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Propositions

Consoling for Homesickness:

The Transformation of Worldly Bonds in Three 12th-Century Monastic Letter Collections

Theo B. Lap

1. Twelfth-century letter collections, like those of Anselm of Canterbury, Arnulf of Lisieux, and Peter of Celle, rely on the purposeful arrangement of their contents by anonymous scribes to help homesick votaries (monks and nuns) adapt to their life of seclusion.

2. The thematic clustering of letters in the collections reveals traces of their strategic function as consolatory and educational treatises aimed towards offering guidance to votaries in transforming their continuing bonds.

See: dissertation, Part I.

3. A life of seclusion in the monastery was by no means an instance of ‘splendid isolation’, since votaries had to transform their continuing bonds with their former ways of life, loved ones, and beloved places in the outside world.

See: Part I.

Contra: Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham U.P., 1982).

4. The ascribed authors of the letter collections (Anselm, Arnulf, and Peter) constitute edifying ‘exemplars’, most admirable and imitable persons whose virtuous behavior compels readers to emulate them on account of (the emotion of) admiration. These exemplars embody nostalgia for the monastic life in broadcasting to their readers true-to-life examples of humility and obedience, the ideal of spiritualized friendship and kinship, and the monastery or body as one’s ultimate home away from home.

See: Parts II, III, and IV respectively.

See also: Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017).

5. Cultural-psychological approaches to premodern history unlock key avenues for cultural historians to revise the hitherto accepted narratives of historical periods (e.g. the ‘12th century’) that are still strongly rooted in a face-value reading of historical documents with a complex communicative legacy like letter collections, which to date continue to exert a firm grasp on historical hermeneutics.

See: especially pp. 37–42, 144–8, 210–14, 260–2.

6. From this study it has become evident that the emotion of nostalgia was not an invention of (early) modernity, but an emotion that was, in the Latin world of the West, carefully attuned to the religious values of Christianity in premodernity’s written legacy that privileged a collective memory as opposed to an individual’s personal memory and which was, as a result, marginalized (e.g. the vice of *acedia*).

See: especially pp. 54–67, 72–8, 109–10, 217–23, 258–60.

Contra: Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (NY: Basic Books, 2001); Olivier Rieter, *Het patina van de tijd* (PhD diss. Tilburg University, 2018).

7. The nostalgic experience of having completed a journey around the world by motorcycle in four years is just as the nostalgic experience of having finished a PhD dissertation. It leads us to question what has become of us, what we have to show for those years, wondering what it was all about, and, most alarmingly, throwing us into the existential terror of not knowing anything anymore.

See: Ted Simon, *Jupiter’s Travels: Four Years on One Motorbike* (London: Penguin, 1980 [1979]), 435.