

EMOTIONS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE AND COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA

Conference at the GHI, November 7–10, 2002. Conveners: Vera Lind (GHI), Otto Ulbricht (University of Kiel). Participants: Marina Arnold (Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel), Barbara Benedict (Trinity College), Steven Bullock (Worcester Polytechnic Institute), Elena Carrera (Oxford Brookes University), Déborah Cohen (University of Paris I), Robert Dimit (New York University), Nicole Eustace (New York University), Aaron Fogleman (Northern Illinois University), Peter Goddard (University of Guelph), Katherine Goodland (College of Staten Island), Heikki Lempa (Moravian College), Kenneth Lockridge (University of Montana), Michael Monheit (University of South Alabama), Kate Narveson (Luther College), William Reddy (Duke University), David Sabeau (University of California Los Angeles), Peter Stearns (George Mason University), Michael Stolberg (Technische Universität München), Dorothée Sturkenboom (Vrije Universiteit), Fredrika Teute (Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture), David Turner (University of Glamorgan).

From November 7 to 10, 2002, the GHI hosted a conference on the history of emotions in the early modern period. Interest in this field has burgeoned in the last two decades in disciplines like anthropology, psychology, sociology, and philosophy, but it is still a new topic of investigation for historians, especially those working in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Today, few doubt that emotions, though a bodily state, have many cultural dimensions that make them a fascinating topic of historical investigation. Besides researching the role of normative systems regulating the display of emotion and their change, historians are also interested in the role of gender, race, and class in the study of emotions, as well as social control, consequences of emotional code violations, and emotions during great events, like war and revolution. Scholars also focus their attention on particular emotions like desire, greed, envy, fear, sadness, love or happiness, or on emotions and religion, or emotions and the body. The goal of the conference was to bring together junior and senior scholars of the early modern era for the first time in order to evaluate this developing field. This evaluation was done comparatively, analyzing emotions in early modern Europe and early North America, also for the first time.

Papers were pre-circulated, so the conference participants had to have their contributions ready well in advance of the conference. The group of sixteen was selected from a field of over sixty applicants who

had responded to the call for papers. Also present were several invited scholars. The conference began with two keynote lectures by two historians who have been very influential in shaping the developing field of historical research on emotions, namely Peter Stearns and William Reddy. Peter Stearns, a pioneer in the study of emotions in American history, presented an overview of the historical study of emotions in the past twenty years. William Reddy presented a theoretical overview, focusing on approaches of special importance to early modernists. Reddy recently published a study on the history of emotions in France from 1700 to 1850 that not only examines current theories of emotions from disciplines like psychology and ethnography, but also provides a new theory of emotions that enables us to track changes in emotional experience.

Over the following three days, the conference participants discussed fifteen papers in seven thematically arranged sessions. Besides the keynote speakers, two additional distinguished historians joined the group and provided comments and a wider perspective on the history of emotions in early modern Europe and early America respectively, namely David Sabean and Kenneth Lockridge. The first session focused on emotions in the context of early modern medicine and philosophy. Michael Stolberg traced the history and impact of changing medical and lay notions of emotional physiology. He discussed the differences in the emotional make-up ascribed to the sexes, the debate on the location of emotional experiences within the body, emotions in regard to the relationship of body and soul, and concluded that changing understandings of body concepts not only left their mark on theoretical, learned approaches of emotions, but also changed the actual subjective experience of emotions. In the second paper of the session, Robert Dimit analyzed works on the theory of passions in Europe between 1540 and 1690, and argued that passions are different from emotions. Compared with emotions, passions were defined as passive, basically the same in everyone, and they were not viewed as intrinsically good. Also, the criteria for identifying passions were different: Instead of taking internal feelings as indicators, as is normally the case with emotions today, in the early modern era emotions were defined by a certain type of relationship between the soul and an object of passion.

The second session dealt with class and political issues in regard to emotions in a transatlantic perspective. First, Steven Bullock examined the significance of anger and standards of emotional control in North American colonists' changing views on power and self-representation, using the example of the violent outbursts of Maryland Governor Francis Nicholson and other prominent political figures around 1700. These were important issues in the struggle for authority between the American gentry and colonial governors, in which bullying and anger as opposed to

emotional control were debated as tools of governance. Déborah Cohen shifted the focus from emotions within the upper hierarchy of political systems to the expression of emotions by lower classes in the public sphere in late eighteenth-century France. She looked at the police records of carriage accidents in Paris and showed that although in most cases there is no evidence of direct linguistically expressed political feelings by the general public, it is possible to find traces of political emotions in popular modes of behavior. Cohen noted that historical analyses of emotions usually limit their scope to linguistic expressions instead of including all manifested emotions that sometimes cannot be pronounced in words.

The expression of grief was the topic of the third session on the first day of the conference. Marina Arnold concentrated on grief and consolation in seventeenth-century German funeral sermons and funeral poems. This literary genre documents a change in the perception and experience of grief over the course of the century from being set within a controlled public church ceremony to the attempt to achieve a more private, personal way of coping, in which stronger emotional attachments could be shown. This change also indicated a growing distance from the church and subsequently a change in devotion. Katherine Goodland then showed how female grief was perceived as madness and monstrosity in post-Reformation England through her analysis of sermons, medical treatises, and Shakespearian drama. She connected this perception with the loss of ritual justification for mourning as a result of the Reformation, which led to concern over the appropriate demonstration of grief. Goodland concluded in her paper that the extreme depiction of female grief was a reaction against Catholic images of the Virgin Mary in her role as the *Mater Dolorosa* and thus a sign of deep anxiety within Protestant English society over any connection between the world of the dead and the world of the living.

On the next day of the conference, session four featured three papers dealing with emotions and religion. Michael Monheit presented Calvin's doctrine of images in connection with the formation of his religious sensibility. He pointed out how in earlier years, before his conversion, Calvin, through his own experience, linked steady, restrained passions with virtue. But in general, Calvin associated strong emotions with unlawful desires, and his hostility towards religious images was related to his conviction that an image, in fact all material reality, evoked sudden and unpredictable passions in the human imagination. Kate Narveson then confronted the problem of emotional authenticity in early Stuart devotional writing. These devotional texts were supposed to help readers to find certain affections within themselves and nurture them, creating some tension between actively finding emotions and the passivity re-

quired to feel the work of the Spirit. Narveson argued that the authors of the texts were not concerned with the ambivalence of consciously producing religious affectivity, but that they were instead deeply concerned by spontaneous affections. It was possible to consider actively shaped emotions sincere, because emotions were understood as having both passive and active qualities, and because they needed to be cultivated in order to conform to their object. In the last paper of the session, Elena Carrera investigated the role of emotions in sixteenth-century Spanish spirituality. Interpreting the discourses in devotional treatises and treatises on confession, she concluded that these texts, which the printing press made more widely available to the general population, taught the method of prayer of recollecting and gathering the senses, which led from self-examination to a meditation on Christ's humanity, thus allowing the reader to experience a union with divinity. This did not require intellectual training, but the ability to recognize emotions. Carrera coined the term "affected hermeneutics" for this process, in order to show how early modern practices presented emotions as both self-confronting and self-transforming.

In session five, which dealt with gendered emotions, David Turner analyzed gender and emotions in early modern English narratives of adultery. He focused on men's emotions, especially the humiliation caused by their wives' sexual infidelity, as expressed in letters submitted to the periodical press that sought help in dealing with these issues. The letters showed the importance of the body and bodily metaphors in the formation of male honor, and for the conceptualization of the betrayal. Adultery was perceived as a bodily loss, something surrendered to another man. Nicole Eustace also dealt with masculinity and emotions in her paper on the encounter between Europeans and Native Americans during the Seven Years' War in North America. This encounter provoked questions about the traits of civilized versus savage emotions, and sensibility versus cruelty as a source of moral relations. She examined the religious roots and political uses of the ensuing debate, and analyzed the rhetorical use of emotions. Eustace argued that controlling the passions came to be seen as a source of strength and virtue for Anglo-Americans, and that a consensus formed on compassionate action as the foundation of humanity, which prevented masculinity from slipping into cruelty, and sensibility from degenerating into effeminate passivity.

In session six, which dealt with emotions and colonial encounters, Peter Goddard presented a paper on Jesuit analyses of Huron and Algonquian emotional states in the seventeenth-century mission to New France. The missionaries read emotional expressions as insights into the spiritual state of the newly converted Amerindians, and were confronted with what they regarded as a disregard of self-discipline and self-

regulation, as well as an impassiveness towards religious imagination. In response, the Jesuits treated these emotional states as child-like and established a paternalistic regime over the Huron and Algonquian converts. Goddard concluded that the emphasis the missionaries put on ideas of civility and self-control can be seen in the context of the emerging concept of an emotionally contained “modern” subject.

Language, knowledge, and honor in regard to emotions were the topics of the last session. Dorothee Sturkenboom analyzed the emotional vocabulary of Dutch moral authors in the eighteenth century. She pointed out that these authors were not using the modern Dutch word for “emotion,” but a word that translates into “passion” instead, and which included a wide range of phenomena. It was only in the late eighteenth century that the modern distinction between “passion” as a more vehement and violent emotion and “feeling” as a softer emotion developed. Shifting the focus to eighteenth-century Germany, Heikki Lempa then investigated the changing concept of honor with regard to contemporary pedagogical ideas. He examined Christian Thomasius’ efforts to make the practices of court society useful for society at large, and how a group of educators and ministers later took up these ideas and incorporated “honor” in their educational experiments at schools in Dessau and Schnepfenthal. In practice, however, the institutional arrangements at these schools transformed the sense of honor into the measurement of merit. The last paper of the conference was given by Barbara Benedict. She investigated curiosity as a touchstone of early modern ideas on how to understand and control human feelings. At that time people debated whether curiosity was more related to the body or mind, more vice or virtue. She showed how this debate was used to enforce distinctions of class and gender and how curiosity came to be defined as corporeal and uncontrollable when the question of social control was involved, but was viewed as an heroic intellectual power when the enterprises of learned men were concerned.

The conveners of the conference, supported by the GHI, plan to publish the revised conference papers in a volume of essays on the history of emotions in early modern Europe and early America. This publication should provide historians and other social scientists with an overview of the most recent research in this new field and time period.

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