



The Ethics of Mourning: The Role of Material Culture and Public Politics in the 'Book of the Duchess' and the 'Pearl' Poem

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Abstract:

Chairperson: Dr. Ashby Kinch This project is a socio-historic analysis of two late 14th century dream visions: Chaucer's Book of the Duchess and the Pearl poem. Utilizing Robert Pogue Harrison's concept of objectifying grief through ritualized communal mourning, this thesis examines the ways in which mourning literature functioned as consolatory

device, and a form of public performance for the powerful patrons who commissioned the pieces. By engaging with pre-existing communities of grief, material culture, and courtly discourse these poems perform the work of mourning while simultaneously enacting modes of public performativity that stress the ethics of grieving, and suggest that, for royal patrons, it is imperative for the stability of the commonwealth that they respond appropriately to loss. In performing the work of mourning the texts advocate for a unity between public and private selves, enacting the principle that for a great leader the private is always public.

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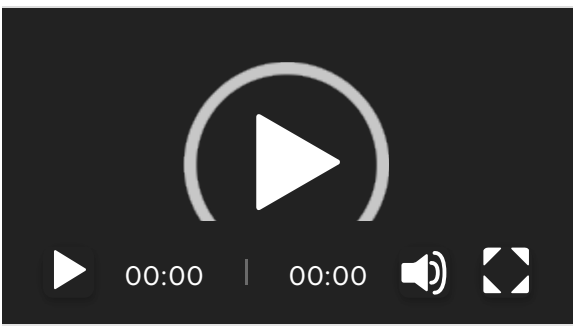
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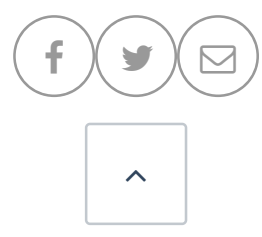
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