

ABSTRACT: While it is widely accepted that emotions are connected with the body, the precise nature of this connection remains difficult to pin down. Recent theories from different fields suggests a somewhat flexible interplay between bodily states and emotion categories, in which social or cultural contexts play an important role. Such generalising theories are helpful to understand the nature of emotion, but it remains important complement them with case studies from other fields, one of them being literature. The contributions to this volume exemplify different forms and aspects of the interplay between emotions and the body, e.g. involuntary bodily reactions vs. consciously controlled expressions of emotion, or subjective vs. intersubjective experiences – but also the difficulty or impossibility of sorting embodied emotions into neat categories.

KEYWORDS: Emotions, body, predictive processing, categorisation.

That emotions are connected with the body is nowadays widely accepted, but the precise nature of this connection remains difficult to pin down. During the last 150 years, psychologists, philosophers and neuroscientists have proposed strikingly different views on this matter. William James, challenging the traditional assumption that emotions as primarily mental states, famously claimed ‘that *the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the | same changes as they occur IS the emotion*’ (James 1884, pp. 189-190, emphasis original). Needless to say, this is an extreme position, and also in some ways an inadequate one: as recently emphasised by Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017a, pp. 12-15) and others, the same bodily states do in fact not always lead to the same emotions¹. Some other theories have tried to combine physiological and cognitive aspects. James Russell’s circumplex model (1980) distinguishes between two dimensions of emotion, valence (positive or negative) and arousal (from low to high), which can be visualised in a two-dimensional space². Klaus Scherer’s component process model (1982) suggests five

¹ See also Wilkinson et al. 2019, p. 103; Gallese and Morelli 2024, pp. 129-131. For other objections against James’ definition, see Scherer 2005.

² Another approach combining cognitive and physiological aspects is Schachter and Singer 1962.

components of emotion, cognitive appraisal, physiological activation, motivational tendencies, motor expression and the subjective feeling state³.

One of the remaining difficulties is to understand how cognitive and physiological aspects interact. In this respect, recent approaches from cognitive studies are helpful. The predictive processing theory, to name one, describes the brain as a hypothesis testing machine organised in hierarchical levels: sensory inputs from the bottom of the hierarchy are processed against the backdrop of predictions from higher levels; if they are unpredicted, they move up to the next, more abstract level, where the processing continues⁴. Andrew Clarke (2016), Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017a and b) and others have used this theory to explain how emotions arise⁵. Emotions, then, are not just experiencing and feeling bodily changes, as claimed by James, but ‘integrate basic information (e.g., about bodily arousal) with higher-level predictions of probable causes and preparations for possible actions’ (Clarke 2016, p. 234). As per Barrett’s theory of constructed emotion, this process involves concepts shaped by experience: ‘When past experiences of emotion (e.g. happiness) are used to categorize the predicted sensory array and guide action, then one experiences or perceives that emotion (happiness)’ (Barrett 2017b, p. 9).

The details of this theory need not be discussed here, but an important insight for the understanding of embodied emotions is that the connection between bodily states and emotion categories is somewhat flexible, not only due to different previous experiences, but also to varying social or cultural contexts. This latter aspect has also been emphasised by some of the most recent contributions to the understanding of emotions, for instance Vittorio Gallese and Ugo Morelli, who speak of the relational nature of emotion (2024, pp. 128-131), or Douglas Cairns and Curie Virág, who describe emotion as intersubjective, contextual and culturally embedded (2024, pp. 10-14). Against this backdrop, it may seem almost anachronistic to focus on the relationship between emotions and the body, but in fact the recent developments in the study of emotions make it all the more important to ask how this complex relationship can be best understood and described. Theories from neurobiology or cognitive studies tend to remain vague in this respect because the possibilities are simply too varied; this special issue is motivated by the assumption that – for the reasons described – it is useful to complement generalising theories with case studies from other fields, one of them being literature.

³ For a summary of his component process model, see also Scherer 2005, esp. p. 698.

⁴ See e.g. Clark 2016; 2023.

⁵ See Wilkinson et al. 2019 for an overview.

The study of embodied emotions in literature of course involves many specific problems. Language shapes the perspective on embodied emotions; language can be ambiguous or difficult to interpret, especially when it comes to historical languages; moreover, language can represent the same embodied emotions in different ways, depending on literary conventions and aesthetic preferences. To give but one of many examples, conceptual metaphors are a rewarding subject for the study of embodied emotions because many of them are based on sensorimotor experience⁶. However, it is often difficult to decide whether a speaker or author actually thinks of these bodily experiences when (s)he uses a metaphor, and if so, which physiological processes are meant exactly. In short, literature never offers an ‘objective’ perspective on embodied emotions but always also reflects cultural factors⁷. That said, one of the most quintessential insights from theories of emotion is that there is no such thing as an objective perspective on embodied emotions. If it is true that there is no one-to-one correlation between bodily states and emotions but rather a complex interplay shaped by contextual factors, there is perhaps no better means to study the range of possibilities for this interplay than to analyse a variety of literary texts dealing with emotions and the body⁸.

This special issue concentrates on Greek and Latin literature, which not only includes a large number of texts in which embodied emotions are either represented or discussed, but also offers some descriptions of emotional and bodily experiences that differ from modern conventions and may thus help us understand aspects of embodied emotions that we tend to overlook. With this choice of texts, this issue inserts itself into the burgeoning field of the study of emotions in ancient literature⁹. Its original contribution to this field is the systematic focus on the bodily aspects of emotions. To avoid misunderstanding, the contributions do not discuss the concept of embodied emotions as such; rather, they focus on how emotions are represented by means of their physi-

⁶ In the terminology of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, these are called ‘primary’ or ‘correlation metaphors’; see Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Kövecses 2020, pp. 34-35. On the experiential basis of some conceptual metaphors cfr. already Lakoff and Johnson 1980, pp. 14-21.

⁷ On this fundamental dialectic of all historical studies of emotion (anthropological constants and cultural factors overlap), see e.g. Reddy 2001.

⁸ For a more detailed justification of the importance of literature for the study of emotions, see Del Zoppo in the last issue of this journal, who discusses and contextualises the important book by Gambino and Pulvirenti 2024.

⁹ During the past decade, numerous monographs and edited volumes on emotions in Greek and Latin literature and philosophy have been published, including programmatic titles such as *Emotions in the Classical World* (Cairns and Nelis 2017), *A Cultural History of the Emotions in Antiquity* (Cairns 2019) and *Emotions and Narrative in Ancient Literature and Beyond* (de Bakker, van den Berg and Klooster 2022).

cal phenomenology, including such questions as whether certain elements are conventional or adopted from earlier models. This hermeneutic approach is indispensable to contextualise the representation of embodied emotions in ancient culture and literature. What makes the contributions valuable to the general study of emotions is that they allow for a comparison between different possibilities of how emotions can relate to the body: the examples discussed in the articles are highly specific manifestations of embodied emotions in individual works of ancient literature, but on a more abstract level they allow us to explore different facets of what the term embodied emotions stands for.

The six contributions to this special issue cover a large chronological range, from Homer to the Byzantine period, and a variety of genres, including narrative, dramatic, philosophical and theological texts in both poetry and prose. More importantly, however, they exemplify different forms and aspects of the interplay between emotions and the body – as well as the difficulty or impossibility of sorting embodied emotions into neat categories. The most classical and commonly considered type of embodied emotions are involuntary and uncontrollable bodily reactions associated with negatively or positively evaluated events or thoughts (in Scherer's model: the neurophysiological activation). These symptoms are often, though not exclusively, governed by the autonomous nervous system, which is responsible for agitation (sympathetic division) and relaxation (parasympathetic division). Several of the contributions deal with cases that can be subsumed under this category: Thomas Kuhn-Treichel discusses how Homer and Euripides employ a metaphor that denotes tears and the loss of bodily tension; Lien Van Geel compares descriptions of female fainting in Homer and Plutarch; Camille Guigon offers a new interpretation of a famous passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* that presents shuddering and sweating as symptoms of love.

However, there are also bodily manifestations of emotions that can be consciously controlled, at least in principle or to some extent, for example facial expressions or gestures involving the limbs (in Scherer's model: the motor expression). The most pertinent study of this type of embodied emotions in this issue is Maria Ortori's analysis of looks expressing emotions in Apollonius of Rhodes; these looks are of course not always deliberately chosen but can nevertheless be influenced by the individual in question, whereas shuddering or fainting are usually beyond one's control. A more intricate case of a consciously chosen bodily expression of emotions is discussed by Pamela Zinn, who shows how Lucretius associates the positions adopted during sexual intercourse with the emotional and relational states of the couple. Cristina Cocola explores an even more complex case, namely how 'katanyktic' poems from the middle and

late Byzantine period try to elicit tears as an element of compunction, thus provoking a bodily symptom that can usually not be controlled. What the examples show is that involuntary and consciously controlled bodily symptoms should not be seen as binary opposition; conscious and unconscious processes overlap, but their relative proportions vary from case to case.

The same holds true for another opposition that could be used to categorise the contributions to this issue: that of subjective and intersubjective bodily experience. There are bodily symptoms that can take place in an individual body, whereas others presuppose an interaction between several bodies. Tears (Kuhn-Treichel, Cocola), bodily tension (Kuhn-Treichel), fainting (Van Geel) as well as shuddering and sweating (Guigon) seem to fall into the former category, whereas emotional looks (Ortori) and sexual intercourse (Zinn) necessarily involve more than one body. However, even here the distinction is not neat: the embodied emotions of an individual can be contagious, be it when a state of embodied grief is passed on between two characters of a tragedy (Kuhn-Treichel), or when symptoms of compunction are enacted by a group rather than an individual (Cocola). Besides, bodily processes taking place in one individual are often the result of an interaction, for instance when the lover of Plato's *Phaedrus* reacts to beautiful bodies (Guigon), and more generally, inherited linguistic expressions such as metaphors (Kuhn-Treichel) lend a certain degree of intersubjectivity even to the descriptions of individuals.

Finally, the contributions showcase different literary and conceptual perspectives on embodied emotions in ancient and medieval Greek and Latin literature. Authors of narrative and dramatic texts (Kuhn-Treichel, Van Geel and Ortori) describe embodied emotions in specific individuals and situations, typically with a focus on their phenomenology. By contrast, medical, philosophical and, to some extent, theological writers provide a more generalising perspective on embodied emotions, with particular interest in the processes or principles that (allegedly) lie behind them. Plato foregrounds the changes taking place in the soul, which are supposed to be mirrored in the body (Guigon), whereas Lucretius additionally analyses love and sexuality from a materialist – but also strongly Roman – perspective (Zinn). The katanyktic poems do not provide a theory of embodied emotions, but nevertheless integrate them into a Christian ethics (Cocola). But again, the distinction between story-based and theoretical texts is not always clear-cut: both Plato and Lucretius draw on lyric language, including certain conceptual metaphors, whereas literary authors such as Euripides sometimes react to medical or philosophical theories.

The different aspects of embodied emotions also shed light on the complex dialectic of anthropological constants and cultural factors. On the one hand,

spontaneous, uncontrollable bodily reactions are more likely to be universal than consciously controlled bodily expressions of emotions, on the other, the linguistic and literary frames used to describe the spontaneous reactions lend a cultural element even to them (see e.g. Van Geel on the trope of the fainting female). In fact, this applies not only to literature but, to some extent, to the experience of emotions in general, as higher-level cognitive processes involve linguistic concepts. Conversely, the concepts of emotionality expressed in philosophical or theological texts are often not in line with modern psychological or neurocognitive theories and could thus be seen as purely specific to their culture. However, even these texts provide universal insights in that they demonstrate to which degree similar experiences can be transformed into different concepts – and how highly theoretical concepts sometimes include very basic experiential elements, for example when Plato links his theory of the soul to aspects such as shuddering and heat (Guigon).

Overall, the contributions to this issue demonstrate the variety of entanglements and interactions between emotions and the body. They make it clear that the term embodied emotions refers to a complex reality, all the more so since it cannot be clearly separated from other aspects of emotionality such as its intersubjective or psychological dimensions. But precisely because of the different perspectives discussed in them, the case studies from Greek and Latin literature assembled in this issue can help us understand a bit more of the essential and yet elusive phenomenon that emotion is.

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