



# **Appetite for Discovery**

## ***Sense and Sentiment in the Early Modern World***

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Lucien Febvre’s 1941 call for historians to recover the *histoire des sentiments* is now routinely evoked by scholars in the wake of the recent “emotional turn” in the historical discipline. Historians would regain their “appetite for discovery” (*goût à l’exploration*) once they delved into the deepest recesses of the discipline, where history meets psychology, Febvre predicted.<sup>1</sup> His plea followed the aims of a generation of scholars working in the early twentieth century—Johan Huizinga and Norbert Elias among them—who sought to recapture the affective lives of the past.<sup>2</sup> Yet the history of sense and sentiment perhaps owes its greatest debt to Febvre and his colleagues in the Annales School, who, via the study of *mentalités* and private life, made the study of emotions a serious object of historical inquiry. Some four decades passed before Febvre’s challenge was taken up with any rigor. In the 1980s, the work of Peter and Carol Z. Stearns sought to chart the emotional standards and codes of past societies—something they termed “emotionology.”<sup>3</sup> Since then, over the past three decades the history of emotions has been pioneered by scholars such as Barbara H. Rosenwein and William Reddy in seminal works that introduced us to now classic interpretative frameworks such as “emotional communities” and “emotives.”<sup>4</sup> This burgeoning of interest in the history of emotions has now also found expression in a number of institutional research centers and publication series devoted to the subject.<sup>5</sup>

This special issue offers a collection of articles written in response to this disciplinary shift. These were first presented as papers at a workshop hosted at the European University Institute in March 2013. This conference brought together a number of historians working within the Anglo-American and Italian traditions of scholarship and invited them to explore how their research agendas speak to the histories of feelings and bodily senses. The workshop moved beyond a simple exploration as to how nonspecialists might engage with sensory and emotions history, and actually unveiled myriad ways in



which these approaches compel us to confront and challenge existing historical narratives.

As Susan J. Matt puts it in a recent article on the state of the art in the field of emotions history: “Done well, the history of emotions forces all historians to alter many of their traditional conceptions of the past.”<sup>6</sup> From its inception the history of the *vie affective* has enabled early modernists to nuance conventional histories, beginning with the history of the family and, more recently, via themes such as the histories of the Reformation, the witch craze, and the French Revolution.<sup>7</sup> Now that the history of emotions is gradually moving out of its narrow subfield and becoming integrated into social, political, religious, and cultural histories in this way, this special issue offers a timely intervention gleaned from the perspectives of scholars working on a range of material from early modern Catholic Europe. Using a variety of sources, from devotional poetry to trial and interdiction proceedings, these forays into sense and sentiment encourage the reassessment of a number of traditional interpretations—from the history of spiritual direction, to the “birth” of homosexuality.

The first two contributions to this volume are concerned with emotional states and mental illness. Adriano Prosperi explores legal records pertaining to the nobleman Giovambattista di Bindaccio Ricasoli Baroni in sixteenth-century Florence. The trial was to establish Ricasoli’s mental state in the months preceding his death in order to organize the division of property among his heirs. Through the testimonies of his friend Galileo Galilei, the article recaptures the emotional experiences of Ricasoli, focusing on his deteriorating mental state, melancholic humor, and fear of death. Mariana Labarca analyzes a selection of testimonies discovered in eighteenth-century Tuscan interdiction records relating to old-age mental incapacity. Descriptions of elderly people’s disturbed emotional states by family witnesses are shown to be central to definitions of mental incapacity, which, Labarca argues, provides a window onto the social and cultural setting of emotional standards in early modern Italy. In both Prosperi and Labarca’s articles, emotions are thus central to the shaping of an early modern language of madness.

The second two articles challenge the standard historiographical chronologies on the birth of homosexual and romantic love. Giuseppe Marcocci explores a case of same-sex marriage among a small community of Slavic, Spanish, and Portuguese men in sixteenth-century Rome. The article reveals that ceremonies imitating the Counter-Reformation sacrament of marriage were performed at the Basilica di San Giovanni in 1578, for which eight men were later executed. These rituals offer us a glimpse, Marcocci argues, of an early expression of homosexual affection as this community of men sought to legitimize their forbidden love using a religious rite. While Giuseppe Marcocci’s article compels us to revisit the chronology associated with the nascent of homosexual love, the fourth article in this issue, by Gabriella Zarri, seeks to complicate a historiographical tradition that has found the origins of marital love in the Protestant Reformation, instead relocating it in the

fifteenth century. Her reflections chart evolving conceptions of divine and romantic love across the century, concentrating on the centrality of the sensual to early modern perceptions of love.

The final contribution to this issue traces the expression of a different category of sentiment—the religious emotion—in early modern France. Jennifer Hillman explores a case of “spiritual lovesickness” using a hitherto neglected corpus of love letters, sent by an Italian princess, Anne-Marie Martinozzi, to her husband, Armand de Bourbon, in 1657. These documents reveal a process by which letter writing helped the princess to construct an image of herself as a spiritually lovesick penitent, deprived from the company of her mentor and confidant in the aftermath of a pious conversion she underwent in the early 1650s. This exploration of the princess’s affective life opens up a new approach to the history of spiritual direction, which foregrounds the role played by copenitents.

While the category “emotion” is part of a modern vocabulary that did not exist in the period under discussion here,<sup>8</sup> the articles in this collection use the terms “sentiment” and “emotion” interchangeably to denote the range of feelings or “passions” that could be experienced by early modern actors. Most of the articles offer material more closely related to the history of the emotions than of the senses.<sup>9</sup> Yet the history of sentiment, especially as Febvre envisaged it, is intimately connected to the study of sensory experience.<sup>10</sup> As the recent work of Joanna Burke has shown, the history of emotions is also “fundamentally” a history of the body.<sup>11</sup> The title of this special issue, “Sense and Sentiment in the Early Modern World,” captures the attentiveness that many of the articles in this collection pay to the physiologies associated with different emotional states. The testimonies studied by Mariana Labarca, for instance, reveal how old-age physical infirmities such as deafness were often made synonymous with an unsound mind.

Attending to the complexity of this relationship between bodily experiences and emotions also highlights the way the history of sentiment in the early modern world should not be reduced to discourse. Of course, this selection of articles approaches sense and sentiment as historically contingent and shaped by the contexts in which they were felt, but like most specialists in the field, it rejects the constructionist view that emotions are wholly created by language. Reconciling emotions as *felt* and *articulated* nevertheless remains an ongoing methodological challenge. The articles in this collection approach this problem in different ways, but each shares the premise that to regard subjective emotions as entirely inaccessible to the historian is perhaps to overstate the difference between them and their “collective frames.”<sup>12</sup>

Scholars have noted that the history of emotions field to date is dominated by histories of extreme emotions (fear, anger, hatred) rather than everyday emotions.<sup>13</sup> One further underlying theme in this special issue is the relationship between socially sanctioned and transgressive emotions. The emotional experiences associated with melancholy, spiritual lovesickness,

and mental incapacity were often repressed, for example, while those of homosexual love were seen as transgressive.

The original workshop from which this collection grew was broader in scope, involving contributions from the non-Catholic European world as well as explorations of the history of emotions in India and the Ottoman world. Yet, in editing this volume, our narrower focus on the Catholic European context presented certain advantages of both depth and coherence. The articles are thus available for a comparative reading and build upon each other. Marcocci's exploration of the desire to express homosexual love through the performance of marriage reinforces Zarri's thesis of the emergence of marriage as a locus for romantic love in the period. Prosperi's and Labarca's explorations of the sociogenesis of emotional pathology in early modern Tuscany may be fruitfully read together. Finally, in tying these articles together, Ananya Chakravarti concludes this volume with an afterword reviving the figures of Johan Huizinga and Norbert Elias as intellectual progenitors for many of the themes of this volume. In doing so, she hopes to provide not merely a framework for thinking collectively about the articles offered here, but also to indicate new avenues of research that this special issue points us toward.

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## Notes

1. Lucien Febvre, "La sensibilité et l'histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois?," *Annales d'histoire sociale* 3, nos. 1–2 (1941): 5. Also translated into English as "Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past," in *A New Kind of History from the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, ed. Peter Burke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 12–26.
2. Barbara H. Rosenwein has recently reminded us that Febvre was not the "prophet crying in the wilderness" but was simply following in the footsteps of

- scholars such as Huizinga; "Worrying about Emotions in History," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 823. Febvre had also called for the historical study of emotions in an earlier essay of 1938: "Une vue d'ensemble: Histoire et Psychologie," in *Encyclopédie française*, vol. 8 (Paris, 1938), reprinted in Febvre, *Combats pour l'Histoire* (Paris, Armand Colin, 1953), 207–220.
3. This research was first presented in Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813–836.
  4. Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
  5. Institutional research centers include the Centre for the History of Emotions at Queen Mary, University of London (<http://www.qmul.ac.uk/emotions/>); the Center for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin (<https://www.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/en/research/history-of-emotions/>); and the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, Australia (<http://www.historyofemotions.org.au/>).
  6. Susan J. Matt, "Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out," *Emotion Review* 3, no. 1 (2011): 120.
  7. See the subsection "New Narratives" in Matt, "Current Emotion Research in History," 120. See also "Forum: History of Emotions," *German History* 28, no. 1 (2010): 74–77.
  8. On the evolution of the term "emotion", see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
  9. The history of the senses in the early modern period has also been the subject of recent scholarly interest; see, for example, two excellent studies: Wietse de Boer and Christine Gottler, eds., *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper, eds., *The Sensuous in the Counter Reformation Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
  10. Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. James Lynn (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 11–12.
  11. Joanna Bourke, "Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History," *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (2003): 123.
  12. Daniela Saxer, "Forum: History of Emotions," *German History* 28, no. 1 (2010): 67–80, 73.
  13. Two key works are Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006); Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America's History* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).