

Affective Voyages: Towards a Mediterranean Erotics of Grief

Megan Moore

University of Missouri

mooremegan@missouri.edu

This proposal is for an advanced draft chapter from my latest book project, in which I explore the Mediterranean as an essential lens through which to approach framing and reading the feeling rules that trace the contours of medieval Mediterranean elite communities. Building off of the argument I made in my first book, *Exchanges in Exoticism*, about Mediterranean cross-cultural marriage as a fundamental, common locus of elite cultural exchange during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in this book I explore how the Mediterranean elite may share commonalities made visible through the ways literature thematizes emotional practices. Here, I propose to share a draft chapter that explores how Mediterranean travel narratives (John of Mandeville's *Travels*), Greek romances (*Belthandros, Drosilla & Charikles*) and Ancient Greek Novels (*Ephesian Tales*), Arthurian romances (Chrétien de Troyes, the *Prose Merlin*), manuscript illustrations and codicological history (BNF 2810) all figure elite status in relation to Mediterranean emotional practices, specifically what I identify in this study as an erotics of grief.

A quick example gives a sense for this “erotics of grief”: there is a curious moment, repeated throughout medieval literature, where a man comes across a woman wailing over the body of her dead lover and immediately decides that he is uncontrollably aroused and must have her. She, in her grief, is tearing out her hair, scratching her face and described as sniveling and bleeding; he, in his ardor, can only laud her beauty as she destroys it before him. I argue that the grief in this scene is eroticized because of its narrative potential, its ability to tell a story about masculinity and power in the guise of chivalric sacrifice. This odd juxtaposition of grief and desire, of death and love—what I'm calling an erotics of grief—is widespread and fundamental, I argue, to a culture of elite sacrifice, where grief is not just a personal emotion, but also a public performance of status, commemoration, and heroism. In the monograph, I explore the erotics of grief in moments like these from romance (which might conform to gendered expectations about women as grief workers), but also in memorable moments of men's grief in *chansons de geste*, as in Charlemagne's wails or the fainting armies of *The Song of Roland* and in travel narratives and fabliaux, as well. I argue that across the gender spectrum and within diverse genres, grief is eroticized in performance of class in ways that resonate across the Mediterranean and rely on ancient Mediterranean feeling rules.

In situating my argument on eroticizing grief, I engage primarily with Georges Bataille, Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida; I also work with Roland Barthes, Martha Nussbaum, Barbara Rosenwein, William Reddy, Simon Gaunt, and Stephen Jaeger as well as the relevant secondary literature. Though I've been working on this book for over five years, I have not yet had the chance to vet the Mediterranean argument in a community of specialists, and this would be an excellent opportunity for me to get feedback in a seminar dedicated to both emotions and the Mediterranean.