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Megan Moore, *The Erotics of Grief: Emotions and the Construction of Privilege in the Medieval Mediterranean*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2021. x+204 pp. Appendix, notes, illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 (cl). ISBN 9781501758393. \$32.99 (eb). ISBN 9781501758409.

Response by Megan Moore, University of Missouri

It is with great interest and pleasure that I have read the reviewers' assessments of *The Erotics of Grief*, a monograph that took shape as a result of my long-term fascination with how courtly literature seems to focus on desire in moments that are, in my own experience, moments of aversion—the “ugly cry” moments of grief, from which we moderns turn away, and from which we often imagine desire to be far removed. Why does medieval literature imagine these moments to be charged, rather than fraught, by desire? What does reading with grief and eroticism tell us about the literary depiction of community, and can thinking with these texts under their medieval conditions of production—commissioned by and produced for the very privileged communities they represent—tell us anything about what those communities might have seen in an erotics of grief? Does this tell us anything about the ways emotions might be deployed, read, or received in service of community building (or excluding!) today? These were the questions that propelled my study.

I am grateful to have had four different readers with different disciplinary perspectives explore my work and comment on it, and I am glad to see that the work leaves scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds with varied sets of questions. I hope that this is a sign that the work sparks conversation and could perhaps even produce further scholarship across traditional divides (western medieval studies from Byzantine, North African, or Crusader studies; historical from literary) in our fields. Tracy Adams, a medieval historian of emotions, wonders whether my focus on representation attests in any way to actual lived experiences, and I agree with her that the key to tying literary thematization to any kind of claim about community is through books themselves. Adams offers an intriguing methodological possibility, one which I admit I myself had never considered, but which would offer a compelling starting point: “I imagined that the author of *Erotics of Grief* would locate and define a community of Mediterranean aristocrats, real human beings, who shared a group identity, and then examine writings commissioned by them as fictitious representations of a socio-historical phenomenon: the emotional practices that helped bind them together” (Essay 1). This approach would certainly be a productive way of tying together particular historical aristocratic families across the Mediterranean, as I do in my work on the relation between Charles of Anjou and the manuscript history of *Floriant et Florete* in my first book, *Exchanges in Exoticism*. However, *The Erotics of Grief* was driven by texts, not codices, and I was working from literary representations to explore community, rather than the other way around. It would be fascinating to go back and rework the study from the other angle.

I might, though, nuance Adams's assertion that “the communities referenced in the title of the introductory chapter, ‘Desire and Death in Elite Medieval Emotional Communities,’ exist within

the world of narratives; *they are not real people*” (emphasis mine). I sought to introduce the idea of a reading community, and I explain that I use codicology and reader response theory to read literary thematizations as anchored in a real-life reading community created through the books in question. Though in most instances, we do not have the archival evidence we wish we had to know exactly who figured in these communities, reading with these codices helps give context not only to what the texts thematize, but also to how we might view that thematization as a performance reflective of the community itself. That is, what these books stage is a performance of what these readers want. This is an approach I use not only in *The Erotics of Grief* and *Exchanges in Exoticism*, but also, crucially, in the undergraduate classroom, for in my experience, today’s students have never been confronted with such a foreign set of conditions of production, reception, and literacy as those prevalent in medieval French-speaking communities; students today understand community through the lens of the tenets of the Internet—that is, much more globalized, and with much greater access to narratives, brought by the advent of smartphones and rapid-fire media such as the platform that was Twitter, or TikTok. Yet, as the massive investment in advertising campaigns on these platforms suggest, these are also sites of reading (or at least, consumer) communities. If we can center our readings around a foundational methodological story about medieval reading communities and medieval audiences—that lay, vernacular codices and the stories they contained were almost exclusively paid for, produced for, and consumed by elite readers, who sometimes even dictated content—then we center our understanding of these books as fundamentally in dialogue with a community of users. This is a kind of conversation with readers not wholly unlike those consuming media today, but with a different set of conventions, privileges, and expectations. If medieval stories are staging grief as a fundamental delineation of the emotional bonds of that community, then, in my thinking, grief must be fundamental to noble community commissioning these manuscripts in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

And, to go further, I argue that there is an underlying Mediterranean quality to this thematization because these stories and their codices interpellate and redeploy foundational Mediterranean myths. Nuria Silleras-Fernandez, whose work focuses on literatures of the Iberian Mediterranean, offers a counter to Adams’s questions about actual Mediterranean communities, for her focus in her review, like mine in my book, is on the textual communities that use fictional imaginings of community to cement the Mediterranean and its literary motifs as a site for exploring practices of elite community. Silleras-Fernandez writes of a Mediterranean where “the same classical and medieval texts discussed in *The Erotics of Grief* also circulated and were translated—first in a courtly context, and eventually more broadly, after the proliferation of the printing press in the late 1400s”—that is, where the exchange and circulation of myths and motifs implies shared textual communities, even across borders of language, confession, or geography (Essay 2). I found Silleras-Fernandez’s essay particularly compelling not only for its contribution to broadening the possibilities for a Mediterranean elite emotional community, but for the particular ways extrapolating my work to a later, Iberian context raises questions about how elite literary representations are in conflict with conduct manuals from the late medieval/Early Modern period—that is, how representations of emotions differ from prescriptions, theory from practice. Conduct manuals would be a wonderful site for exploring the tensions between two potentially different, but overlapping kinds of communities: book users and elite young adults.

Joseph Derosier's work focuses on sovereignty and bodies in Old French romances of the thirteenth century, and his review draws out my attempt to negotiate an erotics of grief in both a contemporary, medieval Mediterranean textual community and a classical, Mediterranean past deployed as negotiation and exchange among the elites consuming those motifs repurposed within twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts. Like Silleras-Fernandez, Derosier's review contrasts my work with a wonderfully enriching and competing emotional community, as he compares my work on the *Roman d'Enéas* in chapter three, where I focus on Dido's abandonment of grieving her dead husband, with the schoolboys reading the *Aeneid* who weep over Dido in Marjorie Curry Woods's recent study. Here, schoolboys are akin to the consumers of conduct manuals in Silleras-Fernandez's review—they are an actual reading community destined to be morally educated and impacted by the texts they were consuming. Whereas the medieval text and the citizens within the text both castigate Dido for abandoning her grief, the moral lesson taught to the schoolboys seems to be the opposite: schoolboys were prescribed to mourn Dido, but markedly *not* her husband. As Derosier rightly points out, there is a productive tension in pairing complementary sites of analysis: “[r]eading Moore and Woods’s work on Dido with each other illustrates the important of contexts, from location (elite literary culture vs. a classroom) to content (vernacular romance vs. Latinate epic)” (Essay 3).

Glenn Burger's review offers another fruitful tension that my own work did not explore fully: the differences between *fin'amor*, eroticism, and pre-modern sexuality, and his questions on the afterlives of what the erotics of grief might do if situated in a later medieval context are compelling and provocative. Burger locates the wonderful questions about these afterlives as outside the historical scope of my study (indeed! I did limit my work for just the reasons he suggests), but I find them compelling, nonetheless. He rightly suspects that one of the goals of my study was to “think outside the traditional box of ‘romantic love’ as the defining mode of writing and expressing aristocratic privilege in this period,” (Essay 4) and his challenge to entwine my erotics of grief further with *fin'amor* may prove fruitful for others working on courtly love and emotions in medieval literature—as Burger suggests, there is space to nuance and enrich my argument by situating it as one strand of emotional practices of the elite, in competition and collaboration with other practices, other strands, and his observation that it is only the elite who can choose inaction, who can choose violence as a form of power, or of desire, is very apt. In considering the later ramifications of my argument about the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Burger asserts that desire and love are transformed into something entirely different in the later Middle Ages, delineating their later incarnation as markedly different from earlier noble practices: “[e]nnobling love in such a secularized sex/gender system becomes more a set of performances available to new as well as established elites rather than a coherent structure of feeling that performatively enunciates the inherent value of aristocratic privilege” (Essay 4). But, I would query whether this neat historical distinction holds: is Enide not an impoverished newcomer to her twelfth-century court, fully outside of established power structures, and yet does she not mobilize the erotics of grief in service of “buying her way in” to privilege? In testing various scenarios in which these erotics may or may not have fruitful purchase in a late medieval or Early Modern afterlife among elites, Burger offers compelling reasons to further probe formulations of *fin'amor* in current scholarship. Do the increasingly “restrained” and “civilized” elites of François I's court, for example, practice elite community through emotional transgression? How might the *Rose* and its reception, which I point to in my conclusion, offer keys to thinking further with eroticism and its organizing functions for an evolving early modern elite?

Pairing these essays produces an incredibly rich set of questions that I hope point to a possible afterlife for this scholarly conversation. Adams's review offers a productive tension with the others' willingness to agree that the Mediterranean is a forceful literary and (because of patronage systems and the conditions of book production) literal underpinning for elite emotional practices, for she invites a more careful elaboration of just how the erotics of grief circulated among medieval Mediterranean communities tied by marriage and unusual access to privilege. Reading Silleras-Fernandez and Derosier together poses questions about why some literary genres fantasize about eroticizing and propagating grief, while others do not. A future study might consider how and why the emotional prescriptions of fiction are in tension with the moralizing force of these other, foundational books—grammars, conduct manuals—destined for elite readers. I imagine this kind of reading could do work akin to Peggy McCracken's illuminating study of the tension between the literary thematization of adultery and its competing relationship to anxieties about noble lineage.[1] A similar, fruitful tension arises in pairing Derosier and Burger, who each point to ways of enriching my work by following eroticism further—in the case of Derosier, through the emotional practices of weeping schoolboys consuming Dido's story as a didactic, moralizing exemplar, and in the case of Burger, through nuanced interplay with *fin'amor* that creates a more complex picture with collaborative and sometimes competing models for emotional practices among the medieval elite.

NOTES

[1] Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

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