The Italian Renaissance continues to hold an important place in historians’ periodization of Western history. Yet Renaissance Italy plays an oddly small role in most histories of emotion. This holds true in two ways: first, in discussions of the history of theories of emotion; and, second, in discussions that touch on the history of felt - or, at rate, expressed - emotions. This situation is, however, beginning to change. In this paper I will briefly talk about theory, spend most of my time on practice, and at the end will suggest how and why it would be good to put the two together when studying emotions in the Italian Renaissance.

Theories of Emotion

Histories of theories of the emotions generally spend little time on the Italian Renaissance. Two recent examples must here stand for all: the new Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion jumps from medieval notions of the passions to Kant, while Dominik Perler’s treatment of theories of the emotions from 1270 to 1670 leaps over the Italian Renaissance as it spans the period from the fourteenth-century English William of Ockham to the sixteenth-century French Michel de Montaigne.1

Yet Renaissance humanists were often keenly interested in the emotions. Petrarch (d. 1374), for example, treated numerous emotions in his De secreto conflictu curarum mecurum and above all in his De remedii usrisque fortune, where he borrowed from but also refocused ancient Stoic theories of the emotions.2 Francesco Filelfo (d. 1481) wrote a systematic treatise on the emotions, De morali disciplina, drawing on Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations and the Peri pathon of Pseudo-Andronicus of Rhodes.3 And between Petrarch and Filelfo was Coluccio Salutati (d. 1406) and others as well.4

When modern scholars of the Italian Renaissance have dealt with its theories of emotions, they have looked above all at grief and consolatory literature.5 George McClure

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2 See G. W. McClure, Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism, Princeton 1990, cap. 3.


4 See below, n. 53 for Giannozzo Manetti.

was no doubt correct when he suggested that the modern focus on sorrow accurately reflected Renaissance preoccupations. Speaking of Jacopo Antonio Marcello, a Venetian nobleman moved by the death of his son to ask various humanists to write works of consolation for him, McClure pointed out that Marcello’s grief was also a source of both pride and fame, and thus perfectly suited to Renaissance values. This is important. One cannot easily separate the values - and with them the theories - of any period from the lived experience in the same period. That is why, as I shall remark at the end of this paper, it would be very useful to combine theory with practice in order to explore systematically the emotional expression that we find in non-theoretical materials.

**Lived Emotions: Historiographical Traditions**

That consideration brings me to the non-theoretical domain. What have Italian Renaissance scholars said about the emotional lives of their subjects apart from theory? The answer until very recently is: surprisingly little. Nevertheless, there is a limited historiographical tradition. I will here outline *four* approaches or schools of thought. I call the first the ‘Burckhardtian’; the second the ‘Eliasian’ (after Norbert Elias); the third the ‘performative’ because it sees emotions as acting out, modifying, or even creating social institutions; and the fourth the “linguistic” because it profits from the linguistic turn in historical studies.7

1. **The Burckhardtian View**

Jacob Burckhardt’s *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, first published in 1860, described Italian Renaissance emotional sensibilities as essentially the precursors of Burckhardt’s own Romantic age. For Burckhardt, medieval men were so tied to their group identities and lacking in a sense of their own individuality that they had only the rarest insight into their internal lives. What was the nature of the insight that Burckhardt had in mind? He gives us a hint when he speaks of Petrarch’s “descriptions of moments of joy and sorrow which must have been thoroughly his own, since no one before him gives us anything of the kind.”8 Burckhardt looked at Boccaccio, who, he said, “succeeds sometimes in giving a most powerful and effective picture of his feeling. The return to a spot consecrated by love (Sonnet 22), the melancholy of spring (Sonnet 33), the sadness of the poet who feels himself growing old (Sonnet 65), are admirably treated by him.”9 Turning to Leon Battista Alberti, Burckhardt found him exploring “the deepest spring of his nature [...], the sympathetic intensity with which he entered into the whole life around him. At the sight of noble trees and waving cornfields he shed tears»10 And so on.

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6 McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation*, p. 115; on Marcello, see King, *An Inconsolable Father*, and Eadem, *The Death of the Child.*

7 There are other approaches. One is literary/Freudian: see, e.g. J. Tambling, *Dante in Purgatory: States of Affect*, Turnhout 2010. For a useful recent overview of the approaches historians have used to explore the history of emotions, see S. Ferente, “Storici ed emozioni”, *Storica*, 43-45 (2009), pp. 371-392.


The historiographical tradition initiated by Burckhardt sees the emotions of Renaissance men as expressive of their deepest feelings. That tradition continues to the present day, above all in studies of Petrarch. For George McClure, for example, the young Petrarch “on tears, sighs, and swoons, indulging the pleasant pain of romantic longing.” This was, for McClure, “a new outlook not only on the general psychology of human emotion, but also on the specific challenges posed by the human condition: particularly those of misery, illness, and death.” McClure contrasted Renaissance sentiments with the “somewhat compartmentalized psychological worlds” of the poet, philosopher, priest, and penitent of the medieval period. And when Petrarch’s tone shifted — when, later in life, he came to regret finding sweetness in lamentation and upbraided a grieving father for “immoderate weeping” — McClure saw this as reflecting a Stoic resolve that warred with Petrarch’s “enduring need to weep and to write.”

2. The Eliasian Approach

Nevertheless, despite the exceptions noted above, the tradition inaugurated by Burckhardt was long ago more or less snuffed out by the historiographical approach that is here dubbed the Eliasian. Norbert Elias’s narrative of the history of lived emotion was set forth in his exceptionally influential book The Civilizing Process. This is not the place to explore the theory in detail; suffice it to say that Elias postulated a process by which violent behavior, emotions, and impulses of every sort (which, in Elias’s view were essentially equivalent phenomena) were brought under control. The essential trajectory of emotions’ history went from impulse to restraint. Elias’s focus was on France, not Italy. Indeed, he went out of his way to deny the pertinence of Italy to his story. After quoting Gabriel Hanotaux, who thought that French princes learned from the “tyrants of Naples, Florence, and Ferrara,” Elias discounted this, arguing that it would require “a precise examination in terms of structural history” — something he was clearly unwilling to undertake — to “determine how far the centralization processes and the organization of government in the Italian city states resemble those of early absolutist France.” He very much doubted that small city-states could engender a civilizing process.

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12 Ibidem, p. 20.
14 Ibidem, p. 39. On p. 45, he speaks of Petrarch’s “emotional instincts”. In his review in The American Historical Review, 114, 2 (2009), pp. 472-473 of C. Lansing, Passion and Order: Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes, Ithaca, N.Y. 2008, McClure objected to Lansing’s interpretation of Petrarch’s change of heart as “paralleling the political restraint of grief sought in communal legislation. Instead, Petrarch’s move toward Stoic calm should be seen in a more discrete, individualized context, namely, his psychological development from the ‘sweet grief’ of the vernacular love poet to the sterner ways of the Latin humanist and moralist”.
15 What is here called the Eliasian approach was anticipated by Dutch historian J. Huizinga, Herfsttij der Middleeuwen: Studie over levens- en gedachtersvormen der veertiende en vijftiende eeuw in Frankrijk en de Nederlanden, Haarlem 1919.
17 For a fuller account of Elias’s theory and its implications for the history of emotions, see B. H. Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages, Ithaca, N.Y. 2006, pp. 7-10.
18 Elias, Civilizing Process, p. 542, n. 128, continuing with the observation that “differences of size always bring with them qualitative differences of structure [...]. At any rate the account given by the Venetian ambassador [quoted in Ibidem, pp. 356-360] and its whole tone does not indicate that he regarded the specific
As a consequence, for historians convinced by the explanatory power of Elias’s global vision, Renaissance Italy became another example of the pre-absolutist Middle Ages, with its impulsivity, violence, and emotional volatility. Edward Muir’s 1993 study of the Friulan nobility is a good example, though he did credit some unspecified Renaissance courts for initiating the civilizing process. In the early sixteenth century, Friulans were caught in a web of vendettas, in “a pattern of stimulus and response”, as Muir put it, “which derived its forms of representation from the cultural precepts about how to express certain emotions”. These precepts changed after 1511. “By the middle sixteenth century», observed Muir, “one of the great transformations in the history of emotions, which had taken hold in the social hothouse of the Renaissance courts, appeared among some Friulan aristocrats, a transformation from externalizing anger and projecting it onto other persons or even animals to internalizing it by adopting the self-control of good manners». Observing that those new manners required courtiers to give up their old eating habits, Muir elaborated on the work of Norbert Elias: “Just by adopting refined table manners, such as using a fork and napkin, courteous men and women distanced themselves from their food, creating a layer of manners which, in separating them from direct contact with bodies and with animals, severed the habitual connections of millennia and produced a new sensitivity [...]. Thus good manners repressed emotions».

Coming from another tradition not directly dependent on Elias but, nevertheless, echoing Elias’s view of the warrior class, Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur wrote in 2003 about the psychology of the professional military lineages (the milites) of the Italian communes. Though focusing on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Maire Vigueur’s argument was relevant to Renaissance Italy because, as he said, the milites’ “comportment and values» were “of long duration». They valorized war, living to plunder and fostering a “culture of hatreds». According to Maire Vigueur, the hegemony of this group and its values eventually waned in the wake of the new powers of the podestà and the popolo. The new milites pro commune that resulted from this political revolution fought not for pleasure or plunder or because their lineages depended on cultivating hatreds but because they were conscripted and subject to a bureaucracy that evaluated their ability to provide a mount, paid for the expenses of war, and “pursued the absent and the undisciplined». The new system corresponded to “the demands of rationality» of a growing administration. Although Maire Vigueur did not speak of “civilizing», his approach was nevertheless within the Eliasian tradition.

3. The Performative Approach

power position of the French king and the organization of finances connected to it as something long familiar in Italy».

20 Ibidem, p. xxiv.
21 Ibidem, p. xxv.
22 Ibidem, p. 163, with explicit reference to Elias in n. 2 (p. 197).
24 Ibidem, p. 308.
Well before Maire Vigueur’s book appeared, however, a new and different - a “performative» - approach to Renaissance emotional life was already underway. The idea of performatives was first proposed in 1955 by the philosopher J. L. Austin, who noted that certain utterances, such as ‘I pronounce you man and wife’, did not simply describe or command but transformed something into another. Performatives were constitutive, as in this case, when (if spoken by the proper person) it created a marriage. Some twenty years later, Robert Solomon applied the idea to the emotions. “We might say», he wrote, “that the emotions are preverbal analogues of [...] ‘performatives’ - judgments that do something rather than simply describe or evaluate a state of affairs [...]». Anger is not merely a report or a ‘reaction’ to an [offensive comment]; it declares that the comment is offensive» much as the marriage officiant declares two people married. This idea fit well with the notion of Renaissance self-fashioning, which included calculating one’s friends and enemies and making sense of a world bereft of clear social demarcations.

An even more important legacy of the performative school for scholars of the Italian Renaissance has been the idea that emotions either ratify a particular social order or challenge it to respond. Behind these studies is the extension of the idea of performatives to ‘performativity’, assimilating emotions to the sorts of gestures that are involved in rituals, theater, and dance. Thus already in 1985, Guido Ruggiero was suggesting that in fifteenth-century Venice, love between the nobleman Domenico Contarini and the non-noble Gratiosa compelled their contemporaries to make certain judgments: Domenico was adjudged ‘mad’, and Gratiosa was convicted of black magic. Ruggiero pointed out, however, that in other instances, love was actually allowed to trump dowry and that “affection and mutual attraction were becoming for some an important aspect of marriage». Here we see how one historian of Renaissance Italy argued, in effect, that the Burckhardtian feelings of Renaissance men might transform social practices.

While Ruggiero was exploring sexuality and love in several studies, other Renaissance historians were working on grief within the performative paradigm. In 1994, Diane Owen

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32 *Ibidem*, p. 36; see also pp. 65-67, 81-82, 157-158.

33 Idem, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance*, New York 1993, where an Eliasian emphasis on the restraint of emotion was combined with observations about the performative work of those bound passions in “forming individuals and society” (p. 13). At the same time, Ruggiero suggested that what looked like subversion might simply express the values and assumptions of certain sub-cultures: «it is evident that not all people in a society participate in culture in the same way, and often it appears that rather than one culture in a given society, we are encountering various shades of culture or even several distinct cultures» (p. 15). This anticipates my notion of ‘emotional communities’ as discussed in B.
Hughes published an essay using this approach for public mourning in the Italian communes. City statutes in Piedmont and Umbria, she pointed out, vigorously penalized men’s displays of grief, apparently leaving the “burden of mourning” to women. But even here, urban legislation increasingly removed women as well as men from the public arena during funerals, confining them and their grief to the domestic, private space of the household. By controlling traditional expressions of grief, in which women bared their breasts and let down their hair, the cities created “new boundaries” that prevented the “rupture of culturally constructed relations” such as status. Hughes’ emphasis was thus on controlling not emotions per se but rather their performance.

Carol Lansing’s more recent book on restraint of grief combines even more clearly the Burckhardtian emphasis on feeling with the performative emphasis on its public use and display. Explicitly rejecting the Eliasian approach that the control of emotions denoted a “civilizing process”, Lansing argued that in late medieval Italy, men - particularly noble men - were expected to express “sorrow with tears and loud laments, even gestures of self-mutilation, and did so in the streets.” These rituals both had affective meaning and performed a function: “the show of grief measured [...] community, the honor and loyalty of the living as well as the depth of their loss.” However, in the second half of the thirteenth century, city lawmakers strove to associate dramatic gestures of grief with women, sensuality, and lack of reason. They thus linked the new-fledged commune with a certain type of decorum defined as male and rational. Now restraining grief, rather than displaying it, performed the task of ratifying the political order.

4. The ‘Linguistic Turn’

Thus far, the approaches to emotions have looked rather little at the full corpus of emotional expression of any one group; they have looked at grief or longing or hatred more or less in isolation. But new interest in “the ways meaning is constituted in and through language” represented by the so-called “linguistic turn”, has recently led some historians to focus on the full affective language of Renaissance Italy. This is what I term the linguistic approach. An early example is Lauro Martines, who studied the words used by vernacular poets of Renaissance referring to “love, anger, and fear” and other matters pertaining to

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34 D. O. Hughes, “Mourning Rites, Memory, and Civilization in Premodern Italy”, in Riti e rituali nelle società medievali, ed. by J. Chiffoleau, L. Martines, and A. P. Bagliani, Spoleto 1994, pp. 23-38, here p. 27.
35 Lansing, Passion and Order, p. 218.
“strategies for living in city-states». More recent is Marco Gentile’s response to Maire Vigueur’s emphasis on noble odium. “The word hatrebo, he noted, “which, together with enmity (inimicitia) refers to the vocabulary of conflict [...], takes into account only a small portion of the aristocratic political culture, which, in the opposite perspective [...], could be easily defined [as] a culture of friendship or even a culture of love [...]. In general terms, the relations of power between a lord and both his subjects and friends is described as a relationship of mutual love and friendship”. Gentile quoted the words of love that the lord of Busseto, Gian Ludovico Pallavicini, used in his will in 1497: “his widow and his heir were supposed to ‘love the men (amant et diligent) with every possible benevolence, love and charity’) while, for their part, the men were to “love, honor and obey” Gian Ludovico’s heirs. A half century before that, the members of the Rossi family, who were building and consolidating a rural lordship in the region around Parma, addressed their ‘clients’, both within the city and without, as their ‘friends’ (amici). Such words, used in the particular context of clientage and dependency, were not ‘mere rhetoric’: in fifteenth-century Lombardy, subscription to the personal rule of a local lord was often felt to be preferable to the jurisdiction of the city, which usually manifested itself in the form of predatory tax collectors.

Isabella Lazzarini’s study of the language of emotion in Italian diplomatic correspondence is partly in the performative tradition and partly in the Burckhardtian mode. But it is above all in the linguistic tradition. Lazzarini was particularly interested in finding the different emotional registers in which the Florentine diplomat Rinaldo degli Albizzi worked and was understood. Contemporaries recorded him in different moods. The chronicler Giovanni Cavalcanti, for example, speaking of the possibilities of peace with the duke of Milan in 1423, quoted Rinaldo in a threatening mood: “if [...] the duke doesn’t become more civil, then we’ll unsheathe our swords”. But the Florentine Consulte e pratiche of 1429 quoted a more encouraging Rinaldo, urging war viriliter against Paolo Guinigi, lord of Lucca. Meanwhile, in his own diplomatic correspondence, Rinaldo wrote on many levels of “formality and familiarity”. Lazzarini noted, for example, that his letters to the public authority were largely dry and formulaic, though shot through with emotional moments. His letters to kin, friends, and clients were less guarded. During the war of 1429 against Paolo Guinigi, when Rinaldo was himself in the field of battle but without the provisions of money

43 “ma se [...] il Duca non torni alle convenevoli cose, allora la spada si cavi dal fodero”: Ibidem, p. 349.
and troops that he needed, he wrote to his son, “Patience is the perfect virtue when things come out well; and so the opposite [impatience] when things turn out badly - which clearly I know likely to occur in this case. So, [with this] as for the other things I’ve told you. And I did not write above ‘anger,’ but I wrote intentionally either ‘cold or hot’». This is an example of emotions’ reflexive performativity, a way to express the feeling of anger and at the same time to rename and reassess it as a form of ‘impatience’.

Above all, Lazzarini furthered the discussion of emotions in the Italian Renaissance by taking into account the wide range of possibilities for emotional expression offered by its fusion of the medieval Latin heritage, a rich treasury of vernacular idioms, and the recent influx of classical Latin writings. The consequence was not simply that Florentines could wield a huge vocabulary of emotion terms - though that is important enough - but also that they gained new models by which they might confront, make sense of, and react to their world. Lazzarini and Gentile are not alone; indeed, they represent something of a movement, a quite recent emotional turn in Italian Renaissance studies that takes into account at one and the same time emotions’ expressivity, performativity, and linguistic dependency. In a paper for a Paris seminar in 2010, Lazzarini adopted an idea that I have suggested: to look at the emotions expressed by emotional communities. In this instance, Lazzarini considered the corpus of the correspondence of Rinaldo and Lorenzo de’ Medici together, as representative of the emotional community of the Florentine elite. The idea of emotional communities is also a way to theorize Ruggiero’s observation that a sub-group of the Venetian elite may well have had a different attitude toward love than those who condemned the lovers Domenico and Gratiosa: these elites did not all belong to the same emotional community.

Putting Theory and Practice Together

The linguistic approach suggests an additional methodological step that would put theory and lived emotions together. Rather than take ‘our’ emotion terms and look for their equivalents in the past, we should find the emotions of the past from its own vocabulary and even its own theories of emotion. Why should we do this? Because terms that have emotional resonance for us today did not always have affective valence, while words that expressed emotions in the past do not always continue to do so today. To be sure, we will

44 “la pazienza esser virtù perfetta quando la fine è buona; e così l’opposto, quando fosse il contrario: come chiaro conosco interverrebbe in questo caso. Pertanto, come per più altre t’ho detto; e none scritto sopra ira, ma deliberatamente scritto, e a freddo e a caldo”: Ibidem, p. 352.

45 Or, rather, its emotive character, as defined by Reddy. See above, n. 30.


48 See Rosenwein, Emotional Communities, esp. pp. 20-29.

49 Lazzarini, Discours émotionnel.

50 Consider, for example, Rinaldo’s substitution of ‘impatience’ for ‘anger’ above, at n. 44.
find considerable overlap among past and present terms, especially in the case of a Western society like Renaissance Italy, whose vocabulary and sensibilities are in many ways ancestors of our own. Yet important differences exist, not only in the terms used but also in the sorts of emotions that were stressed or deemphasized.\textsuperscript{51} Thus, to give an example, one might consider the \textit{Dialogus consolatorius} (1438) of Giannozzo Manetti (d. 1459), a Florentine diplomat of Rinaldo’s day.\textsuperscript{52} Written to console himself upon the death of one of his sons, the dialogue opposed the Stoic and anti-Stoic positions on grief.\textsuperscript{53} Since Manetti himself wrote the book in Latin and a year later translated it into the vernacular, the dialogue offers the historian a large inventory of Manetti’s “emotion words” and preoccupations. Moreover, its many extant copies from the fifteenth century alone suggest that it spoke to more than just a small group.\textsuperscript{54}

Armed with a list of Manetti’s terms, along with a sense of his preoccupations and an idea of the theory of emotions implicit in his work (which I’ll explore in just a moment), the historian will have a non-anachronistic way to approach non-theoretical materials, such as letters. The list of terms will include words such as \textit{dolor}, \textit{lamentationes} and \textit{fletus} in Latin and \textit{doglia}, \textit{pianti}, and \textit{lamenti} in Italian.\textsuperscript{55} Of course! This is what we should expect in a treatise on consolation. But I found these words by noting that \textit{dolor} was a key term associated by Manetti with words for the emotions such as \textit{affectus}, \textit{egritudines}, and \textit{perturbationes}, and, in Italian, \textit{molestie} and \textit{passion}.\textsuperscript{56} Moreover, also associated with \textit{dolor} were notions of joy as well, such as \textit{rallegare e congratulare}.\textsuperscript{57} Contradictory emotions such as these arise in part because Manetti presented several different theories of emotions. One theory said that sorrow (and by extension each emotion) was a learned convention (\textit{opinio}) and thus not natural.\textsuperscript{58} Perhaps it was just such an idea that buttressed anti-mourning legislation in Florence. By contrast, the “Giannozzo” character - i.e. Manetti himself - of the dialogue argued that grieving was natural to “those who are more human (\textit{humaniores})”.\textsuperscript{59} Words, preoccupations, theories: these should be useful tools not only for studying the non-theoretical texts of Manetti himself and of his immediate peers\textsuperscript{60} but also for the sources produced by other communities that read and valued his work. To be sure, Manetti is only one source useful for such inquiries.

\textsuperscript{51} On this point, see T. V. Cohen, \textit{Love and Death in Renaissance Italy}, Chicago 2004, p. 13, where we cannot fully grasp the feelings of people of the past: “The harder we try, as readers or writers, to lay a handsome shape upon the past, the more aware we grow that our story grasps in vain to clasp its subjects - real people, with real passions, very long ago”. Nevertheless, Cohen does not seek to overcome this problem but simply to express the unknowability of the past.


\textsuperscript{54} See Manetti, \textit{Dialogus consolatorius}, pp. liii-lxx for the manuscript tradition.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibidem}, pp. 30-31 (21).

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibidem}, 20 (4), (7)-21 (4), (7)

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibidem}, 23 (10). These vernacular terms translate the Latin \textit{letandum}. See \textit{Ibidem}, 24 (10).

\textsuperscript{58} De Petris, \textit{Giannozzo Manetti}, p. 504.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibidem}, p. 507. A third theory agreed that emotions were natural but based this not (like the other two) on the authority of the ancients but on the legacy of Christianity and its notion of original sin.

\textsuperscript{60} at the house of the means the most scholarly men of Florence gathered: Angelo Acciaiuoli, Benedetto and Matteo Strozzi, Alessandro Arrighi, Antonio Barbadoro”: \textit{Ibidem}, p. 520. This, in my view, constituted a social, and thus very likely an emotional, community.
This paper began by noting that Renaissance Italy plays a rather small role in the history of emotions. It ends on a happier note. Historians are discovering new aspects of Renaissance political life and preoccupations by looking at emotions in the context of groups of peers and contemporaries. Meanwhile, the waning hegemony of the Eliasian model allows for a new appreciation of Trecento and Quattrocento Italy. The Burckhardtian, performative, and linguistic approaches do not oppose an era of impulsivity to one of restraint but rather see expressive and constative potential in a wide variety of emotional norms, practices, and vocabularies. The emotional communities of the Italian Renaissance are beginning to take their rightful place among the many other communities of Western Europe, no longer necessarily as avatars of modernity but rather as exemplars of human affective possibilities.