

A Valentine's Day Blast from the Past: The Museum of Love Letters



Love and the writing of love letters are a central part of Italy's history. These letters tell stories of love lost, love found, and love rekindled. Their most common subjects are immigrants, refugees, and the exiled. In many cases, love letters are forgotten in drawers, in our grandparents' suitcases, or in the attic of our parents' houses. However, one museum looks to highlight the importance of these letters in an intriguing way.

Love letters are a literary genre in themselves. They highlight an incredible range of human emotions: nostalgia, euphoria, frustration, disappointment, joy, jealousy, disagreement, misunderstandings, and kinship. Lovers feel these emotions, almost telepathically, whether they are nearby or far away from each other. Letters such as these shed light on the reality of our loved ones, a reality that we would have otherwise never imagined: nostalgia for their families, for their homeland, for their loved ones left at home, and for pure love. However, many of these letters are lost or forgotten and their messages left unread. Until now, that is.

[Il Museo della Lettera d'Amore](#) [2] in [Torrevecchia Teatina](#) [3] is a unique museum. Most museums



are a collection of historical objects deemed important for the public to see. Sometimes, these items seem arbitrary, and museum visitors tend not to remember what they saw in the exhibits after they leave. However, Il Museo della Lettera d'Amore is different than most other museums.

Il Museo della Lettera d'Amore was founded in 2000. Unlike other museums, this museum was designed to be a "living museum." It contains both new and old letters and provides an engaging experience for its patrons. The museum's goal is to involve its patrons in the letter writers' stories by inviting them to participate in the deciphering of messages. Visitors examine sounds, scents, and images that give them a sense of how to decode the letters' messages. Many of the letters exhibited were collected by way of the concorso (contest) established by the Associazione culturale AbruzziAMOci. Participants submit love letters, and the winners are awarded a monetary prize.

Antonietta Petris and Loris Palma's letters are a wonderful example of classic love letters. Their correspondence began in 1946 when he returned home to Venice, and she remained in [Ampezzo](#) [4] in [Friuli](#) [5]. Their world was turned upside down due to an overseas separation. What followed were love letters that expressed their rational yet passionate love—an idealized love that dealt with solitude and togetherness, dreams and reality, and disappointments and desires. A certain type of love endures in these letters, a love that we hope is not only a sliver of the past but that continues to live on throughout the course of our lives.

On Wednesday, February 15th at 5:30 in the conference room of [Palazzo del Marchese Valignani](#) [6] in Torrevicchia Teatina, [Sonia Cancian](#) [7] (an instructor at [Zayed University of Dubai](#) [8], United Arab Emirates) spoke about the love letters of two emigrants and the emotions behind those letters. Cancian's work focuses heavily on the history of migration; she also focuses on writing, specifically love letters and other personal narratives. She presented her work at events in Canada, the United States, England, Italy, France, Austria, China, and Switzerland. She has written numerous articles for scientific magazines, and she is the author of the book [Families, Lovers, and their Letters: Italian Postwar Migration to Canada](#) [9] (University of Manitoba Press, 2010).

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Links

- [1] <http://iitaly.org/files/letteremuseoabruzzojpg-1>
- [2] <http://www.museoletteradamore.it/museo.htm>
- [3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torrevicchia_Teatina
- [4] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ampezzo>
- [5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friuli-Venezia_Giulia
- [6] <http://www.chietitoday.it/eventi/amore-oltreoceano-lettere-torrevicchia-15-febbraio-2017.html>
- [7] http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/colleges/colleges/__university_college/faculty_and_staff/_dxb/_ids/_profiles/Sonia_Cancian.aspx
- [8] <http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/>
- [9] <https://www.amazon.com/Families-Lovers-their-Letters-Immigration/dp/0887557155>