

# Introduction

*Lisa Perfetti*

One moment she's singing, the next she's thinking;  
Now she laughs, and then she'll cry.  
Her mood changes greatly in the blink of an eye!<sup>1</sup>

Emotionally unstable, moody, subject to emotional outbursts, unpredictable, cause of social upheaval: this was a common medieval view of woman. Medical, philosophical, and theological traditions conspired to create this portrait of the weaker, more emotional sex, one that is so familiar to us that we have come to take it for granted. Stereotypes about emotional women endure today, but the understanding of emotions in the Middle Ages differed in significant ways from our own, and we must attend to cultural differences in order to interpret representations of emotion in their proper context. While emotions have emerged as an important and lively subject of concern among medievalists in recent years, gender has only occasionally been applied as a primary category of analysis.<sup>2</sup> As the first study devoted specifically to women's emotions in the medieval and early modern period, this volume is intended to initiate discussion among scholars through an examination of case studies demonstrating the range of factors that shape the representation of women's emotions.

The essays of this collection examine the importance of factors like class and ethnicity in determining attitudes toward emotions and consider the impact of the belief in female emotional volatility upon women's participation in public and private life. The contributors also explore how the assumption of female emotionality might have influenced women's perceptions of their own emotions. Attention to these issues promises to bring particularly valuable new insights to bear on our understanding of several subjects that have recently been of interest to medievalists, such as

women's roles in family relationships and friendships, the place of conduct or courtesy literature in female socialization and education, and same-sex love or friendship among women, just to name a few. An awareness of the various contexts that shape the representation of emotions like love, hate, sadness, or anger will enable us to gain more insight into women's experiences as wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends.

It goes without saying that texts written more than five hundred years ago inform us more about emotional conventions and standards than about actual emotions. The poems, epics, plays, legal texts, devotional prose, and other texts the authors analyze give us insights into whether women were encouraged to express particular emotions like anger or grief and in what contexts, but are less helpful for telling us whether emotions were qualitatively different for medieval women.<sup>3</sup> Emotional standards do, however, affect personal judgments about our emotions and therefore influence how we feel. Thus, representations of women's emotions in medieval and early modern texts indicate the stereotypes and expectations about proper emotional expression and behavior that would have circumscribed how individual women processed their feelings and allow us to imagine how medieval women might "navigate" the complicated web of social norms and cultural values that define and give meaning to emotions.<sup>4</sup>

An obvious challenge to our investigation is that few texts of the medieval period are known to have been authored by women, and so in many cases we are looking at emotions described by men; patriarchal ideology and ideas about masculinity are also at stake in these accounts. Some of the essays of this collection consider whether female authors were more likely to resist stereotypical discourse on women's emotions in their own writing. Another challenge is the enormous time span of the period in question. The primary texts studied in this volume range from the twelfth through the seventeenth century, and theoretical background reaches back to classical authors such as Aristotle. For convenience, in this introduction I use the term "medieval" to refer to material that reaches into the early modern period. Historians of emotion have often sought to establish turning points in emotional standards, arguing that such shifts illuminate other forms of social change, such as changes in family structure or labor practices.<sup>5</sup> Although not the central focus of this book, historical shifts in the representation of emotion within the medieval period or between the Middle Ages and the early modern era are addressed in several of the essays. Ann Matter traces the increasingly interiorized understanding of

emotion that begins to resemble modern psychology, and the essays by Elena Carrera, Katharine Goodland, and Valerie Allen explore the impact of various emerging Christian doctrines and movements on the conceptualization of emotion.

Whether or not medieval and early modern views of emotion differ in any significant way, what is clear from these essays is that the Middle Ages were far from emotionally primitive and childlike, as Norbert Elias and others had imagined them to be prior to the “civilizing process” of the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The diverse genres and sociocultural contexts engaged by these essays give us a picture of a complex period with competing discourses at work in the shaping of attitudes toward women’s emotions, discourses that cannot be reduced to a unitary system or code.<sup>7</sup>

The essays have been chosen for the diversity of their material and have been arranged in a way that brings out connections between them. The first two essays of the volume provide theoretical background on medical, philosophical, and theological traditions at the heart of medieval conceptions of emotion. Ann Matter discusses theories of the passions and humors and traces their influence on the affective piety of several female religious leaders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. James Paxson analyzes gendered aspects of classical and medieval rhetoric as a context for understanding Hildegard of Bingen’s use of female personification in the *Ordo Virtutum*.

The next two essays also focus on religious literature: Elena Carrera studies the use of emotions by Mechthild of Magdeburg, Angela of Foligno, and Teresa of Avila, and Katharine Goodland examines the representation of grieving women in several British Lazarus plays. Following Goodland’s discussion of grief, Wendy Pfeffer’s essay looks at the sorrow expressed in a quite different context: the twelfth- and thirteenth-century French lyrics written in women’s voices. Anger is the focus of the next two essays: Kristi Gourlay’s on *Fierabras*, a late twelfth-century French chanson de geste, and Sarah Westphal’s on medieval German legal and fictional texts. The final essay, by Valerie Allen, considers the medieval Christian understanding of shame both in the theoretical writings of thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas and in penitential manuals and literary texts.

While each study bases its conclusions on specific contexts, the essays taken as a whole lay much-needed groundwork for exploring why beliefs about women’s emotionality were so prevalent and what implications these beliefs had for women’s participation in public and private life. Two thematic strands running throughout the essays are the fundamental im-

portance of medieval views about the body in understanding how emotions were gendered and the importance of class and ethnicity in determining the particular values attributed to women's emotion. Another theme recurring in several essays is the key function of emotions as indicators of communal identity, which also determined how specific emotional expression or behavior in women could be either valued or denigrated. Finally, all of the essays go beyond an explanation of stereotypes about female emotionality or emotion standards to consider how women responded to such stereotypes and how they understood and used their own emotions.

### Emotions and the Body

Emotions are popularly understood in terms of a binary separating passion from reason and feeling from thinking. Anyone studying emotion today, whether in the field of anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, or literary theory, understands how oversimplified this binary is, for cognition and emotion are processes that are highly interdependent.<sup>8</sup> The popular view of emotion as the opposite of reason has its roots in medieval and classical conceptions of the body. Under the influence of Aristotle and others, medieval philosophers and theologians viewed sexual difference according to a binary that defined the body as female and the mind as male.<sup>9</sup> Thought to be less endowed with the rational faculties that enable one to control the passions, women were considered to be more emotional than men, a belief that persists in many respects today.<sup>10</sup> One might even say that in the medieval way of thinking, emotions *were* female. In his essay on medieval personification, James Paxson argues that the tendency to personify abstract concepts like emotions as female came from the deep structure of classical rhetoric that hinges on a series of associations: since the body is female, and since the use of rhetorical figures is associated with the body because they give form to (or "embody") abstract thought, then rhetorical figures are associated with femininity.

The belief in women's bodily predisposition to emotionality was also based upon the notion that the human body is composed of four qualities (hot, cold, moist, and dry) that produce a certain "complexion," a notion related to the theory of the four humors determining both physical health and character. While the humors were found in both sexes—a man and a woman whose dominant humor was black bile would both be "melancholic," for example—it was thought that the female body was colder and moister than the male body. This inferior heat in women, which was used

to explain many female “imperfections,” tended to produce the notion that women were more emotionally volatile than men, whose hot and dry constitution kept them more stable. While both men and women could suffer physical and character defects from a lack of balance of the four humors, woman’s generally cold and moist complexion was viewed as the cause of her weakness and susceptibility to passions, which she was less able to control.<sup>11</sup> The humoral conception of emotion explains why tears and laughter, which we commonly think of as opposite behaviors, were both attributed more often to women.<sup>12</sup> A belief that a woman’s uterus (Greek *hyster*) could wander about her body further contributed to the idea that women were hysterical.<sup>13</sup>

Because emotions were seen as connected to the heavily gendered body, specific emotions were also likely to be represented differently according to gender. Kristi Gourlay’s essay discusses the belief that women’s anger was not brief and easily extinguishable like men’s, but longer-lasting, smoldering because of women’s cold and wet constitution. This belief had important consequences for women’s legal status. Whereas men could plead innocence because their crime was committed in a heated moment of anger (“chaude colle”), women had to look for other mitigating circumstances since their “cold” anger was seen to be smoldering and enduring, thus more likely to lead to a premeditated murder than to a crime of passion. While the ability of men to claim “hot anger” as a defense seems to contradict the overall view of “cold” women as more emotional, anger was by nature a “hot” emotion, associated with cholera; the distinction in this case is primarily between the brief duration of male anger, or *temporary* loss of reason, and the enduring, perpetually irrational state of the angry woman.

Beliefs about female embodiment also meant that women’s emotions were often sexually coded. In her essay Valerie Allen contrasts the representation of male shame, which encompasses a broad range of behavior related to social estate, with the almost exclusively sexual nature of women’s shame. Similarly, in Sarah Westphal’s discussion of the *Sachsenspiegel*, a body of German customary law, the shameful behavior of the female defendant Calefurnia in a court of law is explicitly characterized as sexual: her angry challenge is visually displayed in the exposure of her “shameful parts” before her male audience, a sexual display that the *Sachsenspiegel* uses to justify denying women legal subjecthood.

As with the popular understanding of emotions today, in the Middle Ages emotions seemed to have a spontaneous power and force of their

own. Ann Matter's essay describes the premodern view of emotions (or "passions") that considered humans as a microcosm reflecting larger forces in the cosmos. Accordingly, the position of the stars, the cardinal directions, the essential elements of all creation and the humors of the body all served to influence human nature. The word "emotion," although not used until the nineteenth century to describe feelings, contains in its etymology the idea of movement: it comes from the Latin *movēre*, "to move out from."<sup>14</sup> Both medieval and modern views of emotion thus include an idea of the force of movement, a kind of passion exerting its force on the body.

But Matter reminds us that in the Middle Ages, before the development of modern psychology, these forces were seen as coming from the outside rather than from within. Whereas today we tend to validate emotions as purely felt, as authentic sources of self-knowledge, some states such as envy and anger could be considered sins, which would have important implications for medieval views of the relationship between emotions and behavior (see below). Christian teaching instructed the faithful to channel the passions appropriately and vigilantly through conscious and rational meditation and prayer. For example, in the *Psychomachia*, a popular Latin text of the fifth century, opposing virtues and vices (such as patience and anger) go to war in the individual's soul. While representing the individual's emotional life as a battlefield between forces from outside the self, the *Psychomachia* also teaches that the individual who understands and attends to this cosmic battle is armed with the spiritual weapons to prevail. Paxson notes in his essay that Hildegard of Bingen's personified Joyful Soul (Felix Anima) falls from her joyful state to become unhappy ("infelix") upon being reminded by the devil (Diabolus) of her embodiment. It is the personified virtues such as humility, charity, and faith that enable the soul to fight off the attacks of Diabolus. So, although the bodily passions were seen as coming from outer forces, they were not viewed as fixed, predetermined, or beyond control. Concerted efforts of the mind could even alter the body's humors. As Ann Matter points out, although a melancholic woman was believed to be predisposed to mystical rapture by nature, a woman who dedicated herself to constant and intense mental activity could actually develop melancholy.

In late medieval piety, beliefs about female embodiment allowed for a certain privileging of women's emotions. In her essay Matter notes that, ironically, women's presumed embodiment, which generally resulted in their lower social status, actually led to the widespread assumption that

women's sanctity was inherent because their embodiment predisposed them to participate mystically in the Passion of Christ. Carrera also discusses the positive associations with women's bodily expressions of mysticism, pointing out that the Church Fathers taught that the Scriptures must not only be understood intellectually but also experienced emotionally. All Christians, whether men or women, were taught to experience and emulate Christ's suffering and to cultivate a knowledge of God through intense feelings of love and joy.

### Class and Ethnicity

The association between the feminine and the body meant that women, regardless of social class or status, were to some extent viewed as a group apart from men, a "fourth estate." In medieval penitential manuals, as Valerie Allen explains in her study, the primary distinction made among penitents was gender, and confessors were urged to be particularly careful when confessing female penitents. But other questions of status could either reinforce or obviate the negative associations between women and emotion. Elena Carrera remarks that access to education was limited for women, but also for the majority of men; differences in emotional expression in devotional literature may have had as much to do with the level of formal training as to expectations about gender. Sarah Westphal describes how Roman law denied certain legal rights to an entire group, comprised of women, sexual deviants, outlaws, blind men, and those who fight beasts by profession. Westphal comments that this odd group seems to be defined by association with taboos concerning the body, sexuality, and animal contact. The stigma against women is thus based in a larger concern about embodiment and animality, shared by other low-status groups.

Psychological studies today show that the perceived excessive emotionality of women continues to be attributed both to lower classes and to ethnic others.<sup>15</sup> In medieval texts, noblewomen are more likely to be represented as emotionally stable and rational compared to women of lower birth.<sup>16</sup> Katharine Goodland observes in her essay that the one Lazarus play that does not portray women as mourning extravagantly is also the one in which the women are of noble birth. The most stoic of female figures in the religious dramas, these aristocratic women are also represented as the most heroic. Laughter, like lament, was also attributed more often to lower classes and ethnic others (and children, it could be added), and conduct literature made clear that noblewomen in particular should control

movements of the body and avoid excessive laughter, which ill befitted their noble station.<sup>17</sup> When emotional behavior in women was justified, it was often by reason of class or status. For example, a woman's anger or sorrow upon being forced to marry against her wishes was likely to be viewed with sympathy when the man was of lower social station, as a case discussed by Wendy Pfeffer indicates.

The association between ethnic others and emotionality is explored in essays by Gourlay and Westphal. Gourlay documents how medieval didactic and literary texts repeatedly imagined Saracens as innately violent and prone to fits of rage. Gourlay explains that this view stemmed in part from the notion that because Arabs lived in hot and dry climates, they were correspondingly hot-tempered by nature.<sup>18</sup> Gourlay argues that it is because of her Saracen identity that the heroine of *Fierabras* is permitted to display violent outbursts of rage, normally considered ill suited to a medieval princess, who is expected to be modest, quiet, and passive. Gourlay adds, however, that the heroine's anger, while permissible, is also laughable, and may have provided high entertainment value for medieval audiences. Sarah Westphal, too, points to the shaping force of ethnicity in *Die Mörin* (The Moorish Woman), a "trial poem." Whereas the white queen defendant is able eventually to cool her anger, the black queen holds to her anger, compromising a communal accord negotiated by the other plaintiffs in the fictional trial.

### Emotion, Behavior, and Community

Emotions serve the key function of enabling the individual to adapt to environmental conditions and to feel a sense of belonging to a community defined by certain standards of behavior. As one anthropologist has defined them, emotions are "self-concerning, partly physical responses that are at the same time aspects of a moral or ideological attitude; emotions are both feelings and cognitive constructions, linking person, action, and sociological milieu."<sup>19</sup> Emotions have an adaptive social function in all cultures, where standards of behavior shape how individuals perceive and express their emotions. Where medieval and modern views of the social function of emotions most differ is in the way that they view the situation or direction of the emotions. In the Middle Ages, emotions are not inner feelings that serve to constitute a highly individuated self with a unique personality. They are oriented outward and define the individual's relationship to a community. In his well-known study on honor and humilia-

tion in early Icelandic sagas, William Ian Miller explains that emotions function more as a “social state” or condition. For example, the proclaimed grief of a man whose murdered father has been unavenged functions as a “justificatory argument” enabling the son to take punitive action.<sup>20</sup> The man may well be experiencing the pain we commonly feel when losing our loved ones, but the saga’s concern is to assess how his feelings position him relationally to others and what social outcomes they will produce. His grief is not a private feeling whose significance resides in the moment; it is part of the “habitus” of the warrior and as such situates him within an ethos where the performance of grief demonstrates that death demands retribution.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Daniel Smail has emphasized a similar performative aspect of emotion in the court records of late medieval Marseille. The key emotions of love and hate, which could determine the legitimacy of a legal grievance or the reliability of a witness called to testify, were seen not as internal states of mind but rather “as patterned behaviors and performances.”<sup>22</sup> What is emphasized is not an individual psychological state but rather the relationships that define one’s position relative to other individuals, families, and groups.

The court records Smail examines also indicate the medieval tendency to blur the line between affect and behavior. The prosecutors sought not to establish whether individuals had feelings of love or hate for another but rather whether they existed in a *state* of affection or enmity; the behaviors (such as having a meal together or sleeping in the same house) were seen less as consequences of emotion than as constitutive of it. In his essay on the virtues in the *Ordo Virtutum*, Paxson notes the difficulty of separating emotions like love, fear, and happiness from behavioral states like chastity. All serve as “emotional regulators” that properly situate the individual in the larger ethical and moral universe.

This is not to say that there was no distinction made between inner feeling and outer behavior. Penitential manuals instructed people to feel truly contrite in their hearts; they must not simply speak words of remorse without feeling them. In medieval misogynistic discourse, women were often accused of faking emotion, and their tears were particularly suspect. An especially interesting emotion is shame, perhaps the most social of emotions, as Valerie Allen notes in her essay. For Aquinas, shame was an involuntary passion, evidenced in the sudden blush when the blood rushes to the face, but also rationally motivated and consciously cultivated because it was related to the virtue of temperance, which protected one from sinning. Women, stigmatized by their inherent carnality, were par-

ticularly burdened by the need to demonstrate that their shame was “naked” and their confession sincere. Yet, however problematic the link between the display of behavior and the sincerity of emotion, medieval texts clearly indicate that the concern is with what the emotions reveal about the individual’s relationship to a community, whether defined in political, religious, or other terms.<sup>23</sup>

Attention to this “outward-orienting” social function of emotions can help us to interpret moments of highly charged emotions in medieval texts without imposing our own values. A good example is the medieval French poems, discussed by Pfeffer, where women experience pain as a result of being married to men chosen for them by their families. Commonly thought of as poems about “unhappily” married women, the *chansons de malmariée* are more literally songs about *poorly* or *inappropriately* married women whose spouses are too old, are of inferior social status, or mistreat them. Are we justified in labeling these women “unhappy”? What would it mean for them to be “happy”? The most obvious problem in answering this question is that emotion words rarely convey the same semantic field across cultures.<sup>24</sup> The modern English word “happy” encompasses a different semantic range than the Latin *felix*, and Old French *joie* is quite different from our sense of either “happiness” or “joy.” Even though all cultures have some concept of happiness, this concept varies according to the beliefs and values of each culture. Here we touch upon the ongoing debate over whether any emotions can be said to be universal, or whether all emotion is always socially constructed and culturally contingent.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps one of the most important distinctions made by those who argue for the primacy of culture is the difference between collectivistic and individualistic societies.<sup>26</sup> According to the standards of individualistic cultures, a woman who marries a man chosen by her family might be viewed as sacrificing her personal happiness, whereas she would be viewed as feeling emotionally fulfilled in collectivistic cultures where “happiness” comes from feeling one has played one’s proper role in achieving collective goals. Given the debate over how the “individual” or the “self” was understood in the Middle Ages, the “collectivist” label should probably not be applied to medieval society in the way it is used to refer to societies in non-Western cultures today.<sup>27</sup> The distinction does, however, offer a helpful way to reframe our approach to the question of the unhappy women of the Old French lyric.

In addition to the *chanson de malmariée*, Pfeffer discusses a *jeu-parti*

(debate poem) in which a woman and man debate the relative merits of marrying a spouse chosen by one's family. The woman affirms that she would rather marry the man her friends and family (her "privez") had chosen for her than a man she loved but whom her family did not approve. The respect and love of her community are more important to her than "true love." To view her as an unhappy victim is to misunderstand her sense of identity. The lady's intellectual speech on the rational reasons for her choice does differ quite markedly from the emotional complaints of the women in the contemporaneous *chanson de malmariée*. These women who describe their husbands and family with insulting words and vividly name their pain or sorrow seem more clearly "unhappy." Yet even though they express what we could fairly call unhappiness, other emotions seem even more important, such as their anger at the family who chose poorly for them, their devotion to their secret lovers, or their feeling of satisfaction that they will make their husbands cuckolds. Putatively about the woman's unhappiness, the poems elevate the woman's depth of love and fidelity to her lover, and highlight the imminent shame of the husband. The women's unhappiness is thus intertwined with a range of other emotions, beliefs, thoughts, and expectations (including expectations of literary genre) that make this emotion culturally distinct.

The important social regulatory function attributed to emotions had particular implications for women's participation in public life. Women's greater emotional volatility was cited as the primary reason why they needed men as guardians and protectors who could act in their economic, political, or legal interest. Sarah Westphal shows how the *Sachsenspiegel* uses the fictional story of the female defendant Calefurnia as justification for forbidding women to plead their own case in court. It is noteworthy that Calefurnia's anger resembles the standard and approved legal disposition of *zorn* belonging to the epic male hero, whose anger is righteous and requires action. Yet Calefurnia's act of mooning the emperor relegates her *zorn* to the bodily realm and empties it of any legal efficacy. Her anger, affirms the *Sachsenspiegel*, is only private, lacking the gravitas of male anger; it thus disqualifies women from acting publicly on their own behalf.

In her essay on anger, Kristi Gourlay points to similar concerns about women's agency. Expressions of anger by a woman could be positive; for example, a woman should react angrily if her chastity is threatened, since this is her most valuable asset, to be zealously guarded. However, any public action should be taken by the men in the family, who would act on her behalf. Female anger, then, is valorized as a force that motivates the male to

action. When it does not, it is castigated as an affront to male authority and a threat to social harmony, as the Calefurnia story vividly shows. Valerie Allen draws similar conclusions about the need for male guardianship in her discussion of shame. The association between shame and sexuality meant that women, naturally more prone to shameful acts and thoughts, needed men to control them and monitor their behavior. Moreover, using the example of Arthur and Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Allen points out how the men's shame is viewed positively since it spurs them on to actions that will recover the honor of the whole court. By contrast, when female characters experience shame in literary texts, they generally shrink back in silence.

Katharine Goodland's study on grieving women is particularly noteworthy in explaining how a specific emotion can change valence depending on prevailing social norms. In pre-Christian times, when women were in charge of performing ritual lamentation for the dead, their wailing, tears, and rending of garments had the positive function of ensuring the safe passage of the soul to the afterlife and perpetuating the memory of the dead among the living. Their tears not only were sanctioned by men but were necessary to a culture of male heroism. With the advent of Christianity, and its emphasis on a stoic acceptance of death as a passage to a higher life with God, women's lament takes on negative associations. The grieving women of the Lazarus plays are criticized by men for their ungodly tears. In one play the women are urged to at least do their weeping in private. The women's potentially blasphemous displays of emotion must be reined in by the men, whose more levelheaded adherence to Christian doctrine entitles them to play a more public and visible role. Yet it should be noted that women were often thought to be naturally compassionate, and their emotional sensitivity was often valued, particularly in the private sphere. In his *Manual for Confessors* (ca. 1215), Thomas of Chobham urged wives to use their persuasive powers (especially in bed) to "soften the heart" of any husband who was neglecting his duties as a Christian. Her power to provoke feelings of generosity and mercy in him could be more effective than the words of the priest.<sup>28</sup> The wife's "preaching" in private could thus lead to better public behavior on the part of the husband.

### Women's Understanding and Use of Their Emotions

The concern that men showed over women's public display of emotion raises questions about the extent to which women could make use of their

own emotions and, more fundamentally, the extent to which they consciously understood their own emotions as connected to their status as female. In the texts studied in this volume, there are no examples of women who refer directly to stereotypes of female emotionality or who speak of their emotions as particularly feminine. The religious women discussed by Matter and Carrera embrace their emotional displays of piety, but do not overtly announce such displays as uniquely feminine gifts. Carrera does note that female mystics generally displayed more visual and theatrical manifestations of emotion such as weeping, tearing at their garments, or proclaiming aloud their mystical visions. Male religious writers recounted the emotional experiences that brought them closer to God, but they did not include such visual displays in their accounts. Wendy Pfeffer argues that women who composed love poetry also spoke with more emotion than their male counterparts; while both male and female poets use words to describe their pain, the women express their pain more vociferously. Other literary examples bear out the notion of women's greater intensity of emotional expression.<sup>29</sup>

Written accounts of women's emotional displays cannot be taken at face value, but they may reflect some actual differences according to gender. Current studies on gender and emotion suggest that women tend to express themselves in more visibly emotional ways because they have internalized stereotypes about women's emotionality.<sup>30</sup> An example of a medieval text that points to a similar internalizing effect is in Pfeffer's essay, which discusses the topos in courtly love poetry of the haughty and cruel lady who rejects her devoted suitor. Pfeffer notes that whereas the male poet directs his suffering outward by blaming the pitiless lady for not granting him her love, songs in women's voices often direct their suffering inward, such as one lyric in which the lady castigates herself for her "cold heart" and regrets that she did not show mercy to her suitor. This blame of self is taken even further in other poems where a distraught woman entertains thoughts of suicide, a motif that is shared by romance heroines such as Chrétien's Enide and that seems to be more common among female characters than males. Carrera also notes that Angela of Foligno, upon gaining some prominence for her religious teachings (which made her an object of envy), began to internalize accusations of fraud leveled against her. She reproached herself for hypocritically posing as a holy woman when she was full of her own hidden sins, and condemned herself for misleading and endangering other souls. Although in one sense a simple imitation of the model of Christian humility, Angela's rhetoric of self-loathing also

suggests particular anxiety about how the increasing public attention she was receiving was at odds with expectations that women not preach in public. A study of self-reproach, suicide, and other forms of hatred of self as they are found in literary and devotional texts in women's voices would be quite useful in helping us to think further about this internalizing of emotion stereotypes.

While medieval women may have internalized stereotypes about women's emotionality, other examples in this book suggest ways that women resisted them. Pfeffer demonstrates that women *trouvères* exhibit not extreme or erratic shifts in emotion but rather emotional constancy. Women who suffer as the result of being unloved or of having lost their lovers suffer consistently and swear that their pain will endure. As conduct manuals and literary texts amply illustrate, women were instructed to mold their emotions to the needs of their husbands.<sup>31</sup> The cobbler of a French farce, for example, brags that his wife is "like made of wax: I have only to ask her to laugh and she does. If I feel like crying, she cries. She can laugh and cry simultaneously. I do with her what I like."<sup>32</sup> As Carrera points out in her essay, Teresa of Avila explicitly rejected this ideology of wifely malleability; rather, she extolled the religious life by reminding her nuns that they are brides of Christ, who unlike a mortal husband will adapt to *their* emotional states, accepting their joy or their sorrow.

A particularly interesting case of a revision of paradigms about female emotionality is suggested in Paxson's discussion of Hildegard of Bingen. Although Hildegard grants epistemological privilege to the male Diabolus, who has knowledge that the virtues themselves do not possess, her drama creates a space to reconfigure dominant views of women's embodiment. The *Ordo Virtutum* demonstrates that the arrogant kind of knowledge flaunted by the male devil in his salacious taunts about women's embodiment is no match for the superior experiential wisdom to be achieved by aligning one's emotions with the virtues. While not explicit about this inversion, Hildegard shows that female emotion, or emotional engagement, triumphs over male reason; the binary so common to misogynistic discourse undergoes a revision in which embodied emotion is redefined as a kind of reason, one potentially empowering to the female religious community for whom the drama was written.

While Hildegard was highly educated and the author of learned works, the *Ordo* itself provides for its female religious community a model for self-understanding where the affective realm is given special prominence, and where intellect is cultivated alongside emotion. In the Middle Ages,

few women enjoyed Hildegard's access to formal education or were able to express themselves in writing; women's perceived emotional sensitivity provided an alternative avenue for self-understanding and self-expression. Elena Carrera points out that women like Mechthild of Magdeburg and Angela of Foligno lacked the intellectual training of writers like Augustine or Bernard and were not permitted to preach in public; for them, affective piety offered a way to communicate their sense of belonging to a Christian community. Even Teresa of Avila, who was educated and wrote her own works, actively cultivated an affective approach to prayer, reminding her nuns that any creature, regardless of intellect, could feel deep love for God.

## Conclusion

By engaging with a range of social and cultural contexts, these essays demonstrate how the belief in excessive female emotion was used to limit women's participation in public life. At the same time, the authors argue that women's emotions contest forms of gender ideology.<sup>33</sup> Westphal and Gourlay show that women's emotionality was used as a rationale for their exclusion from legal and political institutions, but it can also be argued that these fictional accounts of female plaintiffs portray their rage as a *result* of this exclusion. While the *Sachsenspiegel* uses its example of female anger to justify the subordination of women to men, it may also have served to suggest the legitimacy of women's anger. Carrera and Matter discuss the marginalization of women in medieval theological institutions, yet note the respect given to female mystics, whose bodily expressions of sorrow and joy align them with Christ's life and Passion, an affective language less accessible to the male theological establishment. Goodland argues that while the Lazarus plays criticize women's grieving, it is the women's tears that have the power both to summon Jesus and to move audiences, thus engaging them in the story of Christ's miracle.

Medieval attitudes toward women's emotions were complex, and whether a woman's emotion was represented as positive or negative depended on factors related to her status within a given community as well as to the discourses shaping the written text itself. Paying attention to these factors and especially keeping in mind the medieval emphasis on the social performative function of emotion will help to illuminate moments of emotional complexity that require a closer look. A better understanding of the cultural specificity of emotions in the Middle Ages will be particularly helpful for teaching students how to engage medieval texts on their own

terms. When students say that the feelings or behavior of a romance heroine are not “realistic,” we can challenge them to think about how the woman’s sorrow, anger, or shame is a clue to how she sees herself in relation to her family, to her friends, and to her broader community.

The findings of this collection invite a number of interesting lines of inquiry that promise to tell us yet more about women’s emotions in the premodern period. First, while there was clearly overlap in the way literary and historical documents represented emotions, it would be useful to think more about how records of public proceedings like court trials were likely to differ from other forms of discourse, such as didactic or literary texts.<sup>34</sup> A related question is how representation differs according to literary genre. Some genres are virtually defined by women’s emotion, such as the *chanson de malmariée*. How and why does this genre represent the unhappily married woman differently from other genres treating this topos, such as the *fabliau*? More studies on single emotions across genres would thus be very helpful. A recent approach to emotion combining cognitive science with literary criticism argues that people understand what they are feeling by appraising how their feelings match emotion prototypes, or stories about emotion.<sup>35</sup> Medieval narratives thus offer us insight into the different prototypes available and also suggest the kinds of models available to female audiences and storytellers. It would be quite interesting to consider how the creative process of storytelling might foster in women a greater self-reflective awareness of their own emotions.

Other productive avenues to explore involve the relationship between emotions and social change. As women’s economic and political status shifts in particular places and times, what new emotion standards develop? Does an increased access to certain professions or trades produce discourses that either describe or proscribe new emotions for women? What role do changes in courtship, marriage, or family structure play in shaping women’s emotional expression? How do emerging forms of social distinction make certain emotions fashionable? The suffering elevated so lyrically in courtly love poetry served to assert the superior sensibilities of the nobility and appears to have been embraced equally by male and female poets. Other examples of emotions “in vogue” might suggest how distinctions of class played out specifically along gender lines.

The territory still to be examined is considerable and promises to yield many new insights into the lived experiences of women in the Middle Ages. One of the traditional challenges for medieval feminist scholarship has been how to acknowledge the multiple forms of women’s oppression

without viewing women as passive victims. While stereotypes about the inferiority of female feeling dominated, views of women's emotions were far from monolithic, and medieval texts suggest how women navigated through a maze of competing social standards and cultural norms, in some ways conforming to standards denigrating women's feelings as irrational, in other ways contesting them. Whether tears of grief, a cry of joy, or a red flush of shame or anger, representations of emotions point to the things that mattered for medieval women and help us to imagine the everyday dimension of women's sense of belonging to the world in which they lived—what they thought and how they felt.

## Notes

1. "Or chante, or pense, or rit, or pleure; / Moult mue son cuer en pou de heure!" *Three Medieval Views of Women: "La Contenance des Fames," "Le Bien des Fames," "Le Blasme des Fames,"* ed. and trans. Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer, and Mathé Allain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), lines 109–10. The translation is my own.

2. Notable studies on medieval and early modern emotion include Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), and C. Stephen Jaeger and Ingrid Kasten, eds., *Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter / Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages* (New York: de Gruyter, 2003). Two studies devoted specifically to gender are Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women's Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), and Jennifer C. Vaught, ed., with Lynne Dickson Bruckner, *Grief and Gender: 700–1700* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

3. For a discussion of "emotionology" or the emotional standards of a particular society, see Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *American Historical Review* 90.4 (1985): 813–36. Noteworthy is their distinction between the history of ideas and emotionology, which is more concerned with the everyday interaction between values and behavior (833). Also see Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States, History of Emotions 4* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

4. I take the term "navigate" from William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Reddy defines emotion as "an array of loosely linked thought material" that is activated virtually simultaneously so that it exceeds the capacity for attention to translate it into a succinct action or talk in a short period of time (111). The individual "navigates" this tangle of thought material, sometimes fitting "emotional regimes" or standards, sometimes not, mostly unconsciously.

5. Stearns and Stearns, "Emotionology," 814, argue, "Changes in emotional standards can in turn reveal much about other aspects of social change and may even contribute to such change."

6. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). The original German work was published in 1939. For a discussion of Elias's work as it applies to medieval anger, see Rosenwein, *Anger's Past*. The essays of her volume, she comments, "suggest that historical change takes us from one set of conventions and restraints to another rather than through a process of civilizing" (241) and that "an entire repertory of conflicting norms persisted side-by-side throughout the Middle Ages" (242–43).

7. In the introduction to their edited volume *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9, Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz comment that studies of emotion fall into the error of essentialism in their use of the term "culture," which "seems to connote a certain coherence, uniformity, and timelessness in the meaning systems of a given group" and "tends to divert us from looking for contests for meaning and at rhetoric and power, contradictions, and multiple discourses. . . ." The authors consequently reject the word "culture" in favor of "discourses." The multiple, often conflicting discourses at work in the representation of women's emotions in the Middle Ages are evident in this collection. We use the term "medieval culture" with full recognition of the anything but unitary nature of that culture.

8. Indicative of the trend among scientists to investigate the cognitive component of emotion is the existence of the journal *Cognition and Emotion*, published annually since 1986. For a sociological perspective on the emotion/cognition divide, see the introduction by Gillian Bendelow and Simon J. Williams to their edited volume *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). A distinction is sometimes made between feeling (somatic experiences of the body) and emotion (the psychological processing of feelings). But the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, whose work has become widely influential, has argued that this distinction is untenable. Reversing the conventional understanding of emotion and feeling, and recognizing the unorthodoxy of this move, he comments in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), 284: "First, I am suggesting that there is no central feeling state before the respective emotion occurs, that expression (emotion) precedes feeling. Second, I am suggesting that 'having a feeling' is not the same as 'knowing a feeling,' that reflection on feeling is yet another step up. . . . But all of these processes—emotion, feeling, and consciousness—depend for their execution on representations of the organism. Their shared essence is the body." In this introduction, I use the terms "emotion" and "feeling" without any particular distinction between the two.

9. On the way that the Middle Ages categorized and valued qualities of masculine and feminine, see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*:

*Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 205–8.

10. In a 1988 essay, Catherine Lutz actually blamed the tendency to understand emotion as a biological rather than a cultural phenomenon on the Western bias against women. Paraphrasing her claim, William Reddy in *Navigation*, 40–41, comments that “the notion that emotions are biologically based is not simply erroneous, it is part of a larger, insidious, gender-biased Western view of the self that privileges alleged male rationality over the supposedly natural emotionalism of women.”

11. See Cadden, *Meanings*, 170–73, for a discussion of complexion and the fundamental role of heat in medieval views of sexual difference.

12. The sixteenth-century physician Laurent Joubert, in *Treatise on Laughter*, trans. Gregory David de Rocher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 103, explained: “Now the soft, such as women and children, are not only less conscious and less wise, but are also easily moved by every occasion, be it sad or happy.” Related to the humors is the idea that some emotions have their “seat” in particular parts of the body. Laughter, for instance, was thought by Joubert (104–105, 110–13) and others to come from the heart, liver, or spleen because these organs circulate or purify the blood, the humor that produces joy. Today the organ we look to for a biological explanation of emotions is the brain. It is interesting to note that neuroscientists have demonstrated that there are only a small number of brain sites involved in emotions, most of them subcortical, and that different emotions are found in the same area of the brain. Rather than being “seated” in specific sites of the brain, emotions appear to result from the activation *patterns* of a number of sites of the brain (Damasio, *Feeling*, 62).

13. On the wandering uterus, see Cadden, *Meanings*, 14–15.

14. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “emotion.”

15. Kay Deaux, “Gender and Emotion,” in *Gender and Emotion: Social Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Agneta H. Fischer, *Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction*, 2nd ser. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 308. For the importance of class in medieval attitudes toward anger, see Rosenwein, *Anger’s Past*, 244–45.

16. A famous exception to this rule is the lowborn Griselda, the heroine lauded by Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Chaucer for her virtual lack of emotion as she endures the cruel tests of her husband. An implicit message of the text, however, is that if a woman such as Griselda could have such nobility of character, surely women of gentler birth could aspire to her model. The Griselda story was widely used in conduct literature for women in the later Middle Ages. In the *Ménagier de Paris*, written by a husband for his young wife, the story appears in a section on wifely obedience; see *Le Ménagier de Paris*, ed. Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 72–73.

17. On attitudes toward women’s laughter as it relates to class, see my *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 11, 25.

18. The view of climatic “heat” creating emotional volatility and violence appears to be at odds with humoral theory’s view of heat and dryness as qualities associated with men’s more rational constitution. This conflict is indicative of the competing learned and popular theories circulating in the Middle Ages. As Cadden remarks, medical knowledge was often fragmented and illustrated “syncretism and compromise” (*Meanings*, 55).

19. Michelle Z. Rosaldo, “Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling,” in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. Le Vine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137–57. For a discussion of the *evolutionary* adaptive role of human feelings, see Damasio, *Feeling*, 31.

20. William Ian Miller, *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 108.

21. In using “habitus” I am referring to the idea, known best through the work of Pierre Bourdieu, that social structures are not only internalized by the individual but *incorporated* through generally unconscious mimetic and habitual repetitions. The habitus includes a scheme of dispositions including perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and actions that provide a “feeling for the game,” in a given social context or field. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

22. Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264–1423* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 100–101. Smail notes the interesting exception of anger, which was at times said to be motivated by the devil. For a discussion of demonic influences on emotion, see chapter one of this volume.

23. It should be added that interest in the social function of emotion is not confined to the Middle Ages. Many theorists today who study the contemporary period focus on the “public face” of emotion. See Abu-Lughod and Lutz, *Language*, 11; Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) includes an interesting discussion of the public discourse on sympathy as it relates to views of the proper role of government.

24. In her essay “Emotion, Language, and Cultural Scripts,” Anna Wierzbicka argues that because language is so culturally specific, we should avoid language-bound concepts such as happiness and anger and seek instead “conceptual primitives such as good and bad, or want, know, say, and think, [which] are not cultural artifacts of the English language but belong to the universal alphabet of human thoughts; they appear to have their semantic equivalents in all, or nearly all, languages of the world.” In *Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence*, ed. Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel Rose Markus (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1994), 133–96, at 139.

25. Happiness is often considered one of the six “basic” emotions shared by people regardless of culture, along with sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise. For an early discussion of this claim, see Keith Oatley and P. N. Johnson-Laird, “Toward a Cognitive Theory of Emotions,” *Cognition and Emotion* 1.1 (1987): 29–50. For a

more recent discussion of the basic or “primary” emotions and their relationship to “secondary” emotions such as embarrassment, jealousy, or pride, see Damasio, *Feeling*, 51. Recently, Patrick Colm Hogan has argued that there has been too much emphasis on cultural difference. Using a wide range of examples from literature, he develops the idea that there are “narrative universals” shared by literary texts in almost every culture and generated from emotion prototypes. Happiness, he argues, is the fundamental narrative universal and it produces the two primary literary genres found in most cultures: romantic comedy (based on achievement of personal happiness through reuniting with a lover) and heroic tragicomedy (based on the social happiness where an individual or group is restored to political and social power). See his *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 121.

26. Harry C. Triandis argues in “Major Cultural Syndromes and Emotion,” in *Emotion and Culture* (see note 24), 285–306, that individualism versus collectivism is the most important factor resulting in variation in emotions across cultures. He notes that the collective can include “the family, the work group, a political or religious group, a social class, or an ideological or national entity that is centrally important to the individual’s self-definition” (287). The relevance of individualism to gender has been discussed by Agneta H. Fischer and Antony S. R. Manstead in “The Relation between Gender and Emotions in Different Cultures,” in *Gender and Emotion* (see note 15), 71–94. They argue that gender differences in emotion are strongest in individualistic societies, where the importance of achieving and maintaining independence from others threatens the stability of the most important social unit, the family. A kind of “psychological task differentiation” results whereby women are encouraged to express emotions that maintain social relations to compensate for men’s tendency to separate from the family, as they are socialized to do.

27. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), famously located the emergence of Western individuality in the Renaissance. Medievalists before and after him have debated the status of “self” or “individual” in the Middle Ages. For a useful discussion of this debate, see Susan Crane, “Knights in Disguise: Identity and Incognito in Fourteenth-Century Chivalry,” in *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Can Van D’Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 63–79. Another recent work that investigates premodern personhood and touches on the emotions is Timothy J. Reiss, *Mirages of the Self: Patterns of Personhood in Ancient and Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

28. For a discussion of Thomas of Chobham and other writers who valued women’s ability to influence their husbands positively, see Sharon Farmer, “Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives,” *Speculum* 61.3 (1986): 517–42.

29. For example, Ann Marie Rasmussen, “Clovis’s Grief, Tristan’s Anger, and Kriemhild’s Restless Corpse: Emotions, Gender, and Lordship in Medieval Literature,” in *Codierungen* (see note 2), 174–91, argues that in the German poem *The*

*Lament*, men and women share some of the outer signs of grief like weeping and screaming, but “men do not wring their hands, tear their hair, rend their garments, or hug corpses. This is women’s work, just as the most violent and truly involuntary, somatic expressions of grief—losing the ability to speak, going mad, and dying from grief—are enacted by women” (186). My own preliminary study of the lays of Marie de France (presented at the 39th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 9, 2004) also finds a more dramatic display of emotion in women. Emotion words like *dolent* or *liez* are used as frequently with male as with female characters (in fact they are used somewhat more frequently for males), but female characters are more likely to shed tears, cry out “Lasse!,” grow pale, faint, and attempt suicide.

30. Deaux, “Gender and Emotion,” 302–303. On the more intense emotional displays of women in Western cultures, see also Fischer and Manstead, “Relation,” 73–74.

31. Christine de Pizan, who in other respects challenges misogynistic discourse, urges wives to put on a cheerful countenance to greet their husbands after a hard day’s work; see *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honor: “The Treasury of the City of Ladies,”* ed. Madeleine Pelner Cosman, trans. Charity Cannon Willard (New York: Persea Books, 1989), 187.

32. The original reads:

... est faicte comme de cire  
 Et si ne demande que rire.  
 Si je vueil plourer, elle pleure,  
 Rire et plourer tout à une heure,  
 Je fais d’elle ce que je veulx.

*Farce Nouvelle Tresbonne et fort joueuse a quatre personnages: Le savetier, le moyne, la femme, le portier,* in *Recueil de farces françaises inédites du XVe siècle*, ed. Gustave Cohen (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1949), 261, vv. 112–16.

33. Abu-Lughod and Lutz affirm that “emotion discourses establish, assert, challenge, or reinforce power or status differences” (*Language*, 14). Discourses on fear, they point out, have been used by colonial powers, and marginalized groups have used emotion discourses to demonstrate rebellion against or equality with higher status groups.

34. For example, Smail, *The Consumption of Justice*, 94, argues that the legal records he analyzes show little indication of gender difference either in the kinds of emotion expressed or in the way they were expressed in public. In her essay, Gourlay also notes the less gendered account of emotions in legal records compared with literary texts.

35. See especially Hogan, *The Mind and Its Stories*.