



THE MOVIE OF EMOTIONS (Gaffi, 2007, 2nd edition; 202 pg)

A scientist studies the evolution of the mind. The diary of a neurotic personality. A metanovel about emotions and creativity. And at the start, a question to be answered: “Why can’t I decide to be happy?”.

Plaudit

An essay on emotions in the form of a novel. “A happily experimental novel”

(Filippo La Porta, Il Messaggero)

“A superb novel, authentic...” *(Giancarlo De Cataldo, author of Romanzo criminale)*

“Why can’t I decide to be happy?” - this is the question that encapsulates the meaning behind the story of Gabriele, the main character of the book. A young researcher who has come to Rome from the far south, and also the man behind important discoveries at Yale University regarding the evolution of the brain, Gabriele has huge emotional problems. He wants for nothing, but feels deeply dissatisfied, demotivated and does not know why. He is, above all, obsessed with emotions: he wants to understand how they work and how they come about, what their rules are, what techniques can be used to regulate them, what effect they have on our well-being and on our thought processes. At a particular point in his life, Gabriele decides to learn to regulate his emotions, starting with a scientific study of the workings of the amygdala (an almond shaped, phylogenetically primeval structure, that triggers feelings linked to fear and anger). The whole story unfolds while on an hour long run in Aniene Park in Rome on the last day of the year, during which he has a flash back of the whole of the year that has gone by (2003). The conclusion is one that has an effect of mild alienation. The main character does not so much achieve “happiness “ or manage his emotions as accept (calmly) his weaknesses and powerlessness, plus the list of all the small things that have happened to him over the year that are good. He understands that the principle illness is life itself, and that clearly there is no “cure” for this: the best (almost “Taoist”) decision is in fact to not make decisions, limiting yourself to going along with the natural movement of things (trying to hush the amygdala - always ready to spark off for no reason and to take over our mind: here the amygdala becomes almost an archaic metaphor for the neurotic excess of defence mechanisms that characterise the modern day narcissist). You cannot regulate emotions, just live them (and, at best, talk about them) even though we can give more space, via exercises and techniques (even simple ones) to positive emotions. At the end of the novel, we know much more about the brain, about how emotions and feelings work, about how we can keep certain destructive impulses at bay, and we develop an almost hypnotic interest in Gabriel’s tormented research. An unusual novel that does not fall within classification: enjoyable and lively, captivating and paradoxical. It is borderline literature that mixes registers and genres: the novel, an autobiography, a scientific paper, a diary, but also a manual on how to live. The book is a digital miscellany, made up of a variety of materials: diary pages, sketches, e-mail exchanges with real people (e.g. Nanni Moretti) summaries of films, bits of the news, parts of film scripts, excerpts from scientific papers, jottings. It does not have the true structure of a novel, but can be read as a modern day one, fragmented and hypertextual.



Raffaele Calabretta is a permanent researcher of the Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies of the Italian National Research Council in Rome. For several years he had been a Professor of Educational Technologies at the University of L'Aquila. He has been invited to write papers and hold seminars for the Lincei Academy, the Konrad Lorenz Institute in Vienna, the Royal Society in London, the Santa Fe Institute and UNESCO. He is a member of the New England Systems Institute in Cambridge and regularly works with Yale University. This is his first novel.

Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies
Italian National Research Council (Cnr)
Via S. Martino della Battaglia, 44 00185 Rome, Italy
Tel: +39-06-44595227 Fax +39-06-44595243

E-mail: raffaele.calabretta@istc.cnr.it Home Page <http://laral.istc.cnr.it/rcalabretta>