

REVIEW OF “ALONE TOGETHER: POETICS OF THE PASSIONS IN LATE MEDIEVAL IBERIA” BY HENRY BERLIN

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Working in response to a tradition of generalized accounts of medieval history, Henry Berlin's *Alone Together: Poetics of the Passions in Late Medieval Iberia* emphasizes the works of individual poets to capture the isolation resulting from classical views on emotional turmoil, and the use of creative prose and poetry to suggest an alternative to ethical solitude. In an effort to acclimate the reader to the tightly oriented lens with which he views the selected poems, Berlin begins *Alone Together* with a discussion of the roots of Iberian philosophy during the 14th and 15th centuries, proceeding from the debates on reason and emotion most familiar to a modern audience to those whose focus is more obscure.

The first chapter unfurls the backdrop of Aristotelian and Ciceronian Stoic conceptions of friendship to emphasize the medieval metaphysical hierarchies which eschew the demonization of sentiment as the enemy of rational behavior, notions that saw reason, and its encompassed relationships, as purified by positive, essentially emotional, intent. While Berlin spends little time on the details of conflict and intrigue in Iberian court life, the implication of strife facing the featured authors lends context to the stress placed upon relationships and mutual order as key redeeming components of personal affection. This theme continues throughout the second chapter, a close study of Alfonso de Madrigal, and into the first half of the third, which covers the work of King Duarte I of Portugal. In characterizing Alfonso de Madrigal, who ended his career as Bishop of Avila, Berlin begins with Madrigal's questions concerning divine friendship and self-reflection, painting him as viewing sentiment-founded relationships and the human requirement of company in a neutral spiritual light. In contrast, Berlin depicts King Duarte as presenting emotions as positive only when the dutiful subject of rational understanding. However, Duarte's and his subjects' approach to literature allows the book to progress to its true topic: the use of

troubadour poems to explore and, in some cases, challenge the dominant hierarchy of reason and sentiment as inimical inverses. More specifically, the concept of poetry, with its specialized vocabulary and alternative use of grammar, is displayed as a medium uniquely situated to grapple with the special case of love, linking the moral theories of medieval Iberians to their self-searching verses and capably transferring the reader's interest between ethics and poetics.

In addition to drawing connections between verse and medieval civic morality, the second half of the book begins by tying Iberian courtly poetics to monastic trends developed since the Desert Fathers, dwelling on the links between compassion, memory, and prayer which form the backbones of the lyrical expressions in question. In chapter four, which further contextualizes the poetry with a presentation of theories on the necessity of communal empathy for spiritual clarity and proper religious interpretation, Berlin acknowledges that an alternative to strict asceticism already existed in Christian philosophy, setting up the works of late medieval troubadours as continuations of both traditions, each distinctly aware of their place in the conflict between Stoicism and sympathetic piety. Beginning with an examination of the word *comunaleza*, a term referring to religious, political, and social bonds and their attached responsibilities, chapter five deepens Berlin's dive into the accepted, if somewhat scandalous, forms of empathetic invocation by presenting a variety of poems involving quotation and allusion, with sources ranging from other troubadours to Psalmic structures to Christ himself. These citations allowed poets to both form a consistent amorous vocabulary and adduce the love and sorrow present in Biblical narratives in their prayers to deified Love, capitalizing on the irreproachable status of the Passion while referencing their own suffering to incur pity.

After establishing the literary conventions of shared empathy, Berlin turns from poetry to sentimental fiction in chapter seven and presents a handful of early prose complaints against love — each seeking compassionate acknowledgement from their object of desire — in the context of political turmoil and a increase, perhaps linked to instability, in the general focus on morality. The chapter ends with close readings of *Sátira de infelice e felice vida* and *Tragédia de la insigne reina doña Isabel* by Don Pedro, Constable of Portugal. In the former, the personifications of Prudence and Discretion appear in a series of debates concerning the implications of having free will while allowing love to dominate one's life and the ethical status of the author's unloving beloved, and the latter returns to themes of inappropriate emotion, in this case grief, which might be amended by feelings of community. Berlin devotes the final section to the works of Ausiàs March, a Valencian poet known for his use of open self-reflection to convey individualism and his conscious response to troubadour lyrics.

Ultimately, *Alone Together* compiles an impressive number of close readings, translations, and glosses of era-specific poetic terms, providing a strong resource for scholars looking to compare works of the period. However, while the historical details of Iberian politics are clearly presented when directly relevant to the verses presented, the book itself would be best read by those with some knowledge of Spanish or Portuguese literature, as a certain number of untranslated or ambiguous terms permeate the text, which could prove confusing to monolingual English scholars or those unfamiliar with the field.