



Università  
degli Studi  
di Ferrara

## DIPARTIMENTO DI STUDI UMANISTICI

Auditorium Santa Lucia, Via Ariosto 35

**6 December 2018**

11:00-13:00

**Stephanie Trigg**

Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor

School of Culture and Communication

ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions

The University of Melbourne

***Weeping like a Beaten Child:  
Figurative Language and the Emotions  
in Chaucer and Malory***

This talk analyses Chaucer's and Malory's uses of the simile, *wept like a beaten child*, in two very different contexts. The first, in the comic mode, describes Absolon's emotional state after kissing Alison's behind in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, and the second, more tragically, focuses our attention on the difference between the reaction of Arthur's court and of Lancelot after the healing of Sir Urry in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The use of figurative expressions such as similes, proverbs and metaphors in medieval literary texts, while unable to offer a direct identification of emotions, nonetheless can show us what emotions look and feel like in very precise and nuanced narrative and social contexts. Such similes appeal, as proverbs do, to a conventional or shared understanding that is often emotional or affective, akin to what Reddy terms "emotives." The whole point of a proverbial simile is to explain emotional behavior by rendering it recognizable and familiar. At the same time, the way this simile is handled by Chaucer and Malory also exposes the "literariness" of the characters of Absolon and Lancelot and marks a transition in the psychological narrative of their character. While Malory's is celebrated for its pathos, and Chaucer's is overlooked for its absurdity, other accounts of weeping (for example, from Dante and Boccaccio), taken alongside discussions of tears and considerations of gender, provide historical evidence that medieval artists and audiences thought of emotions in relation to particular, and particularly constructed, literary motifs. What appears on the surface to be a straightforward simile demonstrates how emotions vary across cultural and temporal boundaries.

### DISCUSSANTS

**Paolo Trovato, Professor of Italian Philology**

**Paola Spinozzi, Associate Professor of English Literature**

**Marialuisa Caparrini, Associate Professor of Germanic Philology**