

Introduction: Italy and the emotions

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Characterised as the country of gestural expressiveness and animated verbal exchanges, of Latin lovers and of operatic excess, Italy has long been seen as a domain of emotional intensity. However, this association between Italy and the emotions has tended to remain a matter for popular imagination and stereotypical representations, and it is only recently that the question of emotions has started to become a focus for scholarly investigation. This special issue has its origins in the Association for the Study of Modern Italy's 2009 annual conference, *Italy and the Emotions: Perspectives from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, organised by the editors. The conference offered the first opportunity to bring together scholars of Italy working in a wide range of disciplines in order to hear from the pioneers of such research and to exchange ideas on the new insights and new lines of research being opened up by a focus on emotions. There is considerable interest in this emerging field of study in Italy, as the response to the conference demonstrated, but other than the widely known work of scholars such as Alberto Mario Banti, Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli (discussed briefly below), little else has been published so far. With this issue we hope both to showcase some of the work that is being done, and to provide an impetus for further research.¹

While emotions have been an obvious subject for study in the disciplines of literary criticism, psychology and neuroscience, their place in historical investigation has, in the past, had a much lower profile. This is not only because of the tendency to oppose emotion to reason, relegating affect to the private, the trivial and the feminine, but also because of the perception of emotions as historically intangible and unquantifiable. As a result, and despite being integral to all human behaviour, emotions have been regarded as some kind of adjunct, a separate dimension and, as was the case for private lives and for women, they have effectively been left out of historical analysis. Attitudes have changed considerably in this respect, however, and although a focus on emotions remains controversial in some quarters, there is a growing body of work that demonstrates its potential both to add new perspectives to established areas of research and to open up new ones.

Interest in the history of emotions (and emotions in history) can be traced back to the first half of the twentieth century, to the work of pioneers such as Johan Huizinga (1919),

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Norbert Elias (1939) and Lucien Febvre (1941), who were important in suggesting that emotions were a valid subject for historical analysis. Febvre and the *Annales* school in particular, by insisting on the historical relevance of private and daily life, and by focusing on *mentalités*, of which emotions are a crucial component, did a great deal to lay foundations for new directions in research on the history of emotions.² The more recent upsurge in interest – what has been described as the ‘affective turn’ in history – is on the one hand a natural extension of the now broad interest in daily habits and personal exchanges, in gender history, and in the relationship between language and culture, and on the other a response to the considerable body of research into the emotions that has appeared in recent times in disciplines such as psychology, anthropology and the neurosciences.³ The approaches to emotions in history are varied, but, as Susan Matt has put it, there are some fundamental assumptions:

Historians of the emotions share the conviction that feelings are never strictly biological or chemical occurrences; neither are they wholly created by language and society. Instead, feelings are something in between. They have a neurological basis but are shaped, repressed, expressed differently from place to place. (Matt 2011, 118)

Thus not only do emotions inform all human behaviour, but the ways we experience and express them are historically conditioned and change over time and across cultures.

In the past few decades, the work of three English-language historians in particular has been important in encouraging, and showing the possibilities of, emotion research, and indeed their influence can be seen in the articles that appear in this issue. Peter Stearns began his work into the emotional history of the United States in the mid-1980s, with an article in which he and Carol Stearns called for historians to develop an analytical approach to emotions and to their norms and variations. The article coined the term ‘emotionology’ in an attempt to formulate an approach to the rules and standards that govern emotional life (Stearns and Stearns 1985). Subsequently, Peter Stearns produced influential histories of anger (Stearns and Stearns 1986) and jealousy (Stearns 1989) and of the American emotional ‘style’ (Stearns 1994). William Reddy, on the other hand, has focused on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France and the relationship between emotions and politics. Engaging closely with research in anthropology, cognitive psychology and linguistics (specifically J.L. Austin’s Speech Act Theory), Reddy explores the relationship between language and emotions and the way that emotions change over time and permeate historical events. He proposes a number of notions that have since proved very stimulating to other scholars. These include the term ‘emotives’, to describe the speech act of expressing emotion, a third category that Reddy suggests adding to Austin’s constative and performative speech acts. Drawing on psychological theories of thought activation and translation, he characterises this emotional speech act as one which ‘both describes (like constative utterances) and changes (like performatives) the world, because emotional expression has an exploratory and a self-altering effect on the activated thought material of emotion’ (Reddy 2001, 128).

Particularly influential has been Reddy’s theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between politics and emotions, which centres on his idea of ‘emotional regimes’ and the closely related notions of ‘emotional liberty’, ‘emotional suffering’ and ‘emotional refuges’. He describes an emotional regime as the ‘set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime’ (Reddy 2001, 129). The process of learning the

norms of a prevailing emotional regime, Reddy indicates, 'generally involves suffering under a certain discipline' (Plamper 2010, 241), while emotional refuges are those spaces – 'a relationship, ritual, or organization' – which provide 'safe release from prevailing emotional norms and relaxation of emotional effort' (Reddy 2001, 129). The extent of any emotional liberty varies at different times under different regimes and, as Jan Plamper points out, critical to Reddy's theory is the possibility of being able to make value judgements about various emotional regimes, with the ideal emotional regime being the one that offers the greatest degree of emotional liberty (Plamper 2010, 244).

A further notion that has also proved to be very influential, proposed by the medievalist Barbara Rosenwein, is the idea of 'emotional communities'. Rosenwein defines them as being:

...precisely the same as social communities – families, neighborhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships – but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate and deplore. (Rosenwein 2002, 835)

An important aspect of this understanding of emotions is that such communities can coexist and that any one individual might belong to several at once. In a similar way, Reddy has acknowledged that it is appropriate to use the term 'regime' in the plural. Any community is likely to have a number of emotional 'styles', as he puts it; if these 'styles' are enforced then they count as 'regimes' or components of a 'regime' (Plamper 2010, 243).

Within the Italian context, pioneering work has been carried out by Luisa Passerini, Alessandro Portelli and Alberto Mario Banti.⁴ Both Passerini and Portelli, in their ground-breaking approaches to oral history, have highlighted the importance of emotion as a means of understanding the relationship between the individual and society, between subjectivity and history. Portelli's work often emphasises how the specificity of oral histories and the interviewing process permits a more complex understanding of the emotions involved in the making of history and in the relationships between individual and public memories of historical events.⁵ Luisa Passerini's recent work, which builds on interests already evident in her earlier works as a feminist and oral historian, explores the relationship between discourses on love and the idea of Europe, and on the wider connections between identity and emotions.⁶ In his research on nineteenth-century Italy, Banti, on the other hand, has identified the use of emotions as a key interpretive tool for understanding the process by which Italy was unified, arguing that a collection of texts – a 'canone risorgimentale' – inspired mass support for the idea of the nation by exploiting already familiar emotional tropes such as those allied to sanctity, honour and kinship (Banti 2000).

The articles that appear in this issue range chronologically from the Risorgimento to the present day and, typical of much research on emotions, they reflect a number of disciplinary approaches and draw on a wide range of sources. Susanna Ferlito examines a series of letters sent by Cristina di Belgiojoso to her doctor, in order to analyse the relationship between emotions and normative prescriptions regarding female behaviour. The article shows that Belgiojoso's self-diagnosis of hysteria is key to understanding the emotional experience of a woman caught between conformity and transgression. Vanda Wilcox also examines letters, but this time the intensely emotional missives sent by Italian

soldiers during the First World War. This essay focuses in particular on fear, horror and grief and it highlights the way that the experience and expression of emotions shows similarities with the combatants of other nations, but was also shaped by socio-cultural norms to create distinctively Italian characteristics. While the first two essays show how the apparently 'private' correspondence of individuals can reveal emotional tropes and insights into broader experiences, Catherine O'Rawe's article on the film *Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma* draws attention instead to the way that the identification between the emotional and the trivial has meant that a whole genre – the *melodramma* – has been overlooked, in favour of the more 'serious' neorealist films. In her analysis, O'Rawe examines *Avanti a lui*'s appeal to the emotions, particularly through its use of operatic performance, and questions the arbitrary division between the emotional and the authentic.

Rebecca Clifford's article is the first of two that are based on oral history. Drawing on a collection of interviews with former activists and members of the New Left, Clifford analyses the relationship between emotions and gender in her subjects' memories of 1968, showing possible differences between men's and women's stories and the influence exerted by 'meta-narratives' of 1968. Maud Bracke also emphasizes the relationship between gender and emotions in her article on a feminist sexual health clinic near Turin. Bracke argues that the emotional exchanges between middle-class feminist activists and working-class women shaped both groups' political practice and the women's attitudes towards themselves, allowing them to question their life narratives and particularly their notion of liberation. Moving from the 1970s to the 1990s and beyond, the article by Giacomo Lichtner considers the use of child narrators in two Holocaust films. Presenting these historical events from a child's perspective, Lichtner maintains, limits the audience's response to one of pity and prevents a more articulated and critical consideration of memory and adult responsibility. In the last article, Matthew Klugman and Francesco Ricatti examine the emotional ties between football fans and their idols, focusing in particular on Agostino Di Bartolomei and Francesco Totti. The authors use a wide range of media to analyse this relatively unexplored relationship, including the way it has changed over time, and its place within the culture and identity of the city of Rome.

This issue's articles present discrete arguments on a rich variety of subjects, and a number of interconnecting themes emerge that in turn suggest possibilities for further research and wider applications and questions. For example, as suggested above, it is not by chance that the question of emotions has been addressed by historians of gender and the notion that the experience of emotion may be gendered is present in most of the articles. Similarly, the study of oral history is inevitably also the study of subjectivity – of both the interviewer and interviewee – and of communally shared or contested ideas. Thus the conventions (including the linguistic conventions) involved in articulating emotions may help create common understandings, or 'emotional communities', but also an awareness of difference or the pressure to conform. The nature of affective attachments may also change over time, of course, and be subject to different perceptions over time too, through the complex relationship between memory and emotion. Also raised in this special issue is the question of how far emotions can be associated with place: what distinctive forms of emotions exist in the city, or a particular nation, for example? How do emotions vary geographically? While emotions are often associated particularly with the 'private' and can be explored very effectively through 'private' texts such as letters and diaries, at the same time the public expression of emotions raises questions about what emotions

are sanctioned beyond the domestic sphere in any given society, or in what contexts it is permitted to elicit emotions. Thus the study of emotions can lead to the reassessment of the place, functions and hierarchies of emotions in society. Collectively, the editors and authors of this issue hope the approach it embodies may lead to the deeper consideration of genres or forms of expression previously dismissed as excessive or trivial, as well as to new ways of examining familiar aspects of traditional subjects.

Notes

1. In the same spirit, we have edited a further volume, based partly on papers delivered at the 2009 conference. See Morris, Ricatti, and Seymour (2012).
2. According to D. Wickberg (2007), Huizinga's work, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, is a 'foundational text of the history of sensibilities'.
3. For a discussion of the affective turn, see, for example, V. Agnew (2007). For an introduction to the psychology of emotions, see Oatley, Keltner, and Jenkins (2006).
4. For an overview of developments in the field, see Ferente (2009).
5. For a summary of Portelli's reflections on the specificity of oral history and its emotional implications see his highly influential article originally published in 1979 (Portelli 2006).
6. See, for example, Passerini (1999, 2009).

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