historical and aesthetic genealogy.

Melodrama's history occurs as expansive movements across media (theatre, literature, film, radio, television), unfolding as a plurality of trajectories over the course of its more than two-hundred-year existence. One of melodrama's most notable features is its adaptability, as it continually changes in order to remain culturally comprehensible and relevant. The mode reinvents past and ongoing formulas, as well as inventing new ones, all of which we are once again witnessing in the multiple generic configurations of recent dramatic television seriality.

The socioemotional functions of narrativity by no means belong solely to the melodramatic mode, or to seriality, for that matter. However, melodrama, and the significant scholarly work undertaken on it, helps elucidate the centrality of emotions to cultural storytelling. In turn, seriality's long-form narratives,

featuring ensemble characters and branching storylines, provide a rich imaginative field for the exploration of emotions in narrativity. Additionally, TV serials are among the most up-to-date cultural manifestations of the melodramatic mode, allowing *Emotional Expressionism* to examine how melodrama continues to perform in the immediate American present. Thus, "The Melodrama of Television Serialization" provides an overview of melodrama as narrative modality, traces the history of popular seriality, and introduces seriality's current televisual developments. Chapter Two then turns to the example of *The Wire* (2002-2008) to track how that serial's embeddedness in melodramatic practices enables its striking critique of the institutional and systemic aspects of social injustices.

Part I culminates in the chapter, "Emotional Expressionisms." The derivation of *expression* involves the idea of squeezing or pressing in order to arrive at an expulsion. Chapter Three proposes three categories of expressionism that function to expel emotions: aesthetic, melodramatic, and socioemotional. In aesthetic realms, the term *expressionism* traditionally has been reserved for those instances in which emotionality takes up the most prominent place in any art form. Whether thought to be embodied by the artist/producer, embedded in the work itself, or activated in the processes of reader, viewer, or auditor responses, expressionist movements have occurred across the arts. However, emotional expression can only be operationalized through the formal elements available for each medium. Considering the examples of painting, music, and screen media, "Emotional Expressionisms"

explores how medial qualities create or constrain the development of emotionally immersive visual, sonic, or narrative worlds, towards the goal of delivering experiential, deeply felt responses to aesthetic works on the part of their audiences. Consequently, *aesthetic expressionism* concerns ways emotional experiences meet and merge with aesthetically applied pressures.

Melodrama tallies as expressionist due to its strong embrace of the sphere of feelings, the mode having regularly been assessed as a "language of emotion" (C. Williams 2008, 50). However, as an outcome of its close affinity with emotionality, melodrama frequently has been typified as a mode of 'excess.' In contrast, a more productive approach would be to appreciate it as a modality grounded in emotional expressionism. Historical melodrama has been associated with extroverted forms of gestures, dialogue, and action that are regarded as outmoded exaggerations by today's standards, although they were not to audiences of their time. Yet, followers of *contemporary* melodramatic TV serials receive them as forays in expressiveness but not excessiveness. That is, they take their viewing enjoyment 'seriously' (at face value rather than as parody, for instance) while, at the same time, responding to their chosen shows because they are emotionally charged.

Melodrama exists as a form of expressionism in another sense as well. From its outset around 1800 and into the twentieth century, melodrama was perceived as devoid of psychology, so that its "characters have no interior depth, there is no psychological conflict" (Brooks 1995, 35). This is unsurprising given that emotionally internalized characters are the hallmarks of psychological

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realism, an aesthetic modality that came into existence subsequently, with the development of the psychological subject in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, the situatedness of melodrama's emotionally saturated worlds, its existence as a language of feeling, must be historically accounted for outside the domain of privatized, introspective experience. Instead, melodrama's intensity of feeling occurred, not within characters, "but *between* them and external forces," powerful forces that exert control over the lives of its depicted individuals (Gledhill 1991, 210). Most commonly, melodrama portrayed culturally embedded characters operating at the mercy of or struggling against forceful social powers, institutions, and practices. The mode contextualized, and continues to contextualize, characters and situations as the effects of social conflict, rendering those conflicts potent and moving through the emotional stakes facing both players and audiences. Melodrama, then, is 'worldly,' looking outward in its efforts to portray something about the social circumstances in which we live. Although now incorporating important aspects of psychological characterization, contemporary *melodramatic expressionism* continues to implement narrative encounters featuring sociocultural worlds abundant in strains and pressures.

For its part, socioemotional expressionism entails the understanding that aesthetic forms circulate as socially generated apprehensions of felt experiences that are shared communally by some group or groups of people. For aesthetic events to function as cultural activities they need to precipitate some measure of common resonance between producers and receivers as well as among

recipients. Those resonances include felt responses to aesthetic experiences based on collectively accrued emotional meanings, values, and competencies. Additionally, socioemotional expressionism references how aesthetic endeavors place social, moral, and political conditions under pressure in order to engender emotional expulsions. Narratives access planes beyond the aesthetic in their aspiration to convey something about felt lived experience as it occurs within the framework of specific sociocultural situations.

All narrative modalities (tragedy, comedy, psychological realism, high modernism) engage in socioemotional expressionism, each extending their own contoured postures that illuminate how the conditions of existence ought to be experienced and enacted as felt relations. Melodrama's particular version took form as "moral sentiments," in which moral values are depicted as emotional conduct and emotionality as ethical realization (Brooks 1995, 42). Melodrama's social concerns form the wellspring for its visions of morality, corresponding to the mode's preoccupation with matters of justice and injustice. Melodrama's aesthetic drive pushes towards the recognition of social harms that demand response as emotional impulses. Pain and deprivation as the result of forms of injustice continue to engage the melodramatic imagination as its distinct rendering of *socioemotional expressionism.* Lastly, Chapter Three turns to the British program, *Happy Valley* (2014-2023), to illustrate ways aesthetic, melodramatic, and socioemotional expressionisms may be activated in contemporary serials.

Part II, "About Emotions," implements the conceptual groundwork established in Part I, applying its formulations to the analysis of specific storytelling practices found in contemporary dramatic television seriality. The four chapters of Part II explore how aesthetic, melodramatic, and socioemotional expressionisms play out across a number of serial storyworlds. Each chapter is built around a particular aesthetic strategy that is examined in light of the plural emotions it mobilizes, the intricate ways they are activated, the complex purposes to which they are put, and the frequently unexpected end points reached. The four aesthetic criteria are comprised of characterization, story structure, genre, and content or subject matter. In the process of these accounts, every chapter evokes a variety of emotions that emerge as the effects of the sociocultural circumstances encountered, as summarized for each chapter in what follows.

It has been suggested that the very intricacy and complexity of mediated characters mitigates against the development of efficiently comprehensive systems for their analysis (Heidbrink 2010, 67). Chapter Four, "Characterizing Emotions," considers two formulations for characterological analysis: a taxonomic approach and cognitive identification theories, from the specific perspective of how they account for and describe emotionality. Offering an alternative, the chapter contends that the ensemble structure and expanded storytelling associated with serialization allows for more nuanced characterological development and change over time. Additionally, serialization

prompts character proliferation and, therefore, accumulatively complex networks of relations with other characters. "Characterizing Emotions" considers multi-protagonist narratives as a form of aesthetic expressionism in which ensemble characterization facilitates a plurality of "value-based emotional positions" (Tröhler 2010, 464). Characters take up a wide range of emotional positions toward their similar circumstances, an array of positions that then guide their ensuing behaviors and actions.

To exemplify these arguments, I turn to the serial, *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020), focusing on a group of people who become enmeshed in the commitment and cover up of a series of murders. While the characters share certain overlapping feelings, like shock, fear, and disgust, members of the ensemble also adopt their own distinct emotional dispositions in response to the dire situations confronting the core group. An emotionally heterogeneous ensemble of protagonists enables the creation of a polyphonic narrative world, conjuring up a multiplicity of perspectives and, therefore, a circumstantial context replete with social, moral, and emotional uncertainties. The serial's ensemble structure directs attention toward group dynamics activated in a shared social world, its inhabitants making up an often-uneasy community by virtue of the legal, moral, and emotional guilt that binds them together.

Although backstories are provided for many of the characters in *How to*, narrative progression depends more crucially on their emotional, over psychological, motivations. An "origin story" is made available (Lotz 2013, 28), that is, biographical background offers psychological explanation for the

characters' behaviors, in keeping with the tenets of psychological realism.

However, instead of origin stories as ultimate, revelatory mechanism, the series

focuses most intensely on characters' emotional behaviors and strategic

decisions in the story's immediate present. The feelings and actions of individual

members are explored in terms of their implications for group survival. The

ensemble exists as a recognizable, bounded socioemotional community, in which

the fate of the collective is of greater concern than any single individual. In

keeping with melodramatic expressionism, characters are placed under continual

pressure in order to track how they perform, for better or worse, as social

constituents.

Chapter Five, "Emotion as Structuring Device," moves beyond

characterization to examine how emotions structure narratives more globally.

Matthew Buckley argues that melodrama's core structure is based on movement

from emotion to emotion, swinging among opposing or contrasting emotional

effects (2009). Similarly, Russian formalist Sergei Balukhatyi, writing in 1927,

describes melodrama as an expressionist mode whose goal is to convey "the

greatest possible intensity of feeling," by rarely maintaining "a single dramatic

tone," thus keeping audience's emotions in constant tension (Balukhatyi ctd. in

Gerould 1991, 121, 123). Chapter Five borrows Buckley's and Balukhatyi's

descriptions of melodrama's core structure, careening from emotion to contrary

emotion, applying their perspectives to the organizational pattern of

contemporary TV seriality.

To do so, Chapter Five reflects on scholarly work undertaken on the melodramatic genre of soap opera, valuable analyses that provide insight into the purposes and devices underpinning seriality's acute emotional transitions and juxtapositions. Comparing appraisals of the structure of dramatic daytime serials by Jennifer Hayward (2009), Dorothy Hobson (2008), Louise Spence (2005), and Robyn Warhol (2003), the chapter tracks the ways emotionality contours the narrative shape of serialization. Their insights include the extensive diversity of emotions implemented to elicit melodramatic seriality's contrastive effects, as well as the careful choreography that modulates emotional intensities, enabling the required recurrence of dramatic high points. Further observations explore serial melodrama's emphasis on a reflective aftermath in the wake of dramatic climaxes, a reckoning focused not only on what happened but, as importantly, on the felt impact and consequences of transpired events. Seriality's resolutions also occur in a recurrent manner, providing the regular, temporary satisfaction of answers revealed. The work on daytime serials underscores what recent television analysis has failed to take into account by overlooking seriality's long and complex history and, more specifically, soap opera's influence as a progenitor of contemporary serialization.

"Emotion as Structuring Device" looks to the first season of *Killing Eve* (2018-2022) as its principal example. *Killing Eve's* compelling quirkiness can be attributed, in good measure, to its frequent and sharp fluctuations in emotional disposition. A tale of paradoxes on a number of levels, *Killing Eve* juxtaposes pronounced emotional contrasts to create a structure lodged in disequilibrium,

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providing viewers with an experience that is striking in its narrative and emotional disorientations. Yet those disorientations function purposefully towards the serial's meditation on leading lives both exciting and mundane, in this exemplification of melodrama's aesthetic expressionist structural and emotional inclinations.

While Chapters Four and Five attend to emotional variability and fluctuation in storytelling, Chapter Six, "Genre and Tone," considers how serials arrive at their overarching emotional sensibilities, especially in relation to their generic affiliations. Chapter Six is concerned with tone in the sense of a work's mood or emotional atmosphere (Pye 2007, 7). From this perspective, tone accrues as the accumulated effects of all aesthetic elements, offering a potential cohesion to disparate narrative, formal, and thematic elements, as they are framed by the generic or modal expectations in which a specific work is located.

Commonly, genre is conceptualized as a balancing act between formulaic repetition and innovative variation. Most invocations of tone are directed towards the reiterative that provides genre consistency so that, "some genres are defined by the distinctive emotional effect they aim for: amusement in comedy, tension in suspense films" (Bordwell and Thompson 2008, 109). Here, tone holds specific genres together, rendering them coherently unified through tonal prevalence, whether as limiting constraints or enabling parameters. However, rather than only a unifying property, tone also works to account for the remarkable proliferation of distinctive instances produced *within* genres. In considering tone's nuanced uses towards variation, Chapter Six scrutinizes the genre of

period dramas, turning to the examples of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (2017-2023) and *Mad Men* (2007-2015)*,* with some attention to *The Queen's Gambit* (2020).

While all three period dramas are set in an overlapping era, each tracking cultural changes in American society from the 1950s to the 1960s, "Genre and Tone" investigates how tonal elements are put into play towards the creation of aesthetically and socioemotionally differing narrative worlds. Drawing on the emotional system of nostalgia, the chapter argues that *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* and *Mad Men* deliver sharply contrasting emotional moods, despite commonality of period and genre, due to their distinct narrative purposes as those are informed by gendered perspectives. Although always preoccupied with a past, nostalgia is not a single emotion but a compendium of feelings that can be engaged or disregarded in varying combinations. Accordingly, *Mad Men* crafts a largely somber tone, lodged in loss and longing, for the world it depicts. In contrast, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* remains upbeat in its version of the same era's struggles, an optimism *The Queen's Gambit* shares. The two female-led serials, encountering not a past that is missed but one altogether missing, draw their upbeat tonality as ventures in corrective gender historicism.

The final chapter's specific aesthetic aspect explores the treatment of emotion as content or subject matter in TV seriality. However, in doing so, Chapter Seven delves primarily into models of socioemotional expressionism. Focusing on screen media viewership, "Collective Emotions and Audiences" assesses how audiences come together as temporary socioemotional

communities. More specifically, the chapter addresses audiences as imagined cultures, the routine viewing situation for mass-mediated aesthetic events. Chapter Seven recognizes mediated storyworlds as public venues where socially aligned audiences gather, building a "collective cultural archive" (Landsberg 2004, 122) of emotions. Collective emotions develop as the felt activities of socioemotional communities, who depend on complex, strategic, and negotiated emotional practices in order to persist as social entities.

The specific emotion treated as subject matter in the chapter is anger, exemplified by the Australian television serial, *Wanted* (2016-2018). However, the three-season program does not attempt to tackle the Western conceptualization of 'anger' in its enormity. Instead, it devotes attention to a manifestation I label gendered anger because it is launched in response to gendered social inequities. *Wanted* recounts the story of Lola and Chelsea, two women wrongly accused of murder and forced to go on the run together. Pursued by both police and criminals, their anger and the actions it provokes or enables them to take are not depicted as fault lines belonging to their individual personalities. Instead, their anger exists as an accurate interpretation of the malign social world that surrounds them, and proves absolutely essential to their survival. *Wanted* was widely perceived in Australia as an intentional evocation of the American film, *Thelma and Louise* (1991)*.* At the time of its release, *Thelma and Louise* was praised for its adeptness at tapping into feelings of anger around gendered forms of violence. This is the historical terrain its television descendant

draws upon and augments from its cinematic precursor, reinforcing the mediated cultural archive of gendered anger as collective emotion.

Ultimately, "Collective Emotions and Audiences" assesses gendered anger in correlation with concepts of moral or political anger. Instead of being perceived as a dangerous threat posed by individuals, forms of moral or political anger that affect whole groups of people are more likely to be acknowledged, precisely because they are framed as responses to social injustices and, as such, justifiable. In melodrama's terms, they function as moral sentiments in the quest for a better justice. As socioemotional expressions, they emphasize emotionality's crucial political properties, authorizing or delimiting the range of emotions we could and should feel in response to sociopolitical injustices.

This study makes frequent use of two terms, *narrative* and *aesthetics*, my applications of which I outline here*.* In film and television studies, the notion of *narrative* elements customarily has been employed to discriminate from *formal* aspects. For screen media, formal elements include shots, camera movement, editing, and so on. In contrast, "the defining components of narrativity" encompass character, plot, setting, story structure, and themes (Ryan and Thon 2014, 3). When necessary, I use the term *narrative elements* as a means of distinguishing certain attributes from formal components.

But a quite different sense of narrative occurs in the notion of *narrative worlds.* The broadest, most inclusive conceptualization of narrativity, I employ narrative worlds interchangeably with storyworlds. A storyworld can be defined

as the entirety of "the world evoked implicitly as well as explicitly" by any means in a given narrative (Herman 2009, 72). Every facet of filmic or televisual production works toward the creation of a singular storyworld or narrative world. Consider, as an example, the recurring wide shots adopted in *The English* (2022) to depict vast, open landscapes, a long-standing cinematographic practice for American westerns. While setting is usually regarded as a narrative element and camerawork a formal attribute, the point is that landscape and wide shot combine here in an utterly entwined, inseparable manner to create the narrative world *as experienced by viewers*. Similarly, the CGI effects that enable Tatiana Maslany in *Orphan Black* (2013-2017) to appear as multiple characters, with up to five versions of her on screen at a time, may be classified as formal or technical effects but they remain fundamental to building a narrative impact on audiences. Following this understanding, *narrativity* or *narrative worlds* refer to the most expansive, inclusive sense of storytelling operations.

For its part, *aesthetics* can also be applied in a narrow sense to refer to the formal elements of a medium, although this is a usage I avoid. Instead, I employ *aesthetics* rather than *art* to signal creative activities grounded in culturally formulated techniques and procedures. In this sense, television is an aesthetic practice, whether one considers it art or something 'lesser,' such as entertainment, a medium for the masses, or a form of popular culture. Similarly, television productions remain aesthetic exercises whether one regards specific serials as successful or failed applications of the medium.

A more globally encompassing understanding of aesthetics avoids the

difficulty of determining which serials qualify as art or the problems of a categorization like 'quality TV.' For instance, while "filmmaking is an art practice, not all films are works of art," leaving intact the dilemma of which works qualify as 'art,' and based on what criteria (Nannicelli 2013, 226). Therefore, we can recognize contemporary, dramatic TV serials as aesthetic experiences without questioning if a specific program is or isn't art and whether it serves as an example of 'good' or 'bad' art. Aesthetics, then, marks a larger entity that encompasses both art and narrativity, although not all aesthetic practices take shape as narratives. In addition, narrativity occurs across diverse media – literature, film, television, theatre, comic books, radio – each of which, in turn, formulates its own, distinctive aesthetic medium.

Literary historian Richard Chamberlain observes that "emotions of delight and enjoyment must surely, on occasion, motivate" scholarly work (2015, 154). Certainly, a good deal of delight and enjoyment, along with sporadic irritation, boredom, or frustration, have informed my perspectives on the television serials included in *Emotional Expressionism.* But it is worth emphasizing that the assessments I offer are never intended to be comprehensive interpretations of the serial under discussion. Quite the contrary, I have selected excerpts from my case studies with the explicit intention of illustrating only the specific point on emotionality under investigation at that moment. Of course, my selections reflect personal preferences, shows that have resonated for me in some manner. However, my objective has been to put forward an ample range of examples to stress that what I am saying about emotionality, seriality, and melodrama is not

limited to a few exceptions but, quite the contrary, widely applicable across the televisual landscape and beyond. My hope is that this study generates new analytical and interpretative approaches towards the prolific operations of emotionality in narrative aesthetics.

Speaking of certain scientific approaches to emotionality, Ruth Leys maintains that as soon as one abandons the notion of a few basic, hard- wired emotions experienced and expressed in a universal manner by all human beings, "one finds oneself forced to provide thick descriptions of life experiences of the kind that are familiar to anthropologists and indeed novelists but are widely held to be inimical to science" (2009, 77). Leys' point is that once we attempt to move beyond reductive conceptualizations of emotions, they embroil us in enormous complexities and uncertainties. Indeed, efforts to take hold of emotions in the ways, both omnipresent and infinitesimal, that they mobilize life experiences can feel hopelessly daunting, messy, and unwieldly. But the challenge of thick descriptions, so vital to capturing the heterogeneity and reach of emotional experience, can be found in televisual, narrative, and aesthetic worlds seeking to grasp the wonders of felt life.

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[1] The 20 best dramas cited by *The New York Times*, arranged chronologically from start date, are: *The West Wing* (1999-2006), *The Shield* (2002-2008), *The Wire* (2002-2008), *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009), *Deadwood* (2004-2006), *Lost* (2004-2010), *Veronica Mars* (2004-2006; 2019), *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-present), *Friday Night Lights* (2006-2011), *Mad Men* (2007-2015), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), *The Good Wife* (2009-2016), *Adventure Time* (2020-2018), *Enlightened* (2011-2013), *The Americans* (2013-2018), *Rectify* (2013-2016), *The Leftovers* (2014-2017), *Transparent* (2014-2019), *Jane the Virgin* (2014-2019), and *Atlanta* (2016-2022) (Poniewozik, Lyons, and Hale, 2019, 14-15).