

**Early Career International Research Fellowship 2014**  
**Massimo Rospocher**  
**'Playing to the Crowd: street singers, war reporting and the  
manipulation of emotions in early modern Italy'**



**As part of its international research collaboration, the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions funds outstanding international scholars in the field to visit one or more of the Australian nodes for a period of between four weeks and two months, to work with members of the Centre on a research program of their choice. Visitors are invited to present their work in lectures or symposia, where they will receive feedback from and engage in discussion with members of the Centre, promoting collaborative research.**

**Massimo Rospocher, from the University of Leeds, was awarded an Early Career International Research Fellowship in March 2014, and spent eight weeks working at the Melbourne and Sydney nodes of the Centre.**

**Massimo graduated from the University of Trent with a BA in Literature and Philosophy in 2002, and then went to the European University Institute in Florence where he completed a PhD in History in 2008. He was adjunct professor at the University of Trent (2007-2009), where he taught a course in 'Historical Methodology', and a research fellow at the Institute for Italian and German Historical Studies (2007-2011). Massimo has held fellowships from several institutions: the British Academy, Birkbeck College (London), Centro Studi sulla Civiltà del Tardo Medioevo, CIU (Ascona), Centre of Reformation and Renaissance Studies (Toronto), McGill University (Montreal). His broad area of research is the political and cultural history of early modern Europe. Massimo is particularly interested on the ways in which both cultural exchange and political communication occurred in urban public spaces (such as streets and squares) through the interaction of orality and print.**

**Massimo shares the highlights and benefits of his experience as an International Research Fellow with CHE below.**

The Centre's International Visiting Fellow scheme has been a unique opportunity to experience the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies of the University of

Melbourne and the activities of the CHE Melbourne node from the inside. I found the fellowship to be substantial and precious because it enabled me to have a period of time to develop a new area of my research and to place my previous work in the theoretical framework of the history of emotions.

The new work I conducted while at CHE concentrated on a close reading of a collection of early modern Italian printed ballads, focusing on the representation of violence and murder in this popular literature. Examination of material that I had collected from various European libraries allowed me to note particular trends in this genre across the period spanning from the beginning of printing in the late fifteenth century to the early seventeenth century. Particularly striking was the transition from works mostly focused on the famous murders of eminent figures (for example, the Duke of Milan or the Duke of Florence) to a more widespread culture of sensationalism in print and song, recounting the deaths of more ordinary people.

My analysis strongly suggested the emotional aspects of these works; the ways in which the poets or singers ventriloquised the voices of the dead or the murderers, or directly addressed their audiences using evocative language, to stir strong responses and often to convey a moral message. The poetic structures and musical nature of these works and their public performances also had emotional resonances that I am attempting to reconstruct. I am developing this research into a book chapter to be published in 2015 on the history of murder in Renaissance Italy, and it will also feed into my book project on street singers.

I benefitted from the opportunity to present my work and receive feedback from a diverse range of scholars. While in Melbourne I gave a seminar in the 'Early Modern Circle'. My presentation focused on existing work that I had re-fashioned because of my engagement with the history of emotions. It was based on my current book-length project on the figure of the street singer in Renaissance Italy and was entitled 'Playing to the Crowd: street singers, war reporting and the manipulation of emotions in early modern Italy'. I showed how these figures played on the emotions of their audiences, analysing their emotive techniques and considering how their performances were experienced from the point of view of the crowd. Questions and discussions afterwards made me reflect further on how singers of tales are key to understanding the fears, anxieties, interests and desires of ordinary people in Renaissance Italy. Likewise, at University of Sydney, I presented my work at a public lecture entitled 'Murder Ballads and Songs of War', where I gained useful ideas from an interdisciplinary audience (including musicologists and theatre scholars), in particular regarding musical and performative aspects of the early modern ballads.

My research also benefitted very much from the advice of CHE colleagues both in Melbourne and Sydney and from the ideas gained from casual conversations with CHE staff and students (I would thank in particular Charles Zika, John Gagné, Una McIlvenna, Andrea Rizzi, and another international visiting fellow, Laura Kounine). Some of these contacts will develop into future events that will take place in Europe next year (e.g. a study day on the history of emotions and religion will take place at the Italian-German Historical Institute in Trent next March and it will involve Charles Zika).

Overall, during my time at CHE, I think I have learnt the real analytical value of the history of emotions. Instead of providing a predetermined methodological paradigm within which to locate one's research, thinking about emotions helped me

to read old sources with new eyes, to ask new questions and to consider the emotional aspects of areas of my research that I had not thought about before.