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**“Emotional Expression in Medieval Society: Tears and Weeping in Chaucer’s  
*Prioress’s Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*”**

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## Abstract

The History of Emotions considers emotions to be part of human cultural heritage; our experience, expression and understanding of emotions are shaped in relation to implicit structures of a society and community, its value-system(s), gender assumptions, and religious precepts. The medieval understanding and treatment of tears and weeping was shaped, on the one hand, by ancient medical-philosophical teachings on human nature. This discourse is characterized by the gendered and hierarchical associations of the mind/soul to the male sex, and of the body and emotions to the female sex. Tears were also discussed within a religious discourse, where Church doctrine, penitential theology and rituals circumscribed and prescribed lachrymose behaviour. Tears had the potential to be outward signs of the soul's communication with God. With the development of the practice of affective piety, religiosity was characterized by the identification with Christ's suffering, which made strong embodied emotion a pronounced part of religious practice and devotion. In this dissertation I discuss the meaning of medieval tears and weeping first in a religious context and second in a secular context, using Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* and his *Troilus and Criseyde*. In the *Prioress's Tale* I consider the emotional community that the Prioress's language of feeling creates and the particular function of tears in view of her spiritual instruction of her listeners. I argue that the Prioress's emotionalism is employed to emphasise the connection between humanity and divinity. Her sensitivity is used to embody the maternal love of the Virgin for humanity, and to relate spiritual concepts in emotionally and sensually accessible terms. She uses the materiality of the 'greyn' and the affective image of the child martyr to engage lived experiences in the physical world as agents in spiritual experience. Tears bridge the earthly and divine worlds in her tale. In *Troilus and Criseyde* I consider the individual psychological emotional experience of the male protagonist in relation to the medieval discourse on gender. Chaucer represents Troilus's lovesick tears as a threat to his masculine identity, and explores the psychological basis of Troilus's abjection – which testifies to a heterosexual conflict between loss of agency and narcissistic indulgence. I argue that Chaucer seeks to offset Troilus's abject emotional experience with a view of love as means and occasion for moral perfection. He therefore imbues the pagan narrative with a Christian language of a charitable love, so that Troilus's tears are reconcilable with his manhood.

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**Author's Declaration**

“I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.”

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## I. Introduction: A History of Tears, and Chaucer

In Western culture expressions of the face have long been considered discursive. Pliny the Elder described the eyes as “windows to the soul”<sup>1</sup>, and “mirrors of the mind”, able to “confess the secrets of the heart”.<sup>2</sup> In the ancient world, the Stoic’s “face of stone” pointed at a rejection of all things regarded as negatively influencing the human rational capacity; feelings, desires, passions. Stoicism engaged a connection between the body, senses and emotions, in opposition to the mind and reason. Within the Stoic Philosophy of a natural *logos* (an active reason pervading the universe), logic was the operative principle of all activity, and human virtue was defined by a will in accordance with Nature (i.e. reason). In understanding the *natural* order and the human place in it, the Stoics intended to achieve *apatheia* (“freedom from the effects of the *pathé*, or emotions”).<sup>3</sup> Emotions clouded judgement, and so, almost all emotions had been treated as vices.<sup>4</sup> The Stoics laid the foundation for a debate both about the nature of emotion and the relationship between emotions, body and mind/soul.

To speak about emotions in history means to consider *experience*, *expression* and *interpretation* of emotions to be shaped by contemporary cultural, social, religious/theological discourses and contexts. The history of emotions thus also provides a paradigm for understanding the self and selfhood in the past. Studies of medieval emotions share lineage with the works of Johan Huizinga and Norbert Elias. Johan Huizinga [1919] and Norbert Elias [1939] described medieval emotions and expression as “child-like”, unbridled, (culturally) unconditioned.<sup>5</sup> Whilst Huizinga saw, for instance, weeping as an act whose meanings were transparent and timeless, Elias defined a linear “process of civilization”, in which medieval emotions appear unrestrained and impulsive.<sup>6</sup> In refutation of Elias’s hydraulic model, Barbara Rosenwein argued that people live(d) in different “emotional communities”: An emotional community shares a “system of feeling”, defined and recognized in terms of how emotions are evaluated and felt and the styles and norms of expression. These systems therefore also constitute certain “emotional repertoires”.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pliny the Elder and Karl F. T. Mayhof, ed., *Historia Naturalis* (Lipsiae: Teubner, 1906), 11. 145-6.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Jerome and F. A. Wright, ed., *Epistulae. Select Letters of St. Jerome* (London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1933), 3. 54.

<sup>3</sup> There was no unified word for the emotions yet, but the “emotional vocabulary” included e.g. *passiones*, *perturbationes*, *desiderium*, and pleasure and pain. See Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016), 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Rev. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> See also Jonas Liliequist, *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012).

Scholars such as Daniel L. Smail and Gerd Althoff have focused on the meaning of strong public emotional expressions in relation to medieval societal structures. With the lack of many of the official governing authorities and institutions of our modern day, power was more dispersed. In medieval public life emotional expressions carried distinctive social functions and uses, which could create power structures of their own.<sup>8</sup> (In a similar vein, William Reddy argued for the idea of “emotional regimes” as the dominant modes of emotional expression that structure a society at a particular time, “underpinned by official rituals and practices”.<sup>9</sup>) Medieval emotional expressions could be part of a recognized repertoire of public communication.<sup>10</sup> Based on surviving records of legal proceedings, Daniel L. Smail showed that emotions in court served one’s social status and rights; the performativity of emotions also establishes emotions as “social states” that define an individual’s relationship to a community.<sup>11</sup>

The medieval treatment of tears and weeping was shaped, on the one hand, by the ancient gendered and hierarchical notions of body and mind/soul. Classical medical and philosophical theories on sex difference by Plato, Hippocrates and Aristotle permeated the Middle Ages with Galen’s writings being one of the chief classical texts that were preserved in monasteries after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Galen, a Greek physician and philosopher of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, largely influenced not only medieval views on male and female bodies, health and sickness, but also on the nature of emotion. Galenic humoral theory borrowed from Aristotelian and Hippocratic ideas that female bodies were colder and wetter than male bodies, which were hotter and drier.<sup>12</sup> According to Aristotle this created an *active male principle* against a *passive female principle*. Under this theory, the male constituted *form* (the “actualization of life”, essence, or spirit) whereas the female constituted *matter* (the material substance, body, or flesh). The lack of heat in women caused humoral excess, as their bodies produced more fluid (menstrual blood) than male bodies.<sup>13</sup> This material superfluity of the female body caused women

<sup>8</sup> Gerd Althoff, "Demonstration und Inszenierung. Spielregeln der Kommunikation in mittelalterlicher Öffentlichkeit," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 27 (1993).

<sup>9</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129.

<sup>10</sup> See also Althoff, Gerd Althoff, "Empörung, Tränen, Zerknirschung. 'Emotionen' in der öffentlichen Kommunikation des Mittelalters," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 30 (1996).

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264-1423* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 244.

<sup>12</sup> Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance notion of woman: a study in the fortunes of scholasticism and medical science in European intellectual life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 30.

<sup>13</sup> Joan Cadden, *Meanings of sex difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, science and culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14-24.

physical and emotional afflictions (cf. *hystera*, Greek for ‘uterus’).<sup>14</sup> Women were more fragile (and fickle) than men because of the necessity of purgation of excess moisture for their health and well-being.

The ancient associations of the female sex with the body, and of the body with the emotions, had a negative slant, rendering tears and weeping ambiguous and suspect. Peter of Spain, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De animalibus*, explains the relationship between female bodily wetness and lachrymosity/emotion like this: “Because moisture retains an impression less easily than dryness, women lack confidence concerning things promised to them. They are jealous because they are by nature less perfect than men [and] they fear that others are out to cheat them.”<sup>15</sup> Another late thirteenth-century commentary (in Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’s *Women’s Secrets*) describes female tears as “evil humours” leaving the body: tears pointed either to women’s “wickedness” or their “ignorance”, because “dampness coarsens the brain”.<sup>16</sup>

The medical-philosophical discourse coexisted with (and influenced) religious precepts on emotion, body and soul. Weeping had the potential to be a spiritually significant act, but Church doctrines and penitential theology also circumscribed (and prescribed) its performance. One of the most important figures in early Christianity to write on tears and weeping was St. Augustine. The bishop of Hippo’s *Confessions* (397/401), written approximately ten years after his conversion to Christianity from Manichaeism,<sup>17</sup> are a repudiation of the Manichean dualism of body and soul – the body being inherently evil (pertaining to the dark material world), and the latter being inherently good (pertaining to the spiritual world of light). Augustine describes tears as a bodily manifestation of the “movements” (lusts, desires, affects, passions) of the soul and so emotional expressions are a blessing or a curse depending on the disposition of the soul.<sup>18</sup> In *City of God*, Augustine expands on the argument that, the body itself is not the origin of vice, but that good and evil originate in the soul, and that virtue is thus a question of will.<sup>19</sup> If the soul, through the will, is fixed on the good and grounded in praise of God, the emotions it carries along are virtuous.<sup>20</sup> Thus emotional expressions do not in themselves pertain to vice, and to separate

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: the Viaticum and its commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Elina Gertsman, *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), xii.

<sup>17</sup> Rosenwein, *Generations of feeling*, 24-5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 24-32.

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, 14, in Philip Schaff et.al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Rosenwein, *Generations of feeling*, 32.



oneself from a “corrupt body” does not adequately teach man about sin. (Against the Manichean interpretation of Original Sin as carnal knowledge, Augustine famously formulated the doctrine as a sin of pride and disobedience, and regarded concupiscence an “unlawful” (i.e. ungodly) passion of both body and soul.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Christ redeemed humanity fully, and human sexuality is redeemed in the resurrection of the body.<sup>22</sup>)

In the *Confessions*, it is by means of his experiences of weeping that Augustine finds God, and learns to properly identify good and bad. He confesses his adolescent tears because they testified to vanity, self-pity (1.13.21),<sup>23</sup> or vengefulness (1.6.8), rather than to need, grief or charity/friendship (4.6.11). Later, Augustine recognizes the gift of tears that his mother received when she prayed for him before he converted to Christianity: God “did not scorn those tears of hers, which gushed forth and watered the ground beneath her eyes whenever she prayed” (3.11.19) because they sprang from contrition that could not be expressed in words. His mother’s tearful intercession symbolises Augustine’s spiritual birth into the Christian Church.<sup>24</sup> Augustine learns the significance of prayer and the value of confession as a means for man to approach God, both body and soul: He regularly receives the gift of tears, and since their source is God’s grace, Augustine can embrace these tears fully: His vulnerable body and tearful outpourings become redemptive prayers.

The gift of tears (*gratia lacrimarum*), from God and to God, became one of the most important theological concepts in saint’s lives from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with the “evolution of religious sensibility” and St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s reform of the Cistercian order.<sup>25</sup> It prevailed over the ascetic ideal of suffering “as a sign of sainthood (...) whose spiritual content seemed more authentic”.<sup>26</sup> The “tears of compunction” were provoked by meditation on the Passion and the *memoria* of Christ and they proved the love of God: The receiver was awarded a “foretaste of the beatific vision”<sup>27</sup> – the direct showing of God to the individual, unmediated by faith. Obscuring (worldly) vision, the tears refined and purified the *eye of the spirit*, so that the Creator be better known. The tears were thereby a “condition and a sign of the visitation of the soul by the Word in this world” and defined

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<sup>21</sup> *City of God*, 14:3, and *Sermon on the Mount*, 1:16:46, *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *City of God*, 14, *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Confessions*, *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See also Nancy A. Jones, "By Woman's Tears Redeemed: Female Lament in St. Augustine's "Confessions" and the Correspondence of Abelard and Heloise," in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, ed. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> André Vauchez and Jean Birrell, *Sainthood in the later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 438.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

saintly status in the later Middle Ages: The absence of the gift of tears diminished “the reputation for sanctity of a servant of God”.<sup>28</sup>

The understanding that tears could commune with God influenced penitential theology in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The authority of the Church in remission of sin had often meant that priests were “instructed to encourage lachrymose practices”; tears were ultimately outward signs of true contrition and penitential manuals instructed penitents on how to confess.<sup>29</sup> This ‘invented sincerity’ of emotion competed with a new focus on personalism and the self with the influence of Peter Abelard’s moral philosophy. His writings were defined by “a new emphasis on intention in determining the ethical value of an action”.<sup>30</sup> For 12<sup>th</sup>-century spirituality, this “interiorization of sin”<sup>31</sup> meant that tears were directed inward, pointing toward the individual and his private communication with God. Many 12<sup>th</sup>-century theologians began to emphasise that only God knows the secrets of the heart, and thus, only God could be the true judge of the soul.<sup>32</sup> The new concern with the individual’s inner life challenged the historical purpose of penance. The requirement of individual oral confession imposed by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 ultimately represents attempts to “reconcile personal piety and (...) ecclesiastical discipline”.<sup>33</sup> Individual oral confession to one’s priest was to “aid the examination of conscience” of the private, hidden self.<sup>34</sup>

The spread of the ancient medical and philosophical writings from the monasteries into secular life in the 12<sup>th</sup> century revived a (conflicted) gendered discourse on emotion. Medieval man had renewed reason to proclaim that women were “congenitally unable to control strong emotion”.<sup>35</sup> Rules for proper conduct in burial rituals and funerary processions specifically restricted loud female lament.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, women carried a crucial role in ensuring their families’ salvation both in terms of religious education and mourning rituals; their prayers and lamentations ensured the deceased’s soul’s release from

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Swift, "A Penitent Prepares: Affect, Contrition, and Tears," in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 82.

<sup>30</sup> Susan R. Kramer, "'We Speak to God with Our Thoughts': Abelard and the Implications of Private Communication with God," *Church History* 69, no. 1 (2000): 20.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Sin, interiority, and selfhood in the twelfth-century West* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015), 1-3.

<sup>33</sup> "'We Speak to God with Our Thoughts'," 23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>35</sup> Judith Steinhoff, "Weeping Women: Social Roles and Images in Fourteenth-Century Tuscany," in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 35-37.

Purgatory. The regulation of female emotional expression by clerical and civic authority was particularly challenged with the cult of the Passion in the later Middle Ages. Images of the Lamentation from the 13<sup>th</sup>-century began to depict both saintly and secular female mourners and their extreme gestures of grief.<sup>37</sup> With the practice of affective piety, women became models of emotive behaviour.

The identification with the body and tears led female saints and mystics to claim heightened spiritual experience through imitation of Christ's suffering.<sup>38</sup> Between 1200 and 1500 holy women practiced extreme devotion to the Eucharist, symbolically offering their bodies up as food.<sup>39</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that the bodily manipulations by female saints did not serve to deny or mortify the flesh but instead assimilated Woman with the Saviour of humanity, in virtue of their common nurturing flesh and fluids. Through outpourings of tears, blood, breast-milk, etc. the suffering, leaking body attributed to women resembled the body on the cross. Accompanied by visions of mystical pregnancies and lactations, the female ascetic experience symbolized their bearing of the Word of God. The intertwined significations of the female body as food (nurturing Jesus), and of Jesus as mother ('feeding' humanity) redeemed bodily excess.

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The subject of medieval emotionality engages various questions that can be applied to the study of literary texts: What view of the relationship between emotion, body, mind/soul is established by the text? What cultural paradigms are referenced by the particular treatment and use of emotions? What social functions do the emotional expressions perform? What do the texts reveal about individual physical/psychological experience of emotion? What identities are shaped by the emotions?

When reading emotions and "affective discourses"<sup>40</sup> in historical and literary texts, we are guided by its "emotion words" and "emotional vocabulary".<sup>41</sup> We rely, as Stephanie Trigg writes, "on textual and material traces and representations of feelings [and sentiment] (...) as they are processed, described and performed by human subjects".<sup>42</sup> Literature itself also

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Maguire, "Women Mourners in Byzantine Art, Literature, and Society," *ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>38</sup> See Margery Kempe and B. A. Windeatt, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Harlow: Longman, 2000). Julian of Norwich and B. A. Windeatt, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy feast and holy fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> Stephanie Downes, and Rebecca F. McNamara, "The History of Emotions and Middle English Literature," *Literature Compass* 13, no. 6 (2016).

<sup>41</sup> Rosenwein, *Generations of feeling*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Stephanie Trigg, "Introduction: Emotional Histories - Beyond the Personalization of the Past and the Abstraction of Affect Theory," *Exemplaria* 26, no. 1 (2014): 7.

brings with it emotional “conventions, social codes and decorum”<sup>43</sup> – which can be seen in the form of genres such as the *fabliau* or courtly romance.

In 1602, Francis Beaumont wrote about Chaucer,

“(…) One gift he hath above other Authors, and that is, By excellencie of his descriptions, to possesse his Readers with a more forcible imagination of feeling that (as it were) done before their eies, which they read, than any other that ever hath written in any tongue.”<sup>44</sup>

About the *Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400) he wrote further:

“(…) his drifte is to touche all sortes of men, and to discover all vices of that age, which he doth so feelingly, and with so true an ayme, as he never failes to hit whatsoever marke he levels at.”<sup>45</sup>

Chaucer’s project in the *Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400) is in many ways an investigation into human emotion. Through its multi-layered narrative structure, the *Tales* generate an intricate network of affectivity and affective dialogue, from the lives within the tales, to the group of pilgrims themselves and their reactions to each other, to the host, to the narrator’s comment and perspective.<sup>46</sup> Told by a motley group of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury, the *Tales* unite otherwise socially, economically, culturally separated men and women on their mutual quest for salvation. Each of the 24 tales represents the teller’s social vocation, status, education, personality, values, as well as their political grievances. The *Tales* are often described as a form of “estates satire”, which “set[s] forth the functions and duties of each estate and castigate[s] the failure of the estates (...) to live up to their divinely assigned social roles.”<sup>47</sup> In the *General Prologue* Chaucer gives detailed descriptions of the pilgrims, revealing their conformance or deviance from accepted social norms, and their forms of individualized self-expression. Commenting on

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<sup>43</sup> Stephanie Trigg, "Delicious, tender chaucer: coleridge, emotion and affect", in *Emotion, Affect, Sentiment: The Language and Aesthetics of Feeling*, SPELL: Swiss papers in English language and literature 30: 51-66, edited by Andreas Langlotz and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet (Tübingen: Narr, 2014), 52.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Stephanie Downes, Andrew Lynch, and Katrina O'Loughlin, eds., *Emotions and War: Medieval to Romantic Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 77.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The idea for the narrative framework may have come to Chaucer from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. See Geoffrey Chaucer and Larry D. Benson et al., eds., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Alfred David, “Medieval Estates and Orders: Making and Breaking Rules”, entry on the web companion to *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (2006), edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al., accessed at: [http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/middleages/topic\\_1/welcome.htm](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/middleages/topic_1/welcome.htm).

the pilgrims' appearance, manners, and dispositions, Chaucer juxtaposes convention and individuality, virtue and flaw. Emotions in the *Tales* are often the markers of conflict, change and transgressions, but also just as importantly, the markers of social structure and cohesion, functioning as reference points in the demarcation of cultural domains and social roles. The moment of "temporary equality"<sup>48</sup> created by the setting of the *Tales* appeals to a common humanity amongst the pilgrims and to virtues of empathy, charity and forgiveness. Chaucer is (at least ostensibly) concerned with morale, as the host informs the pilgrims that the best tale will be the one 'of best sentence and moost solaas' (l. 798).<sup>49</sup> The narrator frequently distances himself from the obscene and ungodly parts of the *Tales*, and asks his readers to 'put me out of blame':

'For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye  
Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce  
Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,  
*Or elles falsen som of my mateere.*  
*And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere,*  
*Turne over the leef and chese another tale;*  
*For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,*  
Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,  
And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.'

(I (A) 3172-80, my italics)

The psychological insight and acute representations of diverse human sentiments appear to come at a prize – which the narrator ultimately repents: 'Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;/ and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns'. The Retractions may be seen as a "concluding step in a poem on the theme of the pilgrimage of life".<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the most striking difference in this light between the *Canterbury Tales* and Chaucer's epic poem *Troilus and Criseyde* (1381-1387) is Chaucer's concern in the latter work to situate himself amongst some of the greatest writers of Western tragedy: Chaucer's 'littel book' is supposed to follow in the footsteps of Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius (V. 1786-92). *Troilus and Criseyde* is a Middle English retelling of a love story set during the Trojan War. Troilus, son of Priam (King of Troy), falls in love

<sup>48</sup> Chaucer and Benson et al., eds., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., CT Fragment I (A) l. 789, p. 36. All quotations from Chaucer's texts are taken from this edition and line numbers will be given in the body of the text.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 965.

with Criseyde and suffers of lovesickness, until he enjoys a union with Criseyde – an all too brief one, as Criseyde gets exchanged for Antenor, a prisoner of war, and departs to the Greek camp. Although Troilus and Criseyde have promised each other fidelity, Criseyde is wooed by Diomedes upon her arrival to the Greek camp and betrays Troilus. Troilus finally dies in battle against Achilles, and ascends to the eighth sphere of heaven. Chaucer's medieval sources for the story are Benoît de St. Maure's *Roman de Troi* (12<sup>th</sup> century, French verse), which was the source for Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* (early 13<sup>th</sup> century, Latin prose), and Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* (1335/40), an Italian narrative poem.

Chaucer consistently draws attention, however, to *Troilus's* classical poetic past. The story belongs to the Matter of Rome cycle and Chaucer thus engages in the *translatio studii et imperii*.<sup>51</sup> Chaucer's introduction of the story as the 'double sorwe of Troilus' goes back to Dante's *Divina Commedia* (1321), which speaks of the 'doppia trestizia' of Giocasta, which, in turn, can be traced back to Statius's *Thebaid*.<sup>52</sup> The latter, a classical Latin epic on the tragedy of Thebes, is also referenced at the start of Book 1. Chaucer begins his poem with an invocation, not to a Muse, but to Tisiphone, one of the three Furies:

Thesiphone, thou help me for t'endite  
 Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write!  
 To thee clepe I, thou goddesse of torment,  
 Thou cruel Furie, sorwing ever in peyne; (I. 6-9)

Chaucer imitates, here, Oedipus's invocation of Tisiphone in Statius's opening scene in which he curses the 'double evil'.<sup>53</sup> Chaucer seems to evoke the moral implications of Troilus's 'sorwe'.

Chaucer calls his poem 'the book of Troilus'<sup>54</sup>; he focuses on the inner life of his male protagonist and foregrounds the subject of Troilus's individual suffering against the classical account of the Siege of Troy, as a microcosm of the city's fate – like Troy, Troilus ('little Troy') comes to destruction. But Chaucer's version is also "one of the first texts in English extensively deliberating on the *subject* of love in the (...) form of the

<sup>51</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 30-31.

<sup>52</sup> John V. Fleming, *Classical imitation and interpretation in Chaucer's Troilus* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 49.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>54</sup> Chaucer's reference to *Troilus and Criseyde* in the Retractions of the *Canterbury Tales* (X (I) 1085).

romance".<sup>55</sup> Chaucer's deliberation on love is informed by his interest in Boethian philosophy. Chaucer translated Boethius's *De consolacione philosophiae* at about the same time he wrote *Troilus and Criseyde*.<sup>56</sup> He explores the nature of love in *Troilus* and its topics of fate (Fortune) and agency with poetic freedom, and takes his *Troilus* beyond the bounds of its (pagan and textual) history.

In this dissertation I first look at the affective style of one of Chaucer's religious tales, the *Prioress's Tale*, and consider teller and tale in light of their aim to spiritually edify listeners and readers. The Prioress tells a miracle of the Virgin Mary, and as such functions as the Virgin's handmaiden to relate divine love in human and accessible terms. Chaucer attributes to the Prioress a proneness to tears and sympathy for the small and the vulnerable; in her tale this sensitivity extends to a discourse of maternal love as paradigm for the Virgin's love for mankind. The Prioress's emotionalism emphasises the connection between humanity and divinity, and engages lived experiences in the physical world as agents in spiritual experience. Through the child martyr and the 'greyn', the Prioress engages a sensuous, affective, experience-oriented imparting of divine knowledge. As the 'greyn' nourishes the child with the Virgin's love, the child martyr becomes the bearer of the Word; the 'greyn' received by the abbot is a powerful physical instantiation of divine grace. The tears in response to this miracle proclaim that mankind comprehends and apprehends God in virtue of the body and senses. The miracle manifests God's praise in the world through its embodiment of spiritual concepts. The Prioress represents a source of affective identification for her Christian community; weeping not only reflects and consolidates a value-system – characterised in the tale by love, grief, compassion, humility, devotion – but the tears also proclaim that man is a unity of body and soul.

Next to the *Prioress's Tale*, I look at the individual emotional experience of the male weeping subject in *Troilus and Criseyde*. I consider how, in Vern Bullough's words, "conceived gender roles also put limitations on male development," and how *Troilus's* emotional experience is shaped by different understandings of the nature of love.<sup>57</sup> *Troilus's* lovesickness divests him of a 'manhod' that is defined in terms of both physical prowess and moral virtue. He is enslaved to his desire and in a state of abjection that

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<sup>55</sup> Andreas Mahler, "Potent raisings': performing passion in Chaucer and Shakespeare" in *Love, history and emotion in Chaucer and Shakespeare*, ed. Andrew James Johnston and Russel West-Pavlov and Elizabeth Kempf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 35.

<sup>56</sup> Gillian Rudd, *The Complete Critical Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: Routledge, 2001), 20.

<sup>57</sup> Vern L. Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees, et.al. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 33.

conflicts with his reason and masculine self-rule. The psychological implications of this conflict are a dangerous narcissism and a willed vulnerability. Apparent in Chaucer's representation of Troilus's abjection is a gradual moralization of Troilus's view of love. I argue that Chaucer situates Troilus's morbid desire in the context of pagan idolatry. His "pagan love" is defined by idolizing worship of Criseyde's image; it materialises Criseyde as a commodity of Fortune/the God of Love that he must – but cannot – possess. In this discourse, Troilus's struggle with his emotional experience is the product of a 'false' God of Love who blinds his victims to the true value of love. Chaucer seeks to supplant Troilus's desire and narcissism with humility and 'trouthe' that are rooted in a Christian view of love as charitable. As his love grows beyond a physical attachment, Troilus can reconcile his emotion with morally-engaged reason and agency. His love-suffering no longer divests him of his 'manhod' but involves argument about his loyalty to Criseyde.



## II. Embodied Spirituality: Transformative Tears in the Prioress's Tale

The *Prioress's Tale* belongs to four of Chaucer's tales that have been classed as his "religious tales" because they "deal specifically and deeply with faith and spiritual transcendence".<sup>58</sup> All four tales combine, as Barbara Nolan discusses, rhyme royal with formal prayer and they take as their subject "strictly *spiritual* values" rather than "moral concerns per se" – their focus is the "divine light to which the soul, imprisoned in a mortal body, wishes to ascend."<sup>59</sup> Spaced out evenly between the other tales, the religious tales appear like sobering reminders of the pilgrim's purpose, pointing as they do to salvation. Importantly, the tellers aim to spiritually edify their listeners and so, as Robert Worth Frank puts it, "they never settle for simple recitation of a wonder".<sup>60</sup> The Prioress's narration of a Marian miracle is not a tale told by someone removed from worldly pursuits; it is the Prioress's sensibility for human affections and her own human inclinations that inform the pathos she employs to reach her listeners and readers. She relates divine love and knowledge as firmly rooted in the physical world and as realised through human feeling and action. As Christina Lutter has pointed out, miracle stories, like *exempla*, told "events worth remembering (...) by virtue of their relatedness to personal encounters and experiences and specific social environments (...) [They] are intended to be comprehensible directly and sensually, [so as to be] suited to serve as models for spiritual instruction."<sup>61</sup>

In the *General Prologue* the Prioress stands out for her affectations, her effort to mimic courtly manners (l. 132-141) and an extreme sensitivity that manifests itself in tears and pity towards her pet dogs and mice (l. 144-150). Not uncommonly critics have judged that the Prioress's concern for worldly things and her "shallow sentimentality" amount to a satiric portraiture with which Chaucer mocks the faults of his time.<sup>62</sup> As a member of the convent at Stratford at Bow, the Prioress lives under the *Rule of St. Benedict*,<sup>63</sup> and ostensibly, there is no doubt that the Prioress is mildly satirized: She carries a brooch that

<sup>58</sup> The Man of Law's Tale, the Clerk's Tale, the Prioress's Tale, and the Second Nun's Tale. See C. David Benson and Elizabeth Robertson, eds., *Chaucer's Religious Tales* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990).

<sup>59</sup> Barbara Nolan, "Chaucer's Tales of Transcendence: Rhyme Royal and Christian Prayer in the Canterbury Tales," in *Chaucer's Religious Tales*, ed. C. David Benson and Elizabeth Robertson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 21-22.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Worth Frank, "Pathos in Chaucer's Religious Tales," *ibid.*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Christina Lutter, "Preachers, Saints and Sinners: Emotional Repertoires in High Medieval Religious Role Models," in *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800*, ed. Jonas Liliequist (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 53.

<sup>62</sup> See e.g. Charles W. Dunn (1952), Richard J. Schoeck (1956), and E. T. Donaldson (1958).

<sup>63</sup> Sister M. Madeleva, *Chaucer's Nuns and other Essays* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1965), 6.

has been judged to be an unholy piece of luxurious jewellery for a nun.<sup>64</sup> It bears the inscription ‘Amor vincit omnia’ (l. 162), which is ambiguous in its reference to worldly or divine love. Her table manners, the description of which is taken from romance literature, are “far removed from life in any nunnery”.<sup>65</sup> John Livingston Lowes has accordingly condemned the Prioress as hovering between two worlds, the religious and the romantic.<sup>66</sup> Her most serious departure from monastic rule is considered to be her habit of feeding her dogs with ‘rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed’ (l. 147) – food that was not only expensive but could have been given to the poor. In light of such criticism, the Prioress’s “anti-Semitic tale” appears to be only further evidence for her falsehood, as Madame Eglentyne’s charity and tenderness are not extended to her fellow men when she tells with “perfect blandness”<sup>67</sup> of the torturing of the Jews.<sup>68</sup> To the modern reader, the tale’s anti-Semitism is shocking. But the Prioress’s treatment of the Jews must be viewed in an historical as well as literary context. Robert Worth Frank notes that to accuse the Prioress of anti-Semitism is “historically naïve”;<sup>69</sup> the Prioress’s religious prejudice is not a characteristic aspect of herself and cannot have been employed by Chaucer to satiric effect: “If we see Chaucer as condemning the teller [the Prioress], then we must also see him as condemning the form of her tale [the Marian miracle story], and thus as condemning a most powerful complex of beliefs, attitudes, and feelings universally shared in his age.”<sup>70</sup>

The Prioress employs the Jews as part of an archetypal antagonism between good and evil – God and Satan – characteristic of edifying miracle stories. In view of her aim to spiritually instruct her readers, the Prioress’s critics have also acknowledged too little the particular connection between emotionalism and piety drawn by teller and tale: Set in the tradition of affective piety, the Prioress’s tale engages a strong relationship between

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<sup>64</sup> Against this criticism, Sister M. Madeleva has defended the Prioress’s brooch as “undoubtedly a medal, one of the commonest sacramentals in the Catholic Church. It is a small object, much like a locket, bearing engraving and inscriptions of a religious nature. In itself it has no virtue; its value lies in the fact that it reminds the owner or bearer of some truth of religion and so inspires him or her to virtue.” *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>65</sup> Florence H. Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 17.

<sup>66</sup> See John Livingston Lowes, “Simple and Coy: A Note on Fourteenth Century Poetic Diction,” *Anglia* 33 (1910). Hardy L. Frank has pointed out, however, that from a Marian viewpoint, “a choice between celestial and earthly love poses a patently false dilemma. (...) For the Prioress and for the pilgrims all love was one love and Mary was its vessel.” See Hardy Long Frank, “Chaucer’s Prioress and the Blessed Virgin,” *The Chaucer Review* 13, no. 4 (1979): 346.

<sup>67</sup> Muriel Bowden, *A commentary on the General prologue to the Canterbury tales* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), 99-100.

<sup>68</sup> See also John M. Steadman (1959) and D. W. Robertson (1963).

<sup>69</sup> Robert Worth Frank, “Miracles of the Virgin, Medieval Anti-Semitism, and the Prioress’s Tale,” in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1982), 178.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

emotion and religious practice, and establishes tears and weeping as agents in spiritual experience. In order to bridge the gap between transcendent ideals and human experience, the Prioress engages an embodied spirituality through which she intimates that humans comprehend and apprehend the divine through lived experience in the physical world. In this, the Prioress imitates the Virgin and emphasises Mary's connection to the earthly elements, drawing parallels between physical and spiritual love. The tale uses emotionally relatable events, underpinning the sensory perceivable aspects, in order to evoke and direct her listener's compassion, humility and devotion toward the child martyr (who embodies Christ), and to relate the divine love of humanity's "advocate, redemptrix and role model"<sup>71</sup> – the Virgin Mary. The tale's emotionalism achieves "transitions between the material and spiritual, between the body and soul (...), this world and the next."<sup>72</sup> Tears in the Prioress's tale bridge the earthly and divine; they both manifest God's presence in this world and consummate the salvific and transformative act that leads mortal humankind to its eternal dwelling.

## 1

After a highly devout invocation to the Virgin Mary in the Prioress's prologue, which mutes concerns about matters of fundamental faith raised by her portrait,<sup>73</sup> the Prioress adapts a miracle legend of a 'litel clergeon'<sup>74</sup> who has learned 'by rote' the Marian antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater* and sings it walking to and from school through the 'Jewerye' of his town (l. 489-522). The devil, provoked by the song, calls on the Jews not to tolerate such 'despit' upon which a 'cursed Jew' cuts the boy's throat and throws him in a pit (l. 558-571). The Virgin Mary then comes to him and lays a 'greyn' on the boy's tongue, so that he can continue to sing the *Alma Redemptoris* - 'so loude that al the place gan to ryng' (l. 612-3, 656-62). The 'Cristene folk' find him and he tells them of the Virgin Mary's words to him (l. 649-669); the abbot then removes the 'greyn' and the boy 'yaf up the goost ful softely' (l. 670-2). The Jews 'that of this mordre wiste' are hanged, and the child is buried as a martyr (l. 630, 680-3).

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<sup>71</sup> Lutter, "Preachers, Saints and Sinners," 54.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>73</sup> Sister M. Madeleva [1925] and Mary P. Hamilton [1939] have commented on the prologue's borrowings from liturgy and its Scriptural allusions. It bears witness to the Prioress's religious practices, and to a sincere Christian humility (l. 481-487). Robert M. Lumiansky also suggests that, in her prologue, "Chaucer gave the Prioress some of the finest passages of lyric poetry in Middle English." See Robert M. Lumiansky, *Of sondry folk: the dramatic principle in the Canterbury tales* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 81.

<sup>74</sup> Florence H. Ridley notes that the story was sometimes used as a pulpit exemplum and that Chaucer's Prioress might have heard it from a preacher in church or from another nun. See Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics*, 9.

Time and place in the Prioress's miracle are unimportant<sup>75</sup> as the tale is based on (and part of) a collection of stories that constitute a typological conflict between good and evil – represented by their Christian protagonists and their enemies, tempters or persecutors – in which the former triumphs at the hands of humanity's patroness. Like *exempla* and *specula*, miracle stories “served as devices for edification and spiritual instruction”, as Lutter shows, “both for people in monastic communities and, since the thirteenth century, also for a lay audience.”<sup>76</sup> The miracles employ a polarity of wonderful and horrible events, often featuring the devil as the tempter and corrupter of the soul. The antagonism employed by the Prioress is thus predetermined by the genre to which her tale belongs. As Frank points out, the majority of miracles of the Virgin Mary feature Jews, as figures used to “fill [the] hostile role”,<sup>77</sup> and they will have been known to the Prioress as little more than a literary convention.<sup>78</sup> For the medieval reader, the Jews were a “familiar and expected component” and, for the narrator, they provided heightened “dramatic and emotional possibilities”, as human agents of the devil.<sup>79</sup>

In the context of the Prioress's “affective pedagogy”,<sup>80</sup> the Jews carry a distinct function, which she carefully emphasises. Unlike her source material,<sup>81</sup> the Prioress fully spells out the archetypal representation by naming the cause of evil ‘oure firste foo, the serpent Sathanas’ (l. 558), who calls on the Jews to murder the child. The Jews are thus cast as handmaids of Satan, like the child is cast as servant of God. The ‘cursed’ ones represent an incarnation of evil that contrasts the paragon of goodness and innocence – the martyr, who is fully conceptualized as Christ: The Prioress often only uses the epithet ‘this innocent’ to refer to the child (l. 538, 566, 635), and calls him a ‘martir, sowded to virginitee’ (l. 579). The Prioress's rhetoric signals that the conflict is between Him who inspires virtue and him who incites vice (l. 559, 565-6).<sup>82</sup> The Jews fulfil a similar function as the pagans in the *Second Nun's Tale* or as other adversaries of Christ in saintly legends.

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<sup>75</sup> The Prioress emphasizes this by setting her tale in an unnamed Asian city (l. 488), in order to direct the focus on the (universal) connotations of her tale and away from its literal ‘actual state’. This is crucial for the Prioress's emotive edification of her listeners; the intended timelessness of her narrative is also reinforced at the end of her tale by the Prioress's reference to the case of Little St. Hugh of Lincoln (mid-13<sup>th</sup> century) as from ‘but a litel while ago’ (l. 686).

<sup>76</sup> Lutter, “Preachers, Saints and Sinners,” 53.

<sup>77</sup> Frank, “Miracles of the Virgin,” 183.

<sup>78</sup> Ridley points out that “when Chaucer wrote his major poems the Jews had been banished from England for almost a hundred years”. Chaucer's Prioress would have had “no first-hand acquaintance with recognizable Jews at all”. See Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics*, 4-5.

<sup>79</sup> Frank, “Miracles of the Virgin,” 187.

<sup>80</sup> Liliequist, *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800*, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics*, 26-27.

<sup>82</sup> In John 13:2 it is Judas who is prompted by Satan to betray Jesus.

All are used as means to the end of elevating the good; as Ridley puts it, they are “indispensable agents in the saints’ progress to heaven.”<sup>83</sup> In the Prioress’s tale, this typology allows Madame Eglentyne to direct her listener’s emotional involvement, in particular to prompt clear-cut positive and negative emotional responses – compassion and reverence toward the child martyr and the Virgin, and horror and aversion toward the Jews and the devil. The Prioress further aids this by including *sententiae* in her story, to be taken away by her listeners: ‘What may youre yvel entente yow availle? / Mordre wol out, certeyn, it wol nat faille’ (l. 576), and ‘Yvele shal have that yvele wol deserve’ (l. 632).

Furthermore, the Prioress’s diction serves to integrate her tale not only into the tradition of Marian miracle stories but into other martyr legends, such as the story of Little Saint Hugh of Lincoln, or the Massacre of the Innocents alluded to with ‘Herodes’ (l. 574) and with ‘Rachel’ (l. 672) as model for the grieving mother. This contextualization reinforces that the tale is not of an individual’s fate (and his murder by Jews),<sup>84</sup> but of ‘the white Lamb celestial’ (l. 581) and his innocent, persecuted followers who, like Christ himself, are ‘of martirdom the ruby bright’ and ‘gemme[s] of chastite’ (l. 609-10). The Prioress’s aim is to point at the Virgin Mary’s wondrous power in humanity’s pursuit of the eternal kingdom of God, and her pathos is employed to this end. In Ridley’s words, “the point of her story is sanctity, not vengeance”,<sup>85</sup> and the point of her emotionalism is love and compassion, not hatred or defamation.

In line with their edifying purpose, miracles of the Virgin Mary also often end in the conversion of the persecutor or antagonist.<sup>86</sup> The murder of the Jews, such as in the Prioress’s tale, instead emphasises the juxtaposition of death as punishment and death as mercy and redemption. The latter has a particularly heightened emotional impact through the Virgin’s personal words to the boy:

‘My litel child, now wol I fecche thee  
Whan that the greyn is fro thy tonge ytake  
Be nat agast; I wol thee nat forsake.’ (l.667-9)

Those who follow Christ need not fear death. The contrasting punishment of evil is not only in keeping with the tale’s moral (expressed by the Prioress’s *sententiae*), but, as Frank

<sup>83</sup> Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> That the boy represents Christ and ‘Cristen folk’ at large is also expressed by the Prioress’s use of the epithet ‘This Innocent’ for both the boy himself (l. 538, 635) and for that which Satan and the cursed Jews conspire to ‘chace (...) out of this world’. (l. 566)

<sup>85</sup> Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics*, 28.

<sup>86</sup> See Frank, “Miracles of the Virgin,” 183-4.

suggests, “mass conversion would have diverted attention from the final scene”,<sup>87</sup> which, with its sense of triumph and deeply devout emotion shared by the Christian community is crucial to the tale’s sentiment. The tale does not engage in blind, bigoted persecution of Jews by Christians but it punishes the guilty ones and praises the innocent(s). The tale opposes warped emotion with the tender-heartedness of the Prioress and those whose ‘entente’ is ‘set on Cristes mooder deere’ (l. 550). In the Prioress’s tale it is the ability to *feel* and *weep* for love, grief, compassion, charity, and humility that teaches about salvation. As I go on to discuss, the Prioress engages an embodied spirituality that creates direct connections between the human and the divine, between physical and spiritual experience.

## 2

In the impactful final scene of the tale, the Prioress emphasises the physically and emotionally overwhelming effect of the miracle on the abbot and his convent:

And when this abbot had seen this wonder,  
His salte teeris trikked doun as reyn,  
And gruf he fil al plat upon the grounde,  
And stille he lay as he had ben ybounde.  
The covent eek lay on the pavement  
Wepyng, and heryng Cristes mooder deere,           (l. 674-9)

The Prioress’s listeners ought, too, to feel overwhelmed, and they do:

Whan seyde was al this miracle, every man  
As sobre was that wondre was to se (l. 691-92)

The Prioress achieves an unparalleled moment of unanimous feeling amongst the pilgrims. As Louise O. Fradenburg writes, the narration of a miracle of the Virgin “is seen to work its own miracle in the ‘wondre’ of the pilgrims’ sobriety”.<sup>88</sup>

As the teller of a divine miracle on earth, the Prioress functions as the Virgin Mary’s handmaiden. The Prioress’s most distinctive characteristic, her tender feeling, is artfully adapted and vindicated by her tale, as an intimation of the (divine) ‘love that conquers all’. First, her sympathy for little creatures (her dogs and mice) in her portrait –

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>88</sup> Louise O. Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism and the 'Prioress's Tale'," *Exemplaria* 1, no. 1 (1989): 97.

notably, it is the Prioress's possession of *charity* that is foregrounded here<sup>89</sup> – is directly extended to the 'litel' martyr in her tale, whom she aims to make the object of her listener's compassion. The Prioress emphasises the child's young age ('a litel clergeon, seven yeer of age') and his small size by the frequent use of diminutives, and she foregrounds his vulnerability and innocence. Second, the sentiment of the Prioress's grief over her dogs in the General Prologue – 'soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed' (l. 148) – also echoes in the emotionally heightened description of the mother's distress and grief in the tale. That is, the Prioress's "profane" tears extend into a theme of maternal love that intimates the Virgin's love – for 'hir Sone' and for 'mankynde' (l. 466, 619). As Hardy L. Frank notes, we must see the Prioress's miracle, in its honouring of Mary, as also "recapitulating as it does the Joys and Sorrows of Mary," mother of Jesus.<sup>90</sup> It is this maternal love of the Virgin which the Prioress has chosen to celebrate and indeed imitate. The Prioress's sensitivity for the small and the vulnerable informs, in her tale, a moving four-stanza description of a mother's anguish and sorrow:<sup>91</sup>

This poure wydwe awaiteth al that nyght  
 After hir litel child, but he cam noght;  
 For which, as soone as it was dayes lyght,  
 With face pale of drede and bisy thought,  
 She hath at scole and elleswhere hym soght,  
 (...)
 With moodres pitee in hir brest enclosed,  
 She gooth, as she were half out of hir mynde,  
 To every place where she hath supposed  
 By liklihede hir litel child to fynde;  
 (...)
 She frayneth and she preyeth pitously (l.586-599).

The Prioress's empathy with the suffering of a human mother and child not only proves the sincerity of the Prioress's feeling (bestowed on her pets in this world).<sup>92</sup> But her tears, in

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<sup>89</sup> 'But, for to speken of hir conscience, / She was so charitable and so pitous / She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous / Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde' (l. 142-5).

<sup>90</sup> Frank, "Chaucer's Prioress and the Blessed Virgin," 359.

<sup>91</sup> Robert W. Frank points out the similarity between the Prioress's language and the account in Luke 2: 41-48 of Mary's separation from Jesus and her frantic search for her missing son. See Robert W. Frank, Frank, "Pathos in Chaucer's Religious Tales," 44.

<sup>92</sup> Ridley advocates that "the Prioress's dogs are her children, the only ones she is every likely to have; and so nothing could be more natural than her tears." See Ridley, *The Prioress and the Critics*, 24.

prologue and tale, are thereby also employed to connect human experience and divine love; the Prioress's maternal sensitivity is extended to the divine realm, to 'Cristes mooder meek and kynde' whose '*moodres pitee*' consoles all. That is, if Madame Eglentyne's language of feeling is earthbound, its implications are not. The Prioress relates the love of the Virgin towards *her* human fosterlings and thus instructs her listeners (how) to love God. As Frank writes, the Prioress illuminates "to [man], for whom everything seen was an outer and visible symbol of an inner, unseen truth" the Virgin and divine love "in the most passionate terms possible for an earthly one."<sup>93</sup> In its complete context of portrait and tale, the Prioress's tenderness proclaims that spiritual love and religious devotion are bound to – and comprehended through – worldly love and physical experience. The Prioress refers to the Virgin Mary with '(Cristes) mooder' thirteen times, in prologue and tale, emphasising the parallels between the child and Christ and the mother and Mary. Like 'this newe Rachel', the Virgin has shared the fate of "the slaughter of the innocent [Son], [with its] diabolical evil of the slayers and the divine redemption of the slain." And the mother so often calls on 'Cristes moder meeke and kynde' (l. 579) in lamentation of her fate. The Prioress's emotionalism firmly exhibits the tenets of late medieval affective piety, which, in Bynum's words, focused on "humankind's creation in the image and likeness of God [and thus on] the joining of the physical and spiritual world and humankind and divinity".<sup>94</sup> With the Incarnational doctrine the Virgin Mary was connected to the earthly elements and man identified with the humanity of Christ. Affective piety was thus characterised by "a growing sense of God as loving and accessible, and a more accepting reaction to all natural things, including the body." (Ibid.)

The Prioress's edification of her listeners, then, emotionally and sensually "incorporates"<sup>95</sup> the tale's spiritual content. The tale's *embodiment* of (elusive) matters of faith makes the miracle (and thus, divine love) more accessible. As Ridley states, the Prioress's miracle is a "story of real human action and feeling" (p. 27). The Prioress's embodied spirituality makes human emotion and lived experience a powerful component of religious experience, and conceptualises religious emotion in terms of external sensation. In the miracle, the child martyr and the 'greyn' function thereby as important

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<sup>93</sup> Frank, "Chaucer's Prioress and the Blessed Virgin," 347.

<sup>94</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 130.

<sup>95</sup> Lutter, "Preachers, Saints and Sinners," 58.



mediating *figures* and *objects* between the human and divine, fusing the material and spiritual, the secular and the sacred. At the opening of her prologue, the Prioress proclaims:

‘O lord oure lord, thy name how merveillous  
Is in this large world ysprad," quod she  
"For noght oonly thy laude precious  
Parfourned is by men of dignitee,  
*But by the mouth of children thy bountee*  
*Parfourned is, for on the brest soukyng*  
*Somtyme shewen they thyn heriyng.*’ (l. 452-459, my italics)<sup>96</sup>

The child’s mouth, belonging both to the semantic field of speech and of eating, is developed into an affective religious imagery in the tale. After the boy’s murder the Prioress repeats, ‘O grete God, that parfournest thy laude / By mouth of innocentz’ (l. 607-8), before the Virgin lays the ‘greyn’ on the child’s tongue. With the ‘greyn’ the Virgin keeps alive the part of the child’s body that can speak and sing (spread God’s praise in this world),<sup>97</sup> but also taste and eat. The Virgin’s ‘greyn’ symbolises the nourishing of the child with divine love and knowledge, as if it were ‘on [her] brest soukyng’ (l. 458). With the ‘greyn’ in his mouth, the child itself is symbolically able to ‘taste’ (know) God, as his singing of the Alma Redemptoris is now a sign of his true knowledge of God.<sup>98</sup> When the boy first heard the song in school he did not know the Latin and it was explained to him by another pupil; he then learned the song by heart. When he sings with the ‘greyn’ on his tongue, however, he is engaged in direct contact and communication with the Virgin; ‘*To me she cam, and bad me for to synge / This anthem verrailly in my deyyng*’ (l. 659-60, my italics). The child receives divine love directly and thus comprehends it fully. He has “tasted the heavenly gift (...) the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age to come” (Heb. 6:4-5). The child’s new knowledge is also implied by his words, ‘this welle of mercy, Cristes mooder swete / I loved alwey, *as after my konnyng*’ (l. 657, my italics); divine indwelling supplants the child’s (self-)taught song.

Through the child martyr and the ‘greyn’, the Prioress engages a sensuous, affective, experience-oriented imparting of divine knowledge. The Virgin gives the child the ‘greyn’

<sup>96</sup> These lines are a translation of Psalm 8, verses 2 and 3 from the Mass for the Holy Innocents. See Sherman Hawkins, "Chaucer's Prioress and the Sacrifice of Praise," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 63, no. 4 (1964): 605.

<sup>97</sup> "In the mouth of the child (...) the Virgin places the Word and thus perfects his praise." *Ibid.*, 614-15.

<sup>98</sup> The choice to have the boy sing, as opposed to speak, contributes to the pathos since song implies a more emotional act and involvement.

so that he can impart his knowledge of divine love to the people – first through song, and then by giving up the ‘greyn’ to the abbot. Through the Virgin’s instruction, the child can instruct others. Thereby his death can be ‘witnessed’ as a passage to heaven, where he is ‘sowded to virginitee’ (l. 579); that is, the child’s ascension to the divine realm becomes an act performed at the hands of the abbot:

‘I sing, and must sing certainly,  
 In honour of that blisful Mayden free  
*Til fro my tonge of taken is the greyn;*  
 And after that thus seyde [Mary] to me:  
*My litel child, now wol I fecche thee,*  
*Whan that the greyn is fro thy tonge ytake’* (l. 663-668, my italics).

By taking the ‘greyn’, the abbot ends the child’s life on earth, and gives him over, so to speak, to the mother of humanity. The boy’s earthly mother – and the Christian community – are reassured that the child is in the hands of his Divine Mother. The ‘greyn’ embodies what the child’s felawe first suggested to him – with the disclaimer ‘I have herd seye (...) I kan but small grammeere’ – when the boy asked for the meaning of the song: ‘Hire [the Virgin] to salue, and eek for to preye / *To been oure help and socour whan we deye.*’ The boy can now tell how the song has been fulfilled in his own experience; his “sermon” to the convent involves both salutation and petition:

I sholde have dyed, ye, longe tyme agon,  
 But Jesu Crist, as ye in bookes fynde,  
 Wil that his glorie laste and be in mynde,  
 And for the worship of his mooder deere,  
 Yet may I synge O Alma loude and cleere. (l. 651-5)

The Virgin has come to him in answer to his praise, and the ‘greyn’ stays behind for mankind as a token of her grace and divine love, so that His ‘glorie laste and be in mynde’. What ‘ye in bookes fynde’ – the petition for God’s worship and its promise of salvation – is now embodied by the martyr before the eyes of the convent.

Through the ‘greyn’ then, the child’s death becomes a fruitful death. Anagogically, the ‘greyn’ symbolises life in death, both for the martyr who is, ‘folwyng evere in oon, / The white Lamb celestial’, and for humanity, who in receiving the ‘greyn’ will mark its own path to the eternal life. As a material artefact and instantiation of God’s presence the ‘greyn’ has strong Eucharistic connotations. It is offered up by the child martyr like the

body (and blood) offered up by Christ at the Last Supper. Allegorically, the 'greyn' is a piece of the consecrated host, the Word Incarnate, and symbolizes that the Word comes to mankind as 'food'. The sacrament of the Eucharist is invoked throughout the tale by the Prioress's repeated references to the Mass for the Holy Innocents;<sup>99</sup> and it is at the 'chief auter, whil the masse laste' (l. 636) where the child – as host – 'speaks' to the convent and where the abbot receives the 'greyn'.

Caroline Walker Bynum has traced the centrality of the material, or matter, in sacramental theology of the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. "Sacraments were understood to be effective through a material object (for example, the water of baptism or the oil of last rites). There was, by the fifteenth century, a noticeable swing away from the tendency (...) to prefer reception of the Eucharist through viewing. The stress was now on physical reception of the Eucharistic elements: bread and wine." In this period, "relic collections swelled prodigiously (...) People wanted objects (herbs, water, bread, salt grains) not mere words. (...) The physical element of the sacrament (...) was not just a signifier of grace; *it made grace present*" (my italics).<sup>100</sup>

Materiality and the embodiment of the spiritual are guiding concepts of the Prioress's affective edification. Divine grace and love are not elusive concepts but are imparted from the Virgin (as intermediary), to the 'greyn', to the child's mouth and the eyes, ears and hands of the people. The miracle makes lived experience, the body and senses agents in spiritual experience. It is in virtue of the 'greyn' (...) 'that [His] glorie laste and be *in mynde*' (l. 653). The "disembodied name of the Lord"<sup>101</sup> is given shape by the material world through which it spreads. Through the 'greyn' the divine becomes audible and tangible; it fully fuses the sacred and the worldly, the physical and spiritual. By concretizing the divine (and divine power) in the 'greyn', for humanity to receive, the miracle intimates that the Holy Spirit has in mankind a corporeal dwelling (and is corporeally realised) – just as the human soul, upon its worship of the 'greyn', has an immortal dwelling in God and heaven. In other words, the palpability of the 'greyn' visualises that 'it' (the Word or presence of God) is affectively 'received' and comprehended by humanity, who cultivate its legend and spread God's praise.

<sup>99</sup> See Mary P. Hamilton, "Echoes of Childermas in the Tale of the Prioress," *The Modern Language Review* 34, no. 1 (1939).

<sup>100</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 128-45.

<sup>101</sup> Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism and the 'Prioress's Tale'," 91.

The image of the abbot's physical contact with the 'greyn' heightens both the emotive impact of the miracle and asserts the notion that the divine is manifested in the physical world in virtue of human action and bodily experience. The abbot's tears, as gifts both *from* God and *to* God, engage a transitioning between the human and divine, in the emotionally impactful final scene of the tale. When this abbot had seen this wonder, the Prioress deliberately describes his tears using earthly references, such as 'salte' and as 'reyn'. Thus, she first continues the semantic field of 'food' and points to the nurturing, salvific nature of divine grace; second, she likens them to a generative, renewing natural element. This suggests that the tears are also water to the 'greyn', cultivating and spreading it in the physical world. That is, tears also carry a connotation of the 'hooly water (...) spreyned' over the child's body whilst he sings during the mass: Both have consecrational purposes; both 'purge' mankind; both are physical fluids that consummate religious practice, and therein, spiritual experience. The abbot's tears are thus an important conclusion to the Prioress's affective instruction. The miracle distributes agency between heavenly beings and human bodies, souls and material artefacts; emotions play a special role in this distribution. Through the dialogic representation between the Virgin, the child and the abbot, the abbot becomes the Virgin's worthy servant as he receives her instruction to take the 'greyn' – God's offering to humanity. Subsequently, the abbot's emotions 'testify' to God's presence; they convey a sense of direct interaction with divinity. These tears embody a spiritual experience that bridges the physical and divine worlds.

### III. Love, Sickness and Reason: (Un)manly Tears in *Troilus and Criseyde*

Chaucer's *translatio* of the Trojan tragedy is consistent with the medieval conventions of noble love and courtliness. The poem deliberates on the subject of love, specifically, on the male lover's emotional experience in different cultural contexts. Based on the medieval association of the male sex with reason, action, power, Chaucer employs the medical view of love as a sickness in Troilus, whose humoral imbalance caused by the sight of Criseyde's beauty, causes degradation of his mental and rational faculties. The *lovesick* Troilus experiences love as morbid desire that is juxtaposed with his masculine identity – both public and private. His abjection involves a heterosexual psychological conflict between his masculine power and his idealization of Criseyde. Troilus finds himself between loss of self-rule and narcissistic obsession with his own superiority. As I argue, Chaucer correlates Troilus's conflicting desire with a "pagan" view of love as carnal "image-worship", rooted in a 'false' God of Love and wilful Fortune. Troilus's sense of himself as a victim of a malign divine force is substituted with an understanding of love in terms of the Christian language of grace. Chaucer thereby petitions to Troilus's humility and 'trouthe' and develops his attachment to Criseyde into a spiritual rather than physical one. Chaucer moralizes Troilus's lovesickness, as he seeks to reconcile his desire with 'reson' and agency. By replacing a pagan past with a Christian present, Chaucer substitutes determinism with selfhood in Troilus's 'double sorwe'.

#### 1

In medieval poetic discourse, lovesickness is stylised as a specifically male illness of the nobility. Its cultural conception and the lover's experience are shaped by conventions of courtliness and masculinity that simultaneously constrain and allow male indulgence in erotic impulses. Medieval medical discourse about gender assigns men superior mental and rational faculties based on their dry humoral composition; they are less frequently afflicted by emotion than women. In this discourse, love poses a particular problem to men; it is caused by the sight of female beauty and since the male mind is more capable of retaining images, men are more profoundly struck by love.<sup>102</sup> The desire aroused by the image causes humoral excess in the male body which, in turn, causes both physical and mental afflictions. The romantic convention of Love piercing and entering through the eyes symbolises the medieval physiological view of the interaction of body and mind. Since

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<sup>102</sup> Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 114.

Galen, medieval lovesickness was regarded a “passion of the soul” (from *passio*, Latin, both ‘suffering’ and ‘illness’) that “follows the complexion of the body”; in Galenic terms “the body follows the soul in its action, and the soul accompanies the body in its suffering”.<sup>103</sup> In *The Knight’s Tale* Chaucer speaks of ‘the loveris maladye / Of hereos’ in conjunction with the ‘humour malencolik’ (l. 1373-5).<sup>104</sup> The Galenic association of the symptoms of lovesickness with mania and melancholy<sup>105</sup> accounts for the male patient’s uncharacteristic irrationality, despondency and bodily neglect. The medical view of lovesickness regarded these afflictions and the male emotional experience as “potentially fatal if not treated”.<sup>106</sup>

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer uses medieval physiological language to describe the processes and effects of love: When Troilus sees Criseyde, an effluence is passed from her eyes (‘subtile stremes of hir yen’) into Troilus’s eyes and into his heart, where it affects his vital spirit, which controls pulse and breathing (I. 305-7).<sup>107</sup> With this, Troilus’s heart begins “to sprede and ryse” (I. 278) and ‘in his herte botme gan to stiken / Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun’ (I. 297-8). With the direct reference to the imprint left on the male heart, Chaucer foregrounds Troilus’s passivity; his experience of love is correlated with a sickness (‘a fever’, I. 491) that takes its course outwith his will. His emotion outwardly manifests itself in sleeplessness and lack of appetite, and ‘his sorwe (...) shewed in his hewe’ (I. 484-7). The pangs of love ‘hit’ Troilus and make his ‘veyne’ and ‘herte blede’ (I. 866-7, 502). The medical language objectively corroborates Troilus’s emotional suffering as well as his impotence.<sup>108</sup>

‘For wo was him, that what to doon he niste  
 (...) And whan that he in chaumbre was allone  
 He doun up-on his beddes feet him sette  
 And first be gan to syke, and eft to grone.’ (I. 356-360)

This loss of control in Troilus is represented as a sensation of dying. (I. 572-3, I. 723). The conjunction of strong emotion and death makes the language of male desire highly ambivalent – an ambivalence that is epitomized in the image of Troilus’s nearly drowning

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>104</sup> John Livingston Lowes (1914) discusses the medical tradition of *amor hereos*.

<sup>105</sup> Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 6-8.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>107</sup> See also Geoffrey Chaucer and Barry Windeatt, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde: A new translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 157.

<sup>108</sup> See also Rebecca F. McNamara, "Wearing Your Heart on Your Face: Reading Lovesickness and the Suicidal Impulse in Chaucer," *Literature and Medicine* 33, no. 2 (2015).

in his own ‘salte teeres’ (I. 543). The discourse of the “lover’s malady” precludes agency in the male subject, so that the desired woman’s sympathy with him (and her satisfaction of him) become necessary “medical treatments”. In his soliloquies Troilus begs that Criseyde ‘wolden on me rewe er that I deyde!’ and laments that his ‘hele and hewe / And lyf is lost’ unless ‘she on him wolde han compassioun’ (I. 460-467). Criseyde figures as the ‘cure’ for Troilus’s morbid desire (I. 469). At the same time, in this reception of female pity itself lies the “death” of man’s real and perceived superior self. The dilemma of the *lovesick* man is that he has essentially no choice between “Woman” or “Death”.<sup>109</sup> The lover’s death-wish (I. 616, 758) is, in that sense, both a reaction to his loss of a noble public identity (‘me were lever dye / Than she of me ought elles understode / But that, that mighte sounen into gode’, I. 1034-6), as well as a private inclination to succumb to desire.

Troilus’s abjection is meaningful as symptom of an illness, then, “within a system of shared beliefs and symbolic conventions”<sup>110</sup> regarding masculine identity and manhood. Chaucer evaluates the moral implications and psychological basis of Troilus’s abjection as shaped by a discourse in which male “action and thought”<sup>111</sup> are in control of the emotions and senses.

## 2

As Ruth Mazo Karras has pointed out, “no single form of masculinity characterized the Middle Ages”, but different social and cultural domains taught men “how to be men”.<sup>112</sup> Chivalric and courtly culture “epitomized one set of medieveal ideals about masculinity”, which was characterised by a heroic ethos.<sup>113</sup> Chaucer defines an ideal of knightly ‘manhod’ in the poem when Pandarus proclaims to Criseyde that in Troilus and Hector ‘ever vertu list abounde’, both physical and moral (II. 159). He praises their bravery (‘hardynesse’), strength and power (‘might’), ‘grete estat’ (I. 566, II. 179, 205), as well as their ‘trouthe’, ‘gentillesse’, ‘wysdom’, ‘honour’, ‘worthinesse’ and ‘felawshipe’ (II. 160-1, 206). Vice-versa, Pandarus’s judgement of the lovesick Troilus refers to his ‘coward herte’, ‘ire’, ‘folish wilfulnesse’ and ‘wantrust’ (I. 792-4). Pandarus, who acts as Troilus’s

<sup>109</sup> See also Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 169.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," 41.

<sup>112</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 20.

proxy in front of Criseyde, condemns Troilus for betraying his ‘vertu’ and letting his tears turn him into stone,

‘For this nis not, certeyn, the nexte wyse  
 To winnen love, as techen us the wyse,  
 To walwe and wepe as Niobe the quene,  
 Whos teeres yet in marbel been ysene.’ (I. 697-706)

Troilus’s abjection is an ‘unmanhod’ (I. 824) in view of the social expectation of his capacity to reason and act.

Lat be thy weping and thi drerinesse,  
 (...)
 Delyte not in wo thy wo to seche,  
 As doon thise *foles* that hir sorwes eche  
 With sorwe, whan they han misaventure,  
 And *listen nought to seche hem other cure.* (I. 701-7)

Pandarus tells Troilus that he would slay himself in vain, if he does not pursue Criseyde:

‘What may she demen other of thy deeth,  
 If thou thus deye, and she not why it is,  
 But that for fere is yolden up thy breeth,  
 For Grekes han biseged us, y-wis?  
 (...)
 Thou mayst allone here wepe and crye and knele;  
 But, love a woman that she woot it nought,  
 And she wol quyte that thou shalt not fele’ (I. 799-809).

The lovesick Troilus must negotiate between his private self and his social role. The conventions of knightly display play a crucial part in this process as they mask Troilus’s abject emotional experience – both as Troilus asserts himself in front of his fellow men and when he appears in front of Criseyde. To protect his image Troilus hides his feelings in public: ‘He feyneth (...) in lust that he soioerneth / And al his chere and speche also he borneth (I. 326-7), and he ‘caughte ayein his pleyinge chere’ (I. 280). Chaucer spells out the significance of Troilus’s masculine performance when he becomes the recipient of Criseyde’s gaze. Troilus happens to ride past Criseyde’s window as he returns from battle,



on his wounded horse, in a triumphant procession; Criseyde's first impression of him is shaped by his quintessential knightly appearance and the crowd's admiration of him (II. 610-649). The four-stanza description glorifies Troilus as a more 'knightly sighte' than 'Mars, that god is of batayle'. Chaucer dwells on his 'high prowess', 'body' and 'gere' that make him look 'so fresh, so yong, so weldy'. Troilus's 'chere' is what instinctively arouses Criseyde's emotions: She 'leet so softe it in hir herte sinke / That to hir-self she seyde, `Who yaf me drinke?' (II. 650-1).

Importantly, Chaucer places this scene right after Criseyde was told by Pandarus that his friend is dying with love for her; her sober contemplation and heartless (at best scared) conclusion (II. 598-609) are suddenly undone by the sight of the handsome warrior. Not only can she now feel 'mercy and pitee' for Troilus, she is also flattered that this is the man who loves her (II. 649-55). As we are let in on Criseyde's thoughts, we not only get a repetition of Troilus's knightly attributes (II. 659-662) but Criseyde now considers Troilus's longing for her in light of these attributes: '*[H]is manhod and his pyne / Made love withinne hir for to myne*' (II. 676-7). The fact that 'his distress was all for her' only finds 'most favour with [Criseyde]' once she witnesses his humble character (II. 645-8) and considers that he 'mente trouthe' (II. 665).

The scene corroborates that the conventions of knightly masculinity imply nobility of character. Through Criseyde's character and her emotional response to 'noble Troilus', Troilus's loss of reason and action is represented not only as a threat to himself but to society. Women like Criseyde depend upon the male social role for their physical safety and their right to legal representation. As a widow and deserted daughter Criseyde is in a particularly vulnerable position (II. 92-112), and Troilus represents an opportunity to secure protection for herself in Troy:

('... for his worthinesse,  
It were honour, with pley and with gladnesse  
In honestee, with swich a lord to dele  
For myn estat (...)

(II. 704-7)

As D. W. Robertson points out, Troilus's "obligations as a 'public figure' to his country, are not inconsiderable, especially in time of war".<sup>114</sup> Troilus's lovesickness upsets regular structures and principles:

‘He bad his folk to goon wher that hem liste’  
 (...)  
 ‘[a]lle othere dredes weren from him fledde  
 Both of the assege and his savacioun  
 Ne in him desyr noon othere fownes bredde’            (II. 357, 463-5).

Troilus's desire for Criseyde – as determined by the language of lovesickness – does not inwardly testify to a noble 'trouthe' and humble devotion but constitutes self-destruction and psychological conflict. Jill Mann has argued that Troilus's "unreserved surrender to the force of love" makes him Chaucer's "feminized hero": "When Chaucer speaks of Troilus's manhood he habitually pairs it with the 'feminized' characteristics (...) that cleanse it of aggression: 'his manhod and his pyne', 'manly sorwe', 'gentil herte and manhod'."<sup>115</sup> It is Troilus's "[divesture] of the coerciveness characteristic of the 'active' male", Mann writes, that makes his "vulnerability and sensitivity of feeling" not a "weakness" but an aspect of his generous gentility.<sup>116</sup>

The surrendering Troilus is certainly divested of aggression and masculine coerciveness, but not – to my mind – in virtue of (righteous) selfhood. (Once Troilus does gain selfhood, he does so because he no longer simply surrenders to the force of love.) The lovesick Troilus lacks both moral consciousness and self-knowledge, and it is only through the conventions of a knightly 'manhod' that he can appear noble. Troilus's lovesickness is defined by his deterministic passivity, and his abjection differs from womanly abjection in an important aspect: Female tears are often regarded as a woman's way to accessing social power; whilst female abjection can be a woman's form of 'action' and expression, male abjection imprisons man in inaction. The rhetorical, affective power of the female body and female emotion constitutes an opponent to male, "official" power of the mind and reason. I will briefly expand on female abjection in order to discuss the heterosexual psychological conflict inherent in Troilus's abjection.

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<sup>114</sup> D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 478.

<sup>115</sup> Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 129-31.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

In both religious and secular discourse, women are often figured as inspiring pity and mercy in men through abject pleas and intercessions.<sup>117</sup> In Peter Abelard's *Letters*, the prophets Elijah and Elisha are described as raising children from the dead at their mothers' tearful supplications.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Abelard credits the raising of Lazarus to the copious weeping of his sisters Martha and Mary. As Kramer notes, "the special power of women's prayers [appears to be] rooted elsewhere than in their speech".<sup>119</sup> Criseyde, at the beginning of the poem, pleads for her own life in the wake of her father's 'tresoun' (l. 107): 'On knees she fil biforn Ector adoun / With pitous voys, and tendrely wepinge / His mercy bad, hirselves excusinge' (l. 110-2). In the *Knight's Tale*, the widows of the siege of Thebes intercede on behalf of their dead husbands, so that they may receive proper burial (a prerequisite for their soul's ascension to heaven). They, too, kneel in front of Theseus, wailing and lamenting, even referring to themselves as 'wrecched wommen' (l. 921). Their emotions gain potency through their outward, physical expressions: Both Hector and Theseus are persuaded by the sight of (once) noble (*KT* l. 923, 956) and fair (*T&C* l. 115) women now all 'maat' and with 'deedly cheere' (*KT* l. 955, 913).

The women's abjection constitutes a discourse in which the men's 'pitous nature' and 'gentil herte' are momentarily foregrounded; the women's emotions give license to the men's expression of emotion. The sensitive traits shown by the men are, as Susan Crane discusses, "subordinate" in relation to male (rational) decisive power.<sup>120</sup> Female abject pleas and intercessions can influence male judgement by mitigating that power. However, they do not subvert the gender hierarchy; the women's use of the visual potency of their embodied emotions as a form of speech elevates the stature and dignity of the male sex. If female emotion occasions a tenderness in men that is subordinate to reason, women are subordinate to men. Female abjection is conditioned on a system of male authority, even if women's embodied emotions are credited with the ability to negotiate with men. Their power is premised on a vulnerability that recognises its own marginalized position, opposite "official", male speech.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See also Sharon Farmer's discussion on "women's capacity for moral persuasion" through "feminine enticements and even deceit". In Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum* 61, no. 3 (1986).

<sup>118</sup> See Kramer, "We Speak to God with Our Thoughts." Kramer, "We Speak to God with Our Thoughts", 30-31.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Susan Crane, *Gender and romance in Chaucer's Canterbury tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>121</sup> See also Paul Strohm, "Queens as Intercessors," in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts*, ed. A. J. Prescott (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Chaucer dramatizes these gender relations in Troilus's moment of weeping in the letter-writing scene (II. 1065-85). Prompted to action by Pandarus, Troilus decides to write to Criseyde, and blots the letter with his tears (II.1027, II. 1078). When Troilus concretizes his emotion on the page in both literary and physical form (through his tears) he makes the letter a surrogate of himself in front of Criseyde's eyes and in her hands:

(...) ful lowly he hir prayed  
*To be nought wrooth*, though he, of his folye,  
 So hardy was to hir to wryte, and seyde,  
 That love it made, *or elles moste he dye*,  
*And pitously gan mercy for to crye*;  
 And after that he seyde (...)  
*Him-self was litel worth, and lesse he coude*;  
 (...) she sholde han his konnyng excused,  
 That litel was, and eek he dredde hir so,  
 And his *unworthinesse* he ay acused;  
 And after that, than gan he telle his *woo*' (I. 1072-1082).

The letter fully symbolises Troilus's absence. Just as Troilus's lovesickness dulls his wit (I. 735, 762-4, II. 548), so his tears on the page obliterate his words. Unlike (and because of) the principles of female abjection, Troilus's tears do not lend him a voice but sustain his loss of 'konnyng' (II. 1079). Troilus's abjection "contravenes the realities of gender roles",<sup>122</sup> but he does not become 'feminized'. Troilus is enslaved to his desire (rather than identifies with his emotion), and his resultant abjection constitutes a heterosexual anxiety. That is, Troilus's lovesickness reaches into the "intimate recesses of his gendered body"<sup>123</sup> – it involves an idealization of and obsession with Criseyde's image that psychologically mirrors the male lover's perception of his own superiority<sup>124</sup>, whilst subverting that superiority. Troilus 'thoughte ay on hir so, withouten lette' that 'al the wise / Right of hire look [he] gan it newe avise'; '[t]hus gan he make a mirour of his mynde / In which he saugh al holly hire figure' (I. 361-366). Troilus even indulges in desiring the unattainable ('I have a joly wo, a lusty sorwe', II. 1099) because the extent of his suffering testifies to the extent of his own 'worthinesse' projected onto her image (indeed, these are 'endeles,

<sup>122</sup> Crane, *Gender and romance in Chaucer's Canterbury tales*, 72.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>124</sup> See also Slavoj Žižek's exposition of Lacanian theory, "Courtly Love, Or, Woman as Thing". In Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994).

with-ouen ho', II. 1083). At the same time, paradoxically, this exalted idealization and obsession uproots his sense of self as ontologically and socially superior to the female because the male rational faculties are no longer in charge of the emotions and senses. The lovesick subject is, so to speak, neither his own man nor own woman.

The conflict between narcissistic indulgence and loss of agency implicates the moral ambivalence of male desire. Troilus's letter is exceedingly self-referential; the only three lines that he dedicates to addressing Criseyde are strewn with the possessive "his":

First he gan hire his righte lady calle,  
 His hertes lif, his lust, his sorwes leche,  
 His blisse, and eke thise other termes alle (II. 1065-68).

The lovesick Troilus is absorbed with his own needs and with self-pity, the latter of which takes up the next two stanzas. Furthermore, the Troilus whose 'vital spirit' is dying, having been 'hit' with the 'stremes of (Criseyde's) yen' is the same Troilus who '*ley ful loude*' when he declares in his letter, 'him-self was litel worth, and lesse he coude' (II. 1077-8). Loss of free will apparently contradicts a willed vulnerability. In the *Canticus Troili* of Book I Troilus debates, 'How may of thee [O quike deeth, O swete harm] in me swich quantitee / *But if that I consente that it be?*' (I. 411-3). If, as Sarah Kay notes, "the 'I' of the love lyric (...) commonly sees himself at the mercy of a supreme, arbitrary, and perverse power",<sup>125</sup> Troilus nevertheless reflects on his self-rule. 'And if that I consente, I wrongfully / Compleyne, y-wis' (I. 414-5). Troilus's contemplations on the 'wonder maladye' (I. 419) are infused with moral language both in regard to himself and the nature of love:

'If no love is, O God, what fele I so?  
 And if love is, what thing and whiche is he!  
*If love be good*, from whennes comth my wo?  
*If it be wikke*, a wonder thinketh me,  
 Whenne every torment and adversitee  
 That cometh of him, may to me savory thinke;  
 For ay thurst I, the more that I it drinke.  
 (...)

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<sup>125</sup> Sarah Kay, "Desire and Subjectivity", in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, edited by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 214.

And if that at myn owene lust I brenne,  
 Fro whennes cometh my wailing and my pleynte?  
 If harme agree me, *wherto pleyne I thenne?* (I. 400-9, my italics)

The lovesick Troilus thus finds himself ‘bitwixen windes two, / That in contrarie stonden ever-mo’: ‘For hete of cold, for cold of hete, I deye.’ (I. 400-420) Chaucer invokes in Troilus’s song a connection that he draws in the poem between the male lover’s judgement or understanding of love and his experience of love. In the proem of Book II Chaucer asks his readers to consider ‘that in forme of speche is chaunge’, and ‘for to winne love in sondry ages / In sondry londes, sondry ben usages.’ (II. 22-28). As I argue, Chaucer offsets a Pagan language of love with a Christian one that is to inform Troilus’s more “mature”<sup>126</sup> emotional experience. Chaucer ties Troilus’s conflicting obsession with Criseyde’s image (‘imprinted’ on his mind) to the Pagan dispensation; his morbid desire and heterosexual conflict are a product of an indeed ‘wikked’, or false, God of Love, who enslaves his victims to carnal, idolatrous love. With the Christian language of a charitable and redeeming love, Chaucer appeals to a view of love as morally-engaging: Troilus is to supplant his abjection with selfhood in an understanding of love’s spiritual value. Chaucer thereby ultimately seeks to resolve the conflict between love and ‘manhod’.

### 3

Troilus’s idealization of Criseyde and his abjection can be seen to be set within the context of image-worship and divination of his Pagan culture.<sup>127</sup> His falling in love with Criseyde is set within a scene at the temple of Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, where a ceremony takes place in adoration of the palladium, the cult image believed to protect the safety of Troy (I. 160-4). The setting is a playground for male and female display:

‘to the temple, *in al hir beste wyse*,  
 (...) ther wente many a wight’,  
 And namely, so many a *lusty knight*,  
 So many a lady *fresh* and mayden *bright*,  
*Ful wel arayed, bothe moste and leste*,  
 Ye, bothe for the seson and the feste. (I. 161-8)

<sup>126</sup> Term used by many critics including E. Talbot Donaldson (1970), Monica E. McAlpine (1978), Stephen A. Barney (1980), John V. Fleming (1990), Jill Mann (2014).

<sup>127</sup> The connection between Troilus’s love and idolatry was first made by D. W. Robertson (1963).

The young knights let their ‘eyen bayten’ on the women, and Troilus, too occupies himself ‘Biholding ay the ladyes of the toun, / Now here, now there’ (I. 192, 186); until his gaze falls on Criseyde:

Withinne the temple he wente him forth pleyinge,  
 (...) And upon cas bifel, that thorough a route  
*His eye perced, and so depe it wente,*  
*Til on Criseyde it smoot, and ther it stente.*  
 (...)  
 And gan hire bet biholde in thrifty wyse:  
 ‘O mercy, God!’ thoughte he, ‘wher hastow woned,  
*That art so fair and goodly to devyse?’*  
 (...)  
 To Troilus right wonder wel withalle  
 Gan for to lyke hir meninge and hir chere,  
*[He] never thoughte him seen so good a sighte.* (I. 267-294)

Just what sight Troilus is beholding is related to the reader some lines earlier, when Criseyde, as if already from Troilus’s perspective, is glorified as standing ‘in beautee (...) makelees; / Hir godly looking gladeded al the prees’. The description of Criseyde as a paragon of ‘aungelik’ beauty sets up a deliberate parallel between her and the worshipped palladium: Troilus has found his own goddess and his fixed admiration of Criseyde gains an obvious idolatrous dimension.

*[She] over alle thyng, he stood for to biholde;*  
 (...) *whyl that servyse laste.* (I. 267-315, my italics)

The focus of Troilus’s gaze upon Criseyde’s beauty is evocative of Troilus’s own earlier reference to the ‘lewed observaunces’ of lovers in the preceding scene:

‘I have herd told, pardieux, of your livinge,  
 Ye lovers, and your lewed observaunces,  
 And which a labour folk han in winninge  
 Of love, and, in the keping, which doutaunces;  
 And whan your preye is lost, wo and penaunces;  
 O verray fooles, nyce and blinde be ye;  
 Ther nis not oon can war by other be.’ (I. 197-203)

Tellingly, Chaucer uses the same word ('observaunces') to describe the 'Palladiones feste' and the lover's sorrowful pursuits. That 'observaunces' should rhyme with 'doutances' (uncertainties) and 'penaunces' (suffering) implies Chaucer's correlation of this love with what he denounces as the 'payens corsed olde rites' (V. 1849): As John V. Fleming argues, Chaucer refers to what Christians would have regarded as "superstitious practices"<sup>128</sup> and unstable divination of the pagan dispensation, one that provides false solace. Troilus's gaze upon Criseyde constitutes a "pagan love"<sup>129</sup> in that he searches for truth in Criseyde's image and surrenders his life to her image. His "carnal idolatry"<sup>130</sup> is rooted in one of paganism's false gods who (figuratively) blinds and enslaves his victims.

With the God of Love Paganism alludes to a "religion of love" in its own right; Love is one of the many gods to be worshipped and to receive offerings. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer draws on the ancient convention of love as a punishment for mocking or neglecting worship of the God of Love.<sup>131</sup> Troilus is avenged for his 'surquidrye and foul presumpcioun' (I. 213) that he will not be amongst the 'fooles' (I. 202) who fall in love. Troilus's mockery of lovesick men soon turns into repentance as he pleads (Love and Fortune) for forgiveness and mercy. The discourse of Troilus's morbid desire – his loss of reason and agency - is thus thematically linked to the pagan language of love. The *lovesick* Troilus figures Criseyde as a good of Fortune – cause and cure of his desire.

When Pandarus visits Troilus in his bedchamber, Chaucer intimates that this Troilus is blinded to the true value of his love by drawing on Lady Philosophy's reference to Boethius's *litargie*<sup>132</sup> in the *Consolation*:<sup>133</sup>

[Pandarus] cryde 'Awake' ful wonderly and sharpe;  
 'What? Slombrestow as in a lytargye?  
 Or artow lyk an asse to the harpe,  
 That hereth soun, whan men the strenges plye,  
 But in his minde of that no melodye  
 May sinke, him to glade, for that he  
 So dul is of his bestialitee?' (I. 729-35)

<sup>128</sup> Fleming, *Classical imitation and interpretation*, 74.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>131</sup> Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 3.

<sup>132</sup> Fleming writes: "Boethian dullness, a manifestation of pathological *litargie*, is an emblem of a wounded human nature reduced by unreason to bestiality." In Fleming, *Classical imitation and interpretation*, 97.

<sup>133</sup> *Boece* 1, Pr.2, 18-26, in Geoffrey Chaucer and Larry D. Benson et.al. (eds.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, 1029.



Like the young Boethius, the *lovesick* Troilus lacks enlightenment about the greater good of his experience. Lady Philosophy tells Boethius that, since “by her nature Fortune is unchangeable”, he must see beyond “material goods (riches, social status, fame, beauty)” and instead find true happiness “in uniting with the one Good from which we came”.<sup>134</sup> Chaucer can be seen to adapt the Boethian lesson by uniting Troilus’s love with the gracious love of the Christian God. That is, Chaucer makes Troilus’s “fate” a “morally-engaged poetic theme”<sup>135</sup> by lifting him beyond the bounds of his “pagan love”: Troilus’s sense of himself as a victim of a malign divine force (resulting in his abjection) that conflicts with his masculine self-rule (resulting in his narcissism and willed vulnerability) is offset with the view of love rooted in a divine blessing as means and occasion for moral perfection - salvation, to Chaucer’s audience. Chaucer intimates the Boethian lesson that divine foreknowledge is reconcilable with human free will – a will that makes us subject to moral scrutiny.

Pandarus tells Troilus that ‘nought but good it is / *To loven wel, and in a worthy place* (I. 894-5, my italics). Chaucer thus correlates the “noble lover” (and ennobling love) with a new language of love: ‘Thee oghte not to *clepe* it hap, but *grace*.’ (I. 856, my italics). With the Christian language, Troilus learns to love Criseyde beyond his physical desire. He learns that this ‘benign love’ asks diligent service and understands that his feelings for one particular woman are connected to a force that is a ‘holy bond of thinges’ (III. 1261):

Love, that of erthe and see hath governaunce,  
 Love, that his hestes hath in hevene hye,  
 Love, that with an holsom alliaunce  
 Halt peples joyned, as him list hem gye,  
 Love, that knetteth lawe of companye,  
 And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle  
 (...)  
*So wolde God, that auctor is of kinde,*  
*That, with his bond, Love of his vertu liste*  
*To cerclen hertes alle, and faste binde’* (III. 1744-1767).

Troilus praises the goodness and ‘excellence’ of this love that binds human love to divine love in a prayer to Cupid and Venus (III. 1254-74); as Windeatt notes, Chaucer borrows

<sup>134</sup> Rudd, *The Complete Critical Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer*, 83.

<sup>135</sup> Fleming, *Classical imitation and interpretation*, 75.

here from Saint Bernard's prayer to the Virgin in Dantes's *Paradiso*, so that "Troilus expresses an understanding of love in terms of the Christian language of grace".<sup>136</sup>

Crucially, Troilus's understanding of this love involves a notion of *love-suffering* that petitions humble selflessness and devotion (instead of a *lovesickness* that entails abjection and power-conflict.)<sup>137</sup> Troilus's second 'sorwe' is distinguished by a spiritual bond and a loyalty, that enable him, in one of the most significant moments of his story, to weigh the urgings of his desire against the urgings of his reason: Criseyde is to be deported to the Greek camp, and Troilus '[f]ul faste he caste how al this mighte stonde':

*Love him made al prest to doon hir byde,  
And rather dye than she sholde go;  
But resoun seyde him, on that other syde,  
'Withoute assent of hir ne do not so,  
Lest for thy werk she wolde be thy fo,'  
(...)  
For which he gan deliberen, for the beste  
That though the lordes wolde that she wente,  
He wolde lat hem graunte what hem leste  
And telle his lady first what that they mente.  
And whan that she had seyde him hir entente  
Therafter wolde he werken also blyve* (IV. 161-174).

Chaucer represents Troilus in a (new) state of moral deliberation and selfhood; his development is marked by the fact that his sorrow now involves argument (IV. 540-574). This weeping Troilus distills 'reson' (IV. 589) 'as licour out of alamyk' (IV. 520). When Pandarus tells Troilus to 'ravishe' Criseyde, Troilus asserts himself by saying that he has thought long and hard about it all, and for the good of Criseyde has come to the conclusion that he must let her go:

'Al this have I my-self yet *thought ful ofte*,  
And more thing than thou devydest here.  
*But why this thing is laft*, thou shalt wel here;  
(...)

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<sup>136</sup> Chaucer and Windeatt, ed., *Troilus and Criseyde*, 172.

<sup>137</sup> Throughout the poem, Chaucer expresses the Christian view of despair (present in the lover's death-wish) as a sin against the Holy Ghost (I. 36-42, II. 6). Similarly, Pandarus implores Criseyde: '*On his half, which that sowle us alle sende / And in the vertue of coronnes tweyne / Slee nought this man*' (II. 1734-6).

I drede most hir herte to pertourbe  
 For if I wolde it openly distourbe,  
 It moste been disclaundre to hir name.  
 And me were levere deed than hir defame,  
 As nolde God but-if I sholde have  
 Hir honour levere than my lyf to save!' (II. 542-567)

Though Troilus must suffer anew, his suffering is now a logical conclusion of an argument about the best (most noble) course of action by him – ‘syn that I am hir knight’ (II. 569). Troilus’s suffering does not lead him to ‘with-holden’ (IV. 597) Criseyde at all costs or to love another woman, as Pandarus tells him to (IV. 392-427). His mature love urges him to ‘save hir honour (...) In every cas, as lovere oughte of right’, and remain ‘trewre’ (IV. 159, 571). Chaucer seeks to portray Troilus’s love for Criseyde as maturing beyond mere physical needs. His suffering now “traces a path toward spiritual enlightenment, even apotheosis.”<sup>138</sup> In the middle of the fifth book, Chaucer mentions, for the first time, an imperfect feature of Criseyde’s appearance: ‘hir browes joyneden yfere’ (V. 813). Seen from Troilus’s perspective, the mention of Criseyde’s blemish epitomizes Troilus’s shift from idolizing worship of Criseyde’s (godly) beauty to a conscious love for a (physically and morally flawed) human being – a love that continues beyond Troilus’s sight of her, and – it is suggested – beyond his death.<sup>139</sup> Troilus’s loyalty to Criseyde in the face of adversity is what marks Troilus’s attainment of enduring virtue. It is Troilus’s spirit that ultimately loves Criseyde, not his body: His love for Criseyde gradually intimates an attachment that goes beyond his immediate worldly experience. His commitment to Criseyde even beyond her act of infidelity shows that his soul has the power “to transcend the limitations of all the objects of our love in this world.”<sup>140</sup>

His soul’s ability to love triumphs, then, over Troilus’s morbid desire. Through Troilus’ ‘trouthe’ the poem acknowledges, as E. T. Donaldson describes, that “some human qualities (...) are of enduring value”, and it is Troilus’s Christianised love (and his final endurance of his love-suffering) that serve as the means for the recognition that “some

<sup>138</sup> Mary Carruthers, "On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument: Chaucer's Lachrymose Troilus in Context," *Representations* 93 (2006): 13.

<sup>139</sup> After Chaucer rehearses the ‘fyns’ of Troilus’s life, he adds: ‘And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde, / As I have told, and in this wyse he deyde’ (V. 1827-34). Troilus’s ‘lovyng of Criseyde’, which had its beginnings in Paganism, has no end, in its Christianised, spiritualized form.

<sup>140</sup> Monica E. McAlpine, *The genre of 'Troilus and Criseyde'* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 176.

human values transcend human life.”<sup>141</sup> Thematically, Chaucer frees Troilus from the bounds of his Pagan narrative so as to reconcile his love and ‘manhod’. The clarity of Christian truth – the steadfast love of God that infiltrates all earthly love – supplants Paganism’s wilful God of Love and blinding Fortune. Chaucer seeks to replace Troilus’s abjection, his loss of reason and agency, in his idolatrous desire with a moral-philosophical consciousness on human feeling and action. Only when Troilus’s love for Criseyde becomes greater than the love he has for himself, does his ‘sorwe’ seize to divest him of his ‘manhod’.

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<sup>141</sup> E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970), 96.

#### IV. Conclusions

The Prioress's pathetic mode carries a sincere religious motivation. Throughout her tale, tears and weeping are used specifically as markers for the 'good'; tears and the emotions they express (grief, pity, love, compassion, humility, devotion) belong to those in 'Cristes compaignye' (l. 492) and they defy 'yvel entente' (l. 575). Lachrymosity stands in direct, hyperbolic contrast to the cold-heartedness and emotional/moral corruption of those ensnared by the devil. Where, in the *General Prologue*, Madame Eglentyne's tender feeling appears individualized and stand-alone, in her tale, it edifies a religious emotional community – embodied by the boy's grieving mother, the 'Cristene folk', the abbot, the convent as well as the Virgin. The language of feeling and sensitivity constitutes a paradigm for both the love of God and love for God. Chaucer figures the Prioress as a religious role model in the vein of the Mother Mary herself. The Prioress imitates the Virgin Mary's own maternal sensitivity and vulnerability, and heightens the connection between humanity and divinity, physical and spiritual love. Through humanity's role model and advocate mankind's love in this world will lead the human soul to God's eternal kingdom.

The Prioress's and the Virgin's affective petition for mankind's praise of God overcome the distance between elusive matters of faith and human experience. The Prioress instructs her listeners in the same way the Virgin instructs the child and the convent; by giving them 'access to the sacred'. The Prioress's embodied spirituality engages the 'greyn' and child-martyr as mediating material objects with spiritual content. Through the 'greyn' the divine becomes sensually and emotionally comprehensible. The child tastes divine love and knowledge in virtue of the Virgin's greyn on his tongue; he becomes the bearer of the Word, which he imparts to mankind. By taking the 'greyn' the abbot engages in direct contact with the divine, creating a powerfully affective image for the Prioress's listeners. The miracle references the conventions of late medieval sacramental theology, which emphasised the importance of the material object in making grace present. The physical perceivability of the Word or presence of God in the miracle acknowledges the human body and lived experience as agents in mankind's worship of God's praise. The abbot's (and his convent's) tears in response to the miracle engage this notion of reciprocity and transitioning between the earthly and divine. The Prioress's language in her description of the tears deliberately uses the semantic fields of nature and nurture, referencing both humankind's nourishment through Christ (and Mary) and humanity's nurturing of God's praise on earth. These tears embody a spiritual experience

that manifests God in man and man in God.

In *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer gives us, in Jennifer Summit's words, the "historically significant representation of a character's inner life and subjectivity".<sup>142</sup> When Troilus falls in love with Criseyde his emotional experience is consistent with the medieval medical discourse of lovesickness. The image of Criseyde that is imprinted on his mind enslaves him to desire, he experiences physical and mental afflictions, and his loss of agency is represented as his sensation of dying. Troilus's abjection conflicts with his masculine identity on both private and public levels. Chaucer juxtaposes Troilus's lack of reason and action with conventions of a knightly 'manhod' that involves both physical prowess and moral virtue. It is in virtue of his knightly appearance that Criseyde considers his nobility of character.

Chaucer correlates Troilus's lovesickness/abjection with a pagan narrative as far as they both engage a theme of idolatry that precludes reason and self-rule in Troilus. That is, just as Troilus's lovesickness/abjection involves an idealization of Criseyde's image that divests him of reason and destructs his masculine power, so Chaucer represents pagan image-worship as a 'cursed olde rite' that sees its people at the mercy of wilful, false gods. Chaucer represents his "pagan love" as one that materialises Criseyde as a commodity of Fortune/the God of Love that he must – but cannot – possess. In this discourse, the lovesick Troilus struggles with the sense of himself as a victim of a supreme power – a struggle whose psychological implications are Troilus's narcissistic obsession with his own superiority. The lovesick Troilus is 'bitwixen windes two': his subjection and his perception of his masculine power. Both Troilus's song and his letter reflect his conflict. In his letter, Troilus's proclamations of worthlessness and his tears on the page sustain his "absence" and inaction – his tearful speech contrasts female abjection, which is credited with the ability to lend women a form of power. The letter reveals Troilus's preoccupation with himself, and a lack of sincere humility.

Chaucer seeks to absolve Troilus's struggle with his emotional experience by adapting the Boethian lesson that his fate is reconcilable with human agency – petitioning thereby to his moral consciousness. That is, Troilus's conflict with love testifies to a failure to identify the true value of his experience; he must learn to love Criseyde beyond a carnal possessiveness and connect to the "Good from which he came". Chaucer identifies this Good with the Christian God and gracious love. Troilus's mature love for Criseyde

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<sup>142</sup> Jennifer Summit, "Troilus and Criseyde," in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Seth Lerer (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), 222.

intimates a spiritual attachment as he understands that his feelings for her are connected to a 'holy' and 'benign' 'bond of thinges'. His tears no longer constitute destruction of his masculine identity, but involve argument about his 'trouthe' to Criseyde. By replacing pagan past with Christian present, Chaucer reconciles Troilus's love and 'manhod'.

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