

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

25 May 2016

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Saunders, Corinne (2016) 'Affective reading : Chaucer, women, and romance.', *Chaucer review.*, 51 (1). pp. 11-30.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5325/chaucerrev.51.1.0011>

Publisher's copyright statement:**Additional information:**

Special Issue: Women's Literary Culture Late Medieval English Writing.

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Affective Reading: Chaucer, Women and Romance

Introduction

Mind and body, head and heart, thinking and feeling . . . dualisms of this kind, so familiar that they have become clichés, rely on the opposition of body and mind characteristic of Cartesian philosophy. Dualism has long roots, stretching back to the neo-Platonic concepts of body and soul that were so influential for Christian philosophy. But the body-mind opposition does not map neatly onto medieval thought, which emphasised the integration of thinking and feeling. This integration is crucial to literary representation and interpretation of mind, body and emotion, and to the notion of reading as affective across literary cultures. Of all medieval English writers, Chaucer is perhaps most deeply engaged with the power of affect on both minds and bodies. He returns again and again to the psychology of love and loss: in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Knight's Tale*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *The Legend of Good Women*. Thinking and feeling provide a crucial focus in these works, particularly in relation to female subjects. How might women readers have engaged with these ideas? Women were traditionally assumed to be more bodily, more emotional, yet as we shall see, Chaucer emphasises the relationship between thinking and feeling, the embodied nature of being in the world, across his works and across genders. The nexus of mind, body and affect resonates with the concerns of women's literary culture, while women play crucial roles in Chaucer's works as thinking and feeling subjects.

Medieval Thinking and Feeling

Hippocrates' theory of the humours, developed by Galen in the second century and fundamental to medieval medical theory, necessitated the idea of a mind-body continuum. Both physical and mental health were dependent on the balance of the four humours, as were individual temperament and complexion; each humour was also linked to the stars and planets, and the individual seen as responsive to the forces of the cosmos.¹ Distinctions between mind and body, thinking and feeling, were complex and more fluid than in post-Cartesian thought. They were complicated by notions of the soul, different views on where in the body faculties were situated, and different models of how thought and emotion worked. Aristotle situated the rational or intellectual quality within the soul, and located the heart as the centre of senses and cognitive faculties. Galen, by contrast, associated these with the brain, though popular notions persisted well beyond the Middle Ages of the heart as site of understanding and feeling. Neo-platonic theories situated the immortal and rational part of the soul in the head; the appetites and emotions (termed "passions" or "affections", because they were suffered involuntarily) in the trunk of the body. Augustine placed the will as a faculty of the "superior part of the soul" and emotions as "movements of the lower parts", but saw emotions as having both cognitive and bodily aspects, as both evaluative and affective.²

By the end of the thirteenth century, a new interest in psychology, and particularly in how thinking worked, was developing. Qualities once attributed to the rational soul were now situated in the brain, perhaps partly as a result of medical observation of the effects of head injuries. Medical and philosophical views generally held that cognition was two-part: cognitive processes were mediated by the physiological mechanisms of the cerebral ventricles and by the rational soul/mind. Physiological theories were rooted in the concept developed in Arabic medicine of

three types of spirit: natural, vital and animal.³ The natural spirit was produced in the liver and sent through the veins: it enabled generation, nutrition and physical growth. The vital spirit originated in the heart and moved through the arteries to give life to the body. In the brain, the vital spirit was transformed into the animal spirit, which controlled sensation and movement, but also imagination, cogitation and memory. The senses, each connected with its own organ, were understood to be put together by the inner senses, situated in the ventricles of the brain, the centre of both sensory and cognitive faculties. Thoughts were dependent on “forms”, *imagines*, *simulacra* or *phantasmata* (Aristotle also uses *eikón*, copy), sense impressions involving perception and response, put together by the inner senses, and passing through imagination, cognition and memory. Avicenna’s *De anima*, translated (into Latin) in the twelfth century, gives an account of the process, describing the five cells of the brain: at the front, the *sensus communis* (where information was processed, with impressions retained briefly) and *imaginatio* (a temporary memory retaining forms); in the middle *imaginativa* (“a creative power, able to separate or combine the forms that it retrieves from *imaginatio*, thus providing man with the mental power to imagine things, even things that do not exist”)⁴ and *estimativa* (the site of cognitive processes, where judgements were made, and which could draw on memory); and at the back *memorialis* (the storehouse of memory, where these “phantasms” or memory-pictures were kept, imprinted, literally marked on the body through the physiological process triggered by the senses).⁵ *Phantasmata* are the products of “the entire process of sense perception”: quasi-pictures or representations derived from sensory processes but with affective weight, “emotionally charged”.⁶ The *imaginativa* or *phantasy* had the dangerous ability to deceive reason, *estimativa*, as Albertus Magnus emphasised in his widely-circulated *De apprehensione*.⁷

The process of thinking was inextricable from the physiology of emotion. Emotions were understood to occur through the movements of the vital spirit and natural heat, produced in the heart and travelling through the arteries. They could be triggered by direct sensory experience, but also by the workings of imagination and memory, including, of course, the affects of reading, and they had both physiological and mental consequences. In excessive joy or anger, the vital spirit and accompanying heat moved out of the heart to other parts of the body, causing, for example, blushing for joy or shame. In excessive grief, distress or fear, by contrast, the vital spirit and heat withdrew from the arteries into the heart, with the possibility of causing unconsciousness or even death.

Thomas Aquinas developed sophisticated ideas of mind, body and affect that spanned the physiological and theological. For Aquinas, the human is a compound of body and soul. The emotions necessarily have a cognitive as well as an affective aspect: they are felt in the body through the movement of the spirits, but require the process of *phantasmata*, sensory images put together in the brain; they influence and are affected by cognition. The imagination plays a crucial role in understanding.⁸ Soul, mind, intellect, thought, emotion, affect, senses, and body were all intimately connected; emotions both shaped the understanding and were visibly written on the body. Merleau-Ponty's theories of embodiment chime closely with such ideas, and so, perhaps surprisingly, do the recent theories of cognitive neuroscientists, in particular, Antonio Damasio, who has argued that emotion is essential to cognition and moral judgement; that rather than being in opposition, mind, body and affect are closely and inextricably linked.⁹

Medieval Reading and the Emotions

It is easy to understand the process of reading in terms of this view of thinking and feeling. Reading drew first on the sense impressions created by the text: most obviously, through visual impressions of the letters, words and *mise en page*, but also through sound impressions of the words, and touch impressions of the book as a physical object. The imagined world of the book brought its own array of sense impressions: visual images and concepts, aural aspects, evocations of touch, taste and smell, and readers were encouraged imaginatively to vivify these. Within the *sensus communis*, the impressions taken in through the physical act of reading were processed, finding their way into the middle cell of the brain to be creatively assembled in the imagination and to be considered by the estimative powers. They contributed to but also drew on the storehouse of the memory: reading presented “memorial cues” that functioned as a “foundation”, filled in through the images stored within the memory, in all their sensory aspects.¹⁰ Reading required both cognitive and affective processes. The contemplative reader was to progress through the “four rones” of reading, as they are called in a Middle English translation of the Carthusian *Scala claustralium*: “a besy loking vpon Holy Writte”, “A studious inserchyng with the mynde”, “a devoute desiryng of the hert”, and “a risyng of hert into God”.¹¹

The nexus of mind, body and affect is especially evident in affective piety and in theories of devotional reading, particularly relating to women’s literary culture, but it is crucial too for secular writing, and to any analysis of reading imaginative fiction. For Chaucer, this interrelation is both subject and mode: the workings of mind, body and affect are key to psychological representation but also define the reader’s relation to the text. In the *Book of the Duchess*, he engages directly with the relationship between reading, thinking and feeling, and probes the affective power of the

imagination. In both the *Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, he explores the connection between body and mind, the cognitive aspects of emotion and the shaping power of affect. For his female protagonists in the *Legend of Good Women*, and for its readers, the interconnection of cognition and affect is crucial to agency.¹²

What was the social relation of women readers to these works? Women were patrons, owners, occasional writers and most of all readers of books.¹³ Much scholarship exploring women's reading has focused on devotional literature, in particular, the close and productive connection between women and affective piety.¹⁴ But it is clear that, despite the predominance of the spiritual in medieval culture, there was also a connection between women and secular writing in medieval England and on the Continent.¹⁵ Carol Meale observes that romances, particularly French Arthurian romance, "form the second largest generic grouping amongst women's books in the Middle Ages as a whole".¹⁶ Meale offers instances of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century women known to have owned the romances of Lancelot and Tristan; Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* gestures more ironically to the phenomenon, in his reference to "the book of Launcelot de Lake, / That wommen holde in ful greet reverence" (VII 3212-13). Internal evidence implies that romances were read aloud in courtly circles and aristocratic households to mixed audiences, as well as by individual male and female readers. The depiction in Chaucer's *Troilus* of Criseyde and her women listening to a maiden read the tale of the siege of Thebes offers a tantalising image of a group of female readers.¹⁷

D. H. Green's suggestive analysis of ways of reading distinguishes different kinds of "literal reading": reading to the self or others, aloud or silently, reading in different languages, reading as a writer. He distinguishes too different kinds of "figurative reading": mental reading, "with the mind's eye in the absence of any

material written text”, reading pictures, memorised reading.¹⁸ Reading provides ways of interpreting the world outside the text, as well as opening onto imaginative worlds. As Melissa Furrow emphasises, it is impossible to define a characteristic female reading of romance, for the stances of women readers, like those of men, are likely to have been as various as those of the works they read. Yet we can probe further the representation of mind, body and affect, the workings of the imagination and the complex interrelation of thinking and feeling, including in female protagonists. While we cannot access the lived experience of medieval readers, such insights may bring us closer to an understanding of the affective reading of romance by women.

Sorrowful Imagination: *The Book of the Duchess*

Throughout Chaucer’s romance writings, his interest in mind, body and affect is apparent, and it is often this that takes his representations beyond convention. The *Book of the Duchess* is especially revealing, for here Chaucer explores the physiology of reading, alongside that of grief and love. The narrator’s processes of thought are carefully depicted: “sorwful ymagynacioun / Ys alway hooly in [his] mynde” (14-15). *Images* held in his memory are repeatedly revisited, creating “fantasies” in his head and causing a melancholy which has “sleyn [his] spirit of quyknesse” (26) and numbed his feeling. His taking up of a book, a “romaunce” (48), is a conscious response to the sleeplessness that accompanies the sorrow we assume to be love-sickness. The affective power of reading will lead the narrator through the processes of grief, memory and mourning, and ultimately, the memorialisation of writing itself.

The “wonder thing” (61) the narrator reads, the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, sustains the theme of melancholy that “sley[s] spirit of quyknesse” (26). Chaucer’s pared-down version of Ovid’s tale focuses on Alcyone’s grief at Ceyx’s drowning and

her existential lament, “Alas! . . . that I was wrought!” (90). Her sorrow leads to a swoon in which she is “cold as ston” (123), a conventional detail, but one that refers precisely to the withdrawal of vital spirits into the heart through extreme emotion. Her swoon presages the sight of Ceyx’s drowned corpse, “pale and nothyng rody” (143), and is echoed in her “dede slep” (127) and the “dedly slepyng soun” (162) that marks Morpheus’ cave. Images of the insensible body abound. Yet the narrative hovers strangely between the tragic and the prosaic, so that the reader is made uneasily aware of the tension between the profound and absurd in human existence. The tale ends suddenly: ““Allas!’ quod she for sorwe, / And deyede within the thridde morwe” (213-14). There is no metamorphosis, and the emphasis of the story becomes the finality of death. In a typically jarring shift of tone, however, the insight gleaned by the narrator is that of the power the gods to make men sleep or wake, and hence the tale leads into the comic scene of his prayer to Morpheus. Extremes of emotion are offset by affective failures of sensibility.

This balance also characterises the narrator’s dream. In his depiction of the Man in Black Chaucer explores the complex connections between mind, body and affect that characterise extreme grief, while the narrator’s response reiterates the affective failure of understanding. The Dreamer stands in for the reader, feeling and seeing the affective power of a grief that is written on the body as the spirits withdraw:

Hys sorwful hert gan faste faynte
 And his spirites wexen dede;
 The blood was fled for pure drede

Doun to hys herte, to make hym warm -
 For wel hyt feled the herte had harm. . . . (488-92)

The flight of blood into the “membre principal” (495) of the body causes “al / Hys hewe chaunge and wexe grene / And pale, for ther noo blood ys sene / In no maner lym of hys” (497-99). Chaucer draws on Machaut’s *Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne*, but points up and develops the physiology of grief to depict an affective state that is near death. At the same time, the Man in Black’s consciousness of the power of affect is striking; he is a reader of his own predicament:

. . . he spak noght ,
 But argued with his owne thought,
 And in hys wyt disputed faste
 Why and how hys lyf myght laste;
 Hym thoughte hys sorwes were so smerte
 And lay so colde upon hys herte. (504-8)

He could not be more shaped by his passions: “y am sorwe, and sorwe ys y” (597). Yet cognition plays a striking role in his identity: alongside the bodily manifestation of affect in his heart-sickness, his thought, disputation and wit are all triggered by his grief. The narrator suggests he had “wel nygh loste hys mynde” (511), but rather, he is lost in his mind, in his “sorwful ymagynacioun” (“whan al this falleth in my thocht, / Allas, than am I overcome!”, 706-7), which will recreate through the images stored in memory a picture of his lost duchess.

Love is presented explicitly as working on the mind (“love cam first in my thocht”, 789), and the heart is presented as both the seat of feeling and thought (“she

syt so in myn herte / That, by my trouthe, y nolde noght / For al thys world out of my thought / Leve my lady”, 1109-11). The reconstruction of Blanche paints her as the ideal lady, embodying all courtly virtues, but also becomes an inset narrative that depicts not just her beauty, but her embodied self, her “lokyng” (870), movement, voice, touch, and the entire process of their love. The tale of love and loss is re-enacted through the *imagines* summoned up from the memory of the Man in Black, in turn stored in the narrator’s memory, and eventually written down, to enter the memories of the poem’s readers. The memory will function like the Dreamer’s chamber with its stained glass window and walls on which “bothe text and glose” of the *Romance of the Rose*, evoked in words and images, are painted (333). But the difficulty of interpreting *imagines* is also conveyed, through the Dreamer’s repeated failures to comprehend the meaning of the Man in Black’s words, and especially, to realise that the seemingly conventional love lyric, “a lay, a maner song, / Withoute noote, withoute song” (471-72), is a statement of actual death.

In part, the Man in Black’s lament mirrors Alcyone’s, while he is led through the Dreamer’s questions to a new, direct expression, “She ys ded!” (1309), that recalls the abrupt account of Alcyone’s death. This affective, gender-crossing impact works directly on the dreamer to convey the jarring, devastating and universal fact of death, but also, through processes of empathy, questioning and understanding, to inspire the written text. The poem evokes the uneven, sudden, haunting quality of affect, inscribing it on the reader’s memory via a series of “texts” – literary and imaginative memorials. Through the inset story of Alcyone’s grief and death, which mirrors the emotions of the grieving narrator and the Man in Black, and by reanimating the lost beloved, Blanche, the poem both draws in the female reader through its affective power and transcends questions of gender.

The Physiology of Love: *The Knight's Tale*

In *The Knight's Tale*, Chaucer explores further the nature of affective response, and the workings of the mind, senses and memory. The tale is rooted in the conventions of love-sickness, and relies on the neo-Platonic convention of love striking through the eyes to wound the heart. But Chaucer repeatedly goes beyond familiar metaphor to demonstrate a detailed awareness of contemporary physiological theory in his depiction of the deathly affects of love on Palamon and Arcite. Palamon's jealousy, for example, "hente him by the herte / So woodly that he lyk was to biholde / The boxtree or the asshen dede and cold" (I 1300-2): the vital spirit is driven into his heart to cause coldness. Jacqueline Tasioulas argues persuasively that Chaucer differentiates the lovers, using the more conventional, though graphically realised, notion of love-sickness in relation to Palamon but situating Arcite's malady as an illness of the brain:

. . . lene he wex and drye as is a shaft;
 His eyen holwe and grisly to biholde,
 His hewe falow and pal as asshen colde . . .
 So feble eek were his spiritz, and so lowe,
 And chaunged so, that no man koude knowe
 His speche nor his voys, though men it herde.
 And in his geere for al the world he ferde
 Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye
 Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye,

Engendered of humour malencolik

Biforen, in his celle fantastik. (I 1362-76)¹⁹

Chaucer draws on medical ideas about the influence of affect on the brain, available to him, for instance, through Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De rerum proprietatibus*, translated by John of Trevisa.²⁰ Trevisa describes how the passions of the soul engender the melancholy humour, which works on the "celle fantastik", the front ventricle of the brain controlling the imagination. In a state of melancholy, the subject loses the ability to judge and reason; in a state of mania, as here, the imagination cannot perceive new images but sees only the beloved. Gerard de Berry in the thirteenth century described how the *estimatio* might become overactive, repeatedly demanding from the senses images of the beloved, with the effect that the imagination and the eyes lose heat.²¹ Whereas the Man in Black's vital spirit withdraws into the heart, here heat is drawn into the brain, causing pallour and hollow eyes. The overload of images creates a kind of frenzy, as Arcite's inner senses return obsessively to the image of his beloved, bodying it forth again and again in his mind's eye.

Most striking is Arcite's own awareness of the workings of affect on his body and mind. He takes up a mirror:

And saugh that chaunged was al his colour,
 And saugh his visage al in another kynde.
 And ryght anon it ran hym in his mynde,
 That, sith his face was so disfigured
 Of maladye the which he hadde endured,

He myghte wel, if that he bar hym lowe,
 Lyve in Atthenes everemoore unknowe. . . . (I 1400-6)

As with the Man in Black, affect manifests itself in extreme physical illness, but it also colours and shapes Arcite's cognitive processes: the image of himself stimulates his plan of disguise. Arcite's injury at the end of the tale, sapping the "vital strengthe" (I 2802) of his heart, graphically sustains Chaucer's engagement with medical detail. Readers are shown the workings of the mind, the arbitrary, extreme power of affect and its dominance over the body. One of the effects of viewing this extreme love, with its dramatic and tragic outcomes, may be to distance readers from the narrative even while it so vividly realises the physiology of love.

Perhaps this distance is – and was – enhanced for female readers by the detachment of Emilye, a trophy of war who begins and ends the tale as an object to be fought over and won by men, for years unaware of her lovers' emotional anguish and enmity. Her first appearance is described with an ekphrasis very like that used to evoke Blanche, but though we see Emilye in the present, we hear less of her voice: only her "hevenyssshly" singing (I 1055) is recounted, and later, her tears. Unlike Blanche, Emilye never becomes a free agent in her own romance. Her voice is heard only once in her haunting prayer to Diana, which for a brief moment opens a window onto the predicament of the woman objectified within the male structures of battle and love. The images in the temple are not of love's delights but of attempted rape, of the classical nymph Callisto, metamorphosed as she flees the rape of Jupiter, and of Pluto, who has abducted Proserpina to the Underworld whence she cannot escape; they are accompanied by a reference to a woman wailing in childbirth, an ominous hint of the

future that Emilye fears. The “freendlich ye” (I 2680) she casts on Arcite hints at the start of an affective connection, appropriately effected through the gaze, and reiterated in the shrieks she utters at Arcite’s death. But the intervention of the gods also returns Emilye to the status of object: though we are told of her pity and love for Palamon, we never again hear her voice. The affective visual and aural power of the images in Diana’s temple, and the lamenting figure of Emilye herself, work on the reader’s imagination and memory, to create a strong empathy for the silenced object of the lover’s sickness and frenzy, and more generally, for the predicament of women in a patriarchal world.

Mirrors of the Mind: *Troilus and Criseyde*

Troilus and Criseyde takes further the exploration of mind, body and affect. It too relies on the neo-Platonic convention of the connection between eyes and heart: on first seeing Criseyde, Troilus’ heart is caused to “sprede and rise” as if on fire, wounding and quickening his “affeccioun” (I, 278, 296). Sensual perception acts on the vital spirit to occasion emotion – felt at once in body and mind. Chaucer uses ancient notions of heart as seat of both thought and feeling (Criseyde’s image is fixed in Troilus’ heart), but at the same time, plays on the cognitive aspects of emotion. Affect shapes the workings of the brain, producing *phantasmata* or thought-images: Troilus’ thought “gan quiken and encesse”; and he makes “a mirour of his mynde” in which he sees “al holly hire figure” (I, 443, 365-66).

Throughout the process of Troilus’ love, his affective experience is extreme: he feels that “with hire look [will die] the spirit in his herte” (I, 306), and again and again, the heart’s illness pervades the body. The imagery is conventional but also medically alert. Seeing Criseyde weep, Troilus feels “the crampe of deth to streyne

hym by the herte” (III, 1071), and faints. The physiology of the swoon is carefully detailed:

Therewith the sorwe so his herte shette
 That from his eyen fil there nought a tere,
 And every spirit his vigour in knette,
 So they astoned or oppressed were;
 The felyng of his sorwe, or of his fere,
 Or of aught elles, fled was out of towne –
 And down he fel al sodeynly a-swowne. (III, 1086-92)

While here the sudden, complete withdrawal of the vital spirit causes unconsciousness, Troilus’ response to hearing of the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor exhibits the affect of angry grief, “woodnesse” (IV, 238), a term that, though the description of his physical frenzy is taken from Boccaccio, is Chaucer’s own. Eventually, the “fury” and “rage” that grip Troilus’ heart give way to grief and the withdrawal of vital spirit, so that he falls “in a traunce” (IV, 343). As Troilus waits for Criseyde to fulfil her promise and return in ten days’ time, his “maladie” is such that he believes he cannot live (V, 297, 316). His slumber is broken by terrible nightmares and a “tremour. . . aboute his herte” (V, 255). When Criseyde fails to return and her betrayal becomes gradually, excruciatingly apparent, that imagining becomes true. Troilus is literally unmade by love:

He so defet was, that no manere man
 Unneth hym myghte knowen ther he wente;

So was he lene, and therto pale and wan,
 And feble, that he walketh by potente. (V, 1219-22)

He complains of grievous pain around his heart. While again the symptoms of Troilus' grief are drawn from Boccaccio, Chaucer's addition of the crutch strikingly heightens its physicality. Only at the sight of Criseyde's brooch on Diomedes' sleeve does active fury ("ire", V, 1755) replace melancholy.

Yet Chaucer also continues to emphasise the cognitive aspects of love and grief. In bliss, Troilus becomes the "lyric artist", the narrative interspersed with his songs. Love opens onto a vision of cosmic harmony and inspires moral excellence. Later, Troilus' "herte thoughte" is so constantly on Criseyde, "so faste ymagenyng" (V, 453-54) that he cannot be distracted by feasting and revelry. Imagining is, literally, image-making: Troilus, re-reading Criseyde's letters, "refigures" "hire shap, hire wommanhede, / Withinne his herte" (V, 473-74). He has the "proces", the course of events, "lik a storie" in his memory (V, 583-85), and Chaucer's evocation of the awakening of that process is masterful. As Troilus looks at the closed windows of Criseyde's palace and visits the places where he saw her, he thinks his heart "as frost. . . gan to colde" and we see his "chaunged dedlich pale face" (V, 535-56). He imagines, sees in his mind's eye, himself as "defet, and pale, and waxen lesse / Than he was wont" (V, 618-19) and as the subject of onlookers who fear he will die. And, like the man in black, Troilus' grief also leads him to philosophy, to "argue with his owne thought" and dispute in his wits.

Cognition and affect combine in Chaucer's portrayal of Criseyde, in ways that allow him strikingly to rework her character. Yet he also leaves us finally uncertain regarding Criseyde's motivation, and psychological insight becomes highly selective. As with Troilus, Chaucer is concerned to depict her love in terms of animated

emotion. Her response on seeing Troilus ride by is one of instinctive desire, described through the convention of the imprint of the eyes on the heart, and the Petrarchean image of love as drink (II, 650-51). This experience is swiftly followed, however, by her extended monologue, striking for its highly rational and pragmatic approach setting out the case for and against love, and its difference from the voice of Troilus lamenting the wound of irresistible love. Yet the monologue is characterised by uncertainty, opposing one point of view by another, and the image of clouds rushing across an uncertain March sky suggests Criseyde's changeable mind. The images of death that accompany Troilus' experience of love also occur in relation to Criseyde, but convey the affect occasioned by fear of the consequences of love, "Criseyde, which that wel neigh starf for feere, / So as she was the ferfulleste wight / That myghte be" (II, 449-51). Whereas Troilus looks out to the cosmic harmony of love, Criseyde looks fearfully inward, caught within her imaginings of differently constraining situations.

Once Fortune's wheel has turned and Criseyde has been offered in exchange for Antenor, Chaucer portrays Criseyde's extreme grief as written on her body: her face, once "lik of Paradys the ymage," is now "al ychaunged in another kynde" (IV, 864-65), her laughter replaced by the tears that leave a purple ring around her eyes. Her predicament in the Greek camp is enhanced by Chaucer's emphasis on physical affect: her "bryghte face" is "ful pale ywoxen", her "lymes lene"; she sighs and weeps, "And thus she sette hire woful herte afire / Thorough remembraunce of that she gan desire" (V, 708-9, 719-20). But the poem begins to move away from insight into Criseyde's psyche: on the tenth day, she is characterised by "peynes stronge / For love of Troilus" (V, 864-65), yet remains there, caught by Diomedes. The last of her voice is heard at a remove, in the enigmatic letter she sends to Troilus, its prevarications set

against its poignant opening: “How myght a wight in torment and in drede / And heeles, yow sende as yet gladnesse?” (V, 1592-93). Apart from the veiled, ambiguous words of her letters, however, Criseyde has faded out of the story.

The affective role of the reader is pointed up in this self-consciously literary work that is so engaged with the question of authority and interpretation, in which Criseyde herself voices the future of her story, and we read the inset laments and letters of the lovers, and the lyrics of Troilus. For the reader attuned to thinking and feeling, Criseyde’s laments are suggestive in their evocation of the workings of the mind. Loss in love opens onto her expression of profound regret and statement of the transience of all things: “al shal passe; and thus take I my leve” (V, 1085). Earlier, as she looks out over Troy’s walls and towers, she raises the philosophical question of the situation of the individual within time: “On tyme ypassed wel remembred me, / And present tyme ek koud ich wel ise, / But future tyme, er I was in the snare, / Koude I nat sen; that causeth now my care” (V, 746-49). This sense of being caught in the present, defined by memory, yet unable correctly to foresee the future, is crucial to Chaucer’s portrayal of Criseyde. In the mind’s eye, with the *imagines* stored in memory, she has pictured different kinds of future – with and without Troilus, with a return to Troy, even with her death – that she believes she will be able to enact. In the event, however, she has not been free to make real her mental images, and is left only with the affect of grief. Criseyde’s lament points up the gap between imagination and reality, between memory, made up of past experience, and the future. This, after all is the existential predicament of all humankind: how can hope become reality? For the female reader, aware of cultural and social constraints on agency, such a predicament is rendered peculiarly haunting.

Passion and Reason: *The Legend of Good Women*

Late in his career, Chaucer returned to the dream vision form, rewriting the themes of female love and grief through the lens of legend. The *Legend of Good Women* draws on the nexus of virtue, suffering and death familiar from lives of the female saints, but its women are very different from, for example, Cecilia in the *Second Nun's Tale*, the archetype of active holy living and martyrdom. Their agency is less certain; their physical actions more qualified. Their actions respond to secular rather than divine love, they are victims of male betrayal, and several of their deaths are at their own hands. By foregrounding the relation of his good women to Christian saints, as well as employing a notoriously ambiguous tone, Chaucer points up the paradoxes for the reader. Even more than *Troilus and Criseyde*, this work draws attention to itself as literary artefact, the *Prologue* articulating the impossibility of retrieving the "naked text" it promises (G, 86), and setting up a complex fiction of Chaucer writing against himself. Yet it seems reductive to read the *Legend* as predominantly ironic, or as imprisoning women within passive, suffering stereotypes.²² These women are given agency, and that agency is precisely conveyed through the careful realisation of mind, body and affect. Their actions repeatedly signal the link between emotion and cognition, thinking and feeling; they are both passionate and reasoned. By contrast, the villains of the *Legend* are depicted in terms of falseness and dissembling: actions do not truly reflect thoughts and feelings. Whereas the suicides of Antony and Piramus are presented as acts of despair, those of the women in the *Legend* involve intellect and free will: emotional responses are not opposed by but informed by cognitive and moral judgements. Repeatedly, Chaucer conveys this process of affective and intellectual understanding by using the ancient

Aristotelian notion of the heart as seat of the emotions and of thought, but combines this with more contemporary ideas of the mind.

Thinking and feeling are clearly integrated in Cleopatra, Chaucer's first example: "drede" and "destresse" are informed by "trouthe" and "routhe" (664, 668-69). Her death is an active choice, made in obedience to her "sorweful herte": suicide will ensure that Antony is "nere out of myn hertes remembraunce" and it fulfils her covenant, to feel the same "wel or wo" (681-89). Its manner is extraordinarily active: this Cleopatra does not apply an asp to her arm but leaps into the snake-pit that she has prepared. In the second legend, Thisbe's suicide too is presented in terms of covenant: she is "felawe and cause ek of [Piramus'] deth", and her death proves "strengthe and hardynesse", that "a woman dar and can as wel" as a man (895, 892, 923). Chaucer elaborates the bodily characteristics of the sorrow that physically seizes Thisbe: "wawes quappe gan hir herte" (865). In her pallor, rent hair, swoon, tears, torment and painting of herself with Piramus' blood, she is a living emblem of grief. The affective force of the "drery herte", however, fuels the decisive physical action of suicide: "My woful hand . . . is strong ynogh" (810, 890). Strikingly, Thisbe looks for Piramus "bothe with hire herte and with hire yen" (859) – with feeling and with senses connected to the brain – and her words make clear the rational as well as emotive force of her action.

In the Legend of Dido, love is as physical as grief: Dido "lost hire hewe and ek hire hele" (1159); the symptoms are described in some detail. "Depe affeccioun" (1229) is envisaged as seated in the heart. But Chaucer is also explicit about the nature of love as involving remembrance and cogitation: "This newe Troyan is so in my thought" (1172). Aeneas' experience seems similar, "moche sorwe hadde he in his mynde" (946), but here body, heart and mind are not truly aligned: his woe is

“feyned” (1257), the dream summoning him on to his quest presented as an invention. Dido falls and swoons, a conventional image but also one that reflects medical notions of how extreme emotion – fear or grief – sends the vital spirit back from the arteries into the heart, and causes unconsciousness. The same image is used in relation to Ariadne: “Colde wex hire herte” (2197). Heat, by contrast, a “fyry herte” (2292), accompanies savage actions such as Tereus’. These extreme physical affects of the cold and hot heart are not used, however, to narrate consciously chosen deaths. Though we hear only briefly of Phyllis’ death, and it is related to despair, the terms are still striking: “She was hire owene deth ryght with a corde” (2485). Her “trouthe” is set against the treachery of “false Demophon” (2398), and it is to the breaking of the mind-body-affect continuum that her lament draws attention: “How coude ye wepe so by craft?”; “May there swiche teres feyned be?” (2529-30). Dido’s suicide is carefully reasoned: “whan she myghte hir tyme wel espie” she steals out with Aeneas sword, and “rof hyre to the herte”; she allows time for prayer, and her lament is stated consciously, “Right so to yow make I my compleynyng”(1349-51, 1357). This active, thought-through death, like Cleopatra’s, stands in opposition to that of Hypsipyle, who in response to a similar betrayal of the alignment between mind, body and affect by the feigning Jason “deyede for his love, of sorwes smerte” (1579).

Lucrece offers perhaps the most extreme and problematic instance of female agency. The question of whether suicide in the context of rape was justified was hotly debated. Though some theologians and writers were sympathetic, Augustine’s condemnation – the reverse of the “gret compassioun” (1690) with which he is credited by Chaucer – also exercised a powerful influence.²³ Chaucer’s emphasis on the affective power of fear and shame lends credence to the hagiographic structures he uses, allowing his Lucrece to become an icon of “trouthe” (1860), loyalty, and

“stedefastnesse” (1687). This “stedefastnesse” is physically manifest in Lucrece’s stillness, which is contrasted with Tarquinius’ irrational desire, depicted through images of fire and madness. The rape scene exploits the physiology of fear; the physical affect of shock on the instinctive power of judgement shared by animals and humans: “Hire wit is al ago. / Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lomb alone, / To whom shal she compleyne or make mone?” (1797-99). Lucrece’s fear of shame not only explains her submission to the rape, but also precludes any question of guilt by causing her to swoon:

. . . what for fer of sclaunder and drede of deth,
 She loste bothe at ones wit and breth,
 And in a swogh she lay, and wex so ded
 Men myghte smyten of hire arm or hed;
 She feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr. (1814-18)

Lucrece’s unconsciousness has been seen as a defeat, in that it renders her still more one of the Legend’s “enervated, passive heroines,” unable even to control her body.²⁴ Yet this does not take account of the medieval medical understanding of the vital spirit as departing to the heart, leaving the body senseless in response to “fer” and “drede”. The phrase “wit and breth” makes clear that the swoon is precisely related to the constraint of vital spirit, since this is regulated by breathing; in the brain deprived of spirit, the wits fail. Inaction is the result of extreme affective response: it proves “trouthe” and contrasts starkly with Tarquinius’ treachery, where the uncontrolled vital spirit (ungoverned by the animal spirit that controls rationality) rushes out overheated from his fiery heart “so wodly” (1752), to cause the rash deed of rape.

The certainty of Lucrece's innocence allows Chaucer to link her suicide with her shame, her concern for her husband's name, and her refusal to be "forgiven" for a crime that she has not committed – all sentiments shaped by the values of Roman society. But if Chaucer excuses Lucrece's suicide by placing it historically, he also draws overtly on the genre of the saint's life, to characterise it as voluntary martyrdom. Even more than Dido's, this is a reasoned action, performed despite the many "ensamples" Lucrece is offered: "Be as be may . . . of forgyvyng, / I wol not have noo forgyft for nothing" (1852-53). Like Dido, she plans secretly, taking out the knife "pryvely", and Chaucer uses strikingly active language, "she rafte hirself hir lyf" (1854-55). This is an act of intent, freely chosen, courageously and carefully executed to preserve modesty by arranging her clothes as she falls, "So wel she loved clenness and eke trouthe" (1860). The narrator's final emphasis is on firmness of will: "Ne in hir wille she chaunged for no newe"; she manifests "the stable herte, sadde and kynde" (1875-76). Will is combined with affect and intellect in the idea of the firm, sober and natural heart. Yet, ironically, for the raped body to sustain this, mind must also be set against body, the body-mind continuum broken, a breaking that is violently enacted in suicide. This is the paradox of martyrdom: the bold body also becomes the dead body, the temporal movement of affect and will frozen in an eternally symbolic form.

Conclusion

Across Chaucer's romance writings, mind, body and affect are inscribed in complex ways that link thinking, feeling, imagining and remembering: the acts intrinsic to the process of reading. In Chaucer's male protagonists, cognition and affect work powerfully upon body and mind, and are probed with striking

physiological vividness. Readers see too a progression of portrayals of female mind, body and affect: from Blanche, her sensory being conjured up from memory, to Emilye, present, pitying yet largely silenced, to Criseyde, caught within the conflict of reason and desire, memory and possibility, to the women of the *Legend*, in whom the meeting of thinking and feeling create the agency of death. Pathos and empathy act forcefully on the minds of readers to animate their stories and their laments.

Paradoxically, love and loss, betrayal and death also become affirmative in their affective power. In the exploration of affect and cognition, of truly felt emotion and active choices governing minds and bodies, these narratives evoke grief and empathy, but for their readers they also speak to the possibility and the power of female agency.

¹ See Roy Porter's summary, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London, 1997), 9, and his discussion of classical and medieval medicine, 44-134; see further Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, Contributions in Psychology 14 (New York, 1990). For general studies of medieval medicine, see M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 7 (Cambridge, 1993), Faye Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1998), Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1990), and C. H. Talbot, *Medicine in Medieval England* (London, 1967).

² See further Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford, 2004), 168, 158. See in particular *The City of God* 14.6-7 and 14.19.

³ The theory of the three kinds of spirits is discussed in Johannitius' *Isagoge ad artem Galeni* (a brief translation of an Arabic treatise), translated by Constantine the African and circulated as part of the *Articella*, with a group of six medical texts translated in the twelfth century from Arabic into Latin: see Knuuttila, *Emotions*, 212-13.

⁴ Jacqueline Tasioulas, “‘Dying of Imagination’ in the First Fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*”, *Medium Ævum* 82 (2013): 212-35, at 216-17; the details given here of the five cells are indebted to Tasioulas’ lucid summary. See Avicenna, *Liber de anima seu Sextus de naturalibus*, ed. Simone van Riet (Leiden, 1968), and the detailed discussion in Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Warburg Institute Surveys 6 (London, 1975), 43-64; and see further Michelle Karnes, *Imagination, Meditation and Cognition in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 2011), in particular 41-45.

⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 10 (Cambridge, 1990), 17. See further *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, Material Texts (Philadelphia, 2002), and Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 34 (Cambridge, 1998).

⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 59.

⁷ See Carolyn Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in the Canterbury Tales* (Ann Arbor, 2001), and Tasioulas, 216.

⁸ For Aquinas on the imagination see *Summa Theologiae*, ed. P. Caramello, 4 vols (Taurini, 1952-56), I, 84.7; and further Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, Topics in Medieval Philosophy (Oxford and New York, 1993), and Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry*, Moral Traditions (Washington, DC, 2009).

⁹ See Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (1988; London, 2000), developed further in his *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (1994; London, 2006).

¹⁰ Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 19.

¹¹ *A Ladder of Foure Ronges by the whiche Men Mowe Wele Clyme to Heven*, cited by Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago, 2007), 51: for the treatise, see *Deonise Hid Diuinite and other Treatises on Contemplative Prayer Related to The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Phyllis Hodgson, EETS 231 (London, 1955), 100-17.

¹² Scholarship on Chaucer and gender is plentiful and wide-ranging: particularly influential studies include Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, 1989), Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives, & Amazons* (Iowa City, 1990), Jill Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer, Feminist Readings* (London, 1991), Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, 1992), Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Princeton, 1994), and Angela Jane Weisl, *Conquering the Reign of Femeny*, *Chaucer Studies* 22 (Cambridge, 1995).

¹³ See further "Laywomen and the Arts" in Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500*, *The Longman History of Medieval Women* (London, 2002), 209-19, *The History of British Women's Writing*, vol. 1: 700-1500, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt (Basingstoke, 2012), in particular part 3, "Literacies and Literary Cultures", 133-86, and D. H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁴ See further Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*, Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England*, *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia, 2008), Mary Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2002).

¹⁵ See Melissa Furrow, *Expectations of Romance: The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England*, *Studies in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 2009), 5-6.

¹⁶ Carol M. Meale, “. . . alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch: laywomen and their books in late medieval England” in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 17 (Cambridge, 1993), 128-58, at 139; see also Julia Boffey, “Women authors and women’s literacy in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England” in *Women and Literature in Britain*, ed. Meale, 159-82.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (1987; Oxford, 1988), II, 80-109. All subsequent references to Chaucer’s works are to this edition, cited by line numbers.

¹⁸ See Green, *Women Readers*, 3-77.

¹⁹ See Tasioulas, “Dying of Imagination”, in particular, 213-19.

²⁰ See Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De rerum proprietatibus* (1601; Frankfurt, 1964) 5.3 and John of Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford, 1975) 1.73. Trevisa instances “grete thoughtes of sorwe, and of to grete studie and of drede”, but not love specifically.

²¹ See Tasioulas, 218.

²² For a sophisticated and provocative reading of this type, see Lisa J. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Ithaca, 1983). See also Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley, 1994), and for a contrasting view, Carolyn P. Collette, *Rethinking Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women* (York, 2014).

²³ See further my *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2001), 152-77, 267-73.

²⁴ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics*, 75.