

If love it is: Chaucer, Aquinas and Love's Fidelity

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If Love it's not, O God, what feel I so?
If Love it is, what sort of thing is he?
If Love be good, from where then comes my woe?
If he be ill, wondrous it seems to me
That every torment and adversity
That comes from him I can so joyous think;
For more I thirst, the more from him I drink.

If it is in my own delight I burn,
From where then comes my wailing and complaint?
Rejoicing, why to tears do I return?
I know not, nor, unwearied, why I faint.
Oh living death, oh sweet harm strange and quaint!
How can this harm and death so rage in me,
Unless I do consent that it so be?

And if I do consent, I wrongfully
Bewail my case; thus rolled and shaken sore
All rudderless within a boat am I
Amid the sea and out of sight of shore,
Between two winds contrary evermore.
Alas, what is this wondrous malady?
For heat of cold, for cold of heat, I die.

The above text is the first song to love in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.¹ It is sung by the tragic hero, the Trojan warrior Troilus. After long mocking love and the silliness of lovers, Troilus has himself succumbed to its power by falling deeply in love with the noble Criseyde. The experience is so new and disorienting that Troilus seeks to understand its nature: "If Love it is, what sort of thing is he?" What is this riot of emotion, this sweet agony and painful joy that sends us now one way, now another? Is love

¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, edited and translated by Gerard NeCastro (eChaucer: <http://www.umm.maine.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer>, 2007): 1.400–20.

something we choose or something that comes upon us, like a sickness (a “wondrous malady”)? And if love is a choice, is it possible to remain faithful to our beloved in spite of changes in fortune and feeling? Chaucer pursues these questions while presenting the apparently inexplicable behavior of Criseyde, who after so fully and nobly giving her heart to Troilus, very quickly gives her heart to Troilus’ enemy, the Greek Diomedes. Chaucer’s poem is not a misogynistic attack on the inconstancy of women, as it is in Boccaccio’s version of the story, but a sympathetic analysis of the mysterious inconstancy of the human heart.² As such, the poem sketches a portrait of love that remains remarkably contemporary. In the pages that follow, we shall study this portrait. We shall then suggest how elements of Thomas Aquinas’ theory of love—especially in light of recent clinical and experimental studies into the psychology of affection—can help us understand features of love’s complexity that Chaucer’s poem well portrays.

I. Chaucer’s reflections on love in *Troilus and Criseyde*

The basic outline of Chaucer’s story would already have been known to his audience. The action takes place during the siege of Troy, and Chaucer paints the bright colors of his love story upon the dark canvas of Troy’s impending destruction.³ Troilus, the *Iliad* tells us, is one of King Priam’s sons who, like his brother Hector, will ultimately be killed by Achilles.⁴ The character of Criseyde and her love-triangle with Troilus and Diomedes was introduced by the twelfth century Norman poet Benoît de Sainte-Maure in his *Roman de Troie* (which was widely read) and further developed by other authors, especially by Boccaccio in his *Il Filostrato*.⁵ According to this literary tradition, Criseyde is the daughter of Calchas, a priestly defector to the Greeks. A widow, Criseyde has remained behind in Troy, under the watchful eye of her uncle, Pandarus. Troilus falls in love with Criseyde, and with the help of her uncle, woos Criseyde until he wins her heart. Fate, however, interrupts their secret love, when Criseyde’s father—who has foreseen the destruction of Troy in an augury—arranges for Criseyde to be sent out to him among the Greeks during a prisoner exchange. Faced with their impending separation, the lovers profess

² See Corinne Saunders, “Love and the Making of the Self,” in *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*, edited by Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 145.

³ See Andrew Lynch, “Love in Wartime: *Troilus and Criseyde* as Trojan History,” in *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*, 113–133.

⁴ Homer, *Iliad* 24.257 and *Scholium* S-I24257a.

⁵ See Barry Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Oxford Guides to Chaucer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 37–137 and 279–88.

their eternal fidelity and Criseyde promises to do all she can to return to Troy and her beloved Troilus. Gradually, however, while living among the Greeks, Criseyde abandons her resolve and gives her heart to Diomedes.

Chaucer employs this traditional material to offer a nuanced and varied account of love. He details the characteristics of romantic infatuation as experienced by Troilus. He portrays the game of courtship, offering a compelling description of how Troilus wins Criseyde's heart. He describes their joy in the consummation of their love; and later, he outlines the fury and despair of love betrayed. For our purposes, however, two features of Chaucer's account deserve particular attention. First, although Chaucer knows well how love can become selfish, pleasure-seeking and disordered (anyone who has read the Miller's Tale knows this), throughout *Troilus and Criseyde* he celebrates the dignity of romantic love, seeing it as part of God's plan for creation and as an ennobling force. The narrator, for example, tells us that "God loves, and will not forbid to love, and no living creature in this world without love is worth anything or can endure" (3.14). He even mocks those who scorn love, affirming that, although some men hold it to be folly, love is in fact virtue (3.1393). Indeed, the effect of love on Troilus, we are told, is that "Love made him flee pride and envy, anger and greed, and every other vice" (3.1806). Second, Chaucer portrays both Troilus and Criseyde during their time together in Troy as faithful and devoted lovers. Criseyde even proclaims to Troilus,

Dear heart, in truth the game has now gone so far that sooner shall Phoebus fall from his sphere, and every eagle mate with the dove, and every rock move from his place, than Troilus shall fade from Criseyde's heart! You are so deeply engraved upon my heart that, even if I were to die upon the rack and even if I wished to turn you from my thoughts, may God save me, I could not!" (3.1492).

Criseyde, however, ultimately abandons Troilus for another. This is what, as Corinne Saunders has noted, makes Criseyde the central enigma of Chaucer's epic poem and gives pointed meaning to Chaucer's investigations into the ultimate character of human love.⁶

Chaucer's treatment of love is given added intensity by the inclusion of an extended reflection on fate, necessity, providence and free choice, that is largely drawn from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.⁷ In this context, Chaucer probes two contrasting attitudes toward love. On the one hand, love is experienced as something that comes upon us, like a sickness, that takes possession of our hearts,

⁶ Saunders, "Love and the Making of the Self," 139.

⁷ See Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 96–109.

even against our wills. This is how Troilus experiences it, and even Criseyde, in the above cited passage, expresses this sentiment: "even if I wished to turn you from my thoughts, may God save me, I could not!" On the other hand, love is portrayed as a choice. Criseyde pursues this line of reasoning throughout her courtship with Troilus. At the outset she affirms, "I will not delude him with false hopes. I do not know how to love a man, and cannot against my will" (2.475). Then later, when she began to fear his wooing, the narrator tells us that she calmed her fears in the following way: "When she had fully considered, she found nothing perilous, why she ought to fear; for it is possible that a man may love a woman until his heart splits, and she not love in return unless she wishes" (2.609). The narrator explains that it was only gradually and upon full reflection that she gave her heart to Troilus, but then fully and with joyful abandonment. This is what makes her later actions so puzzling, even to herself. As the narrator notes, "truly the history tells us that a woman never made more lament than she, when she became false to Troilus" (5.1053). Chaucer has her describe her plight and her resolve in the following terms: "I have betrayed one of the gentlest men that ever was, and one of the worthiest. . . . But since I see there is nothing better and that now is too late to repent, at least I will be true to Diomed" (5.1055 and 1075). She continues, however, to love Troilus. Speaking to him as if he were present, she affirms: "surely I shall never hate you, but you shall always have of me the love of a friend and my words of praise, even if I should live forever" (5.1078). She has given herself to Diomedes, but still retains a loving affection for Troilus in her heart.

It is passages such as these that lead some scholars to describe Chaucer's poem (perhaps intemperately) as the first English novel.⁸ Chaucer considers with sympathy the complex relationship between choice and apparent necessity in love. Criseyde's puzzlement is truly modern and remains with us. She well expresses the sentiments of many a husband or wife who with a surprising suddenness and after years of loving marriage, find themselves in a new relationship. Her words could also apply equally well to many a priest or religious, who after years of service choose a different life. It is important to underline here that Chaucer does not portray Criseyde's action as the result of simple fecklessness, pleasure-seeking or a clearly selfish egotism. Her new allegiances remain something of a mystery to herself as well. This too has a contemporary ring. Robert Bellah,

⁸ George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1915), 109. Windeatt offers perhaps the most balanced appraisal when he states that, "Chaucer's insight into character invites comparison with the modern novel in its sustained attention to inward feeling and motive" (Barry Windeatt, "Introduction," in *Troilus and Criseyde* [London: Penguin Books, 2003], xv).

in his extraordinary study of contemporary American culture, *Habits of the Heart*, found (more than twenty years ago) that many of those whom he interviewed had at midlife undergone radical changes in lifestyle that often included new marriages. The disturbing feature of these changes is that the people whom Bellah interviewed rarely could explain why they had gone from one set of commitments to another, from one marriage to another.⁹ In fact, they often remained friends with their former spouses and expressed sentiments not too distant from those of Criseyde.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Chaucer's discovery remains a theme in contemporary literature. Annie Dillard, for example, explores love's mysterious inconstancy in her novel *The Maytrees*.¹⁰ With sober economy, Dillard traces what can happen to a couple's love as it passes from the green exuberance of Springtime, through the warmth of Summer, to the first gray chills of Autumn. Toby Maytree abandons Lou, his wife of many years to start anew with Deary, his wife's best friend. Years later, Maytree reflects on this strange experience. "Why can love, love apparently absolute, recur? And recur? Why does love feel it is—know for certain it is—eternal and absolute, every time?"¹¹ Maytree considers three possible explanations. First, perhaps the movement from one beloved to another is a natural part of our growth in love, whereby, what we learn loving our first beloved, we develop and apply to loving our subsequent beloveds. This would mean that "everyone gathers or grows an enormous sack of love he hands whole from one beloved to another."¹² The unfortunate implication of this view is that the beloved becomes a mere means to our growth in love, making the beloved what Maytree calls "love's hat rack."¹³ The second possible explanation is even more troubling: "perhaps love is delusional."¹⁴ Maytree paints an analogy from fishing. "The heart never learns and keeps leaping the length of its life, rising to lures made of rubber hiding hooks."¹⁵ We are condemned to jump from one beloved to the next because love itself is an illusion whose allure only wounds. A third possibility is that perhaps Maytree never really loved his first wife Lou or his previous girlfriends. Instead, "having learned love by loving," he found in Deary "his true

⁹ Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), 3–8.

¹⁰ Annie Dillard, *The Maytrees* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 127–29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

mate at last."¹⁶ Maytree, however, rejects this explanation as well, because it too denies the core of his experience: that he really loved Lou (and still loves her) and that he now really loves Deary.

Dillard next portrays Maytree circling for years a fourth possibility. Perhaps "lasting love" was simply "directed will," consisting both in a "willful focus of attention" and "a custody of reactions."¹⁷ This view would imply that Maytree's first marriage broke up because of a failure of will. He failed to focus his attention on Lou and to guard his reactions with regard to Deary. Although Maytree seems partly to accept this portrait of love, it too proves inadequate. Love as directed will fails to account for the emotional features of love, which Maytree describes as "love's first feeling of cliff-jumping." Maytree recognizes that whether love's emotion lasts eighteen months or seven years, it too "must be acknowledged and accounted for."¹⁸

In the end, Maytree remains stumped, and like Criseyde's resigned fidelity to Diomedes, remains with his second wife, having in good New England fashion, "wrapped his hands around oars, iced them fast, and kept rowing."¹⁹ Yet, as Dillard's protagonist affirms, these two aspects of love—the cliff-jumping and the directed will—must be acknowledged and accounted for. It is here that Aquinas' insights into love can be of service.

II. Thomas Aquinas' psychology of love

The perennial temptation is either to reduce love to a pure choice of the will or to a merely emotional response. For Thomas Aquinas, however, love is both. Just as the human intellect cannot know except in and through the senses, memory and imagination, so too for Aquinas the human will loves in and through the emotions, especially the bodily passion that we also call love.²⁰ Aquinas follows Aristotle in affirming that we do not have despotic, but only diplomatic or "political" control over our emotions.²¹ Like free citizens of a republic, the emotions interject their own responses to the people and things we encounter in life. The emotions both influence our decisions, and our decisions, in turn, influence our emotional responses. This complicated mutual relationship between love as passion and love as choice is what makes human love such a rich but also such

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁰ *Summa theologiae* (ST) I 20.1 ad 1; ST I 80.2 ad 3.

²¹ ST I 81.3 ad 2 and Aristotle *Politics* 1.2 (1254b2).

a bewildering reality. Love is spiritual and animal; it is divine, but also earthy.

Aquinas was of a generation that tried to understand love's complexity by placing it within a larger study of natural motion. He shared with the ancients the view that all motion in creation—even the movement of a falling stone or of a growing tree—is somehow caused by love.²² Aquinas was not affirming a silly anthropomorphism, whereby falling stones and growing plants were viewed as consciously and passionately desiring the goals of their motion. Instead, the analogy went in the other direction: human action shares something in common with the actions of other animals and of inanimate things. Since human love is at the source of human action, this implies that human love also analogously shares something in common with the source of these other actions. Aquinas' philosophy of participation and analogy enables him to describe the element that these principles of action generically share in common as a type of "love." Whether it was ultimately helpful to describe the principles of animal action and of inanimate motion as types of love is a legitimate question. It should not, however, distract us from Aquinas' central insight: human love shares important features in common with the principles underlying the actions of other natural things.

What, however, is this common element? In local motion, the motion presupposes a *capacity* or potency to move in a certain way or to a certain spot. I can walk across the room, but I cannot walk across the ceiling or fly to the top of a building. Yet, potency alone does not seem sufficiently to convey the common character of love. For, although someone may have the capacity to be someplace he would rather not be, in prison for example, and although he can even be brought there, we wouldn't want to call this potency for prison a love for prison. The element of love that is common to other things would seem to be reserved to natural motions: a stone falling to the earth, an acorn becoming an oak, or the deer longing for flowing streams. What these cases add to the general notion of capacity is *affinity* or inclination. The deer has an affinity for water; the acorn has an inclination toward becoming an oak; and after Einstein and Field Theory we can once again say that the stone has a certain affinity for the earth toward which it falls.

St. Thomas uses several different terms to convey love's affinity (*affinitas*, *aptitudo*, *connaturalitas*, *convenientia*, or *inclinatio*),²³ but in the case of human love, both in the emotions and in the will, Aquinas prefers *complacentia*. The contemporary English word

²² See Aristotle *Metaphysics* 12 (1072a26–28 and 1072b3) and *Physics* 8.6 (258b26–259a9).

²³ See *ST I* 60.1, *ST I-II* 23.4, *ST I-II* 25.2, *ST I-II* 26.1 and 2, *ST I-II* 36.2.

“complacency” does not capture the meaning of the Latin term. For Aquinas, *complacentia* is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *eudokeia*, which literally means satisfaction or approval, and regularly conveys the notion of being well pleasing, of being a pleasing affective affinity for some object judged to be good, whether an action, person or thing.²⁴ Aquinas thus defines love in the following way: “The first change caused in our affectivity by the desirable object is called love, and is nothing else than *complacentia* for the desirable object.”²⁵ This definition is a summation of a fuller account that explicitly distinguishes between the emotional love proper to the passions and the spiritual or rational love proper to the will. In both cases, love is the principle of all subsequent motion—whether of the emotions or of the actions that flow from our rational decisions—and is nothing other than a certain pleasing affective affinity for the good (*complacentia boni*).²⁶

But if love is the principle of human affectivity, what is the character of the actions that flow from it? Normally, when we speak of love, we refer to an activity—whether an action or a passion—and not merely, if at all, to the principle underlying the activity. We speak of desiring something or of willing something for someone. Aquinas accounts for this experience by developing the following schema: in the emotions, love is desire when the loved object is absent and pleasure when the object is present. In the will, the act of love is to will some good for someone (for oneself or for another) when that good is absent, and to delight or rejoice in that good when it is present.²⁷ As Josef Pieper explains, the primary good we will for another is that he or she exist: to love them on the most fundamental level is to affirm: it’s good that you exist; it’s good that you are in this world.²⁸ We then will and promote other goods for them: that they be virtuous, healthy and wise. When our beloved is present and enjoying all these goods, we rejoice in the beloved and his good. All these acts of love, however, presuppose a certain affective affinity for the loved object at the outset. This is true of our love for people and for things, whether on the spiritual or material level. One wouldn’t desire truffles, for example, or find them pleasurable to eat, unless one already had a certain affinity for them. Likewise, although one can do good deeds for another, these actions won’t be considered

²⁴ See Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, translated and edited by James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 2, 99–106.

²⁵ *ST I-II 26.2*: “*prima ergo immutatio appetitus ab appetibili vocatur amor, qui nihil est aliud quam complacentia appetibilis.*”

²⁶ *ST I-II 26.1*.

²⁷ See *ST I-II 25.2*, *ST I-II 26.4* and also *ST II-II 27.2*.

²⁸ Josef Pieper, *About Love*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), 22. See *ST II-II 25.7* and *ST I 20.2*.

acts of love, unless they spring from a certain spiritual affection and affinity for that person.²⁹

But how does any of this help us understand the plight of Maytree or Criseyde? Specifically, how does a theory that emphasizes love's role as a principle of action (love as *complacentia*), help us understand the confusing relationship between love in the will and love in the passions—between love as “directed will” and love as “cliff jumping”? To answer this question, we must look more closely at the unique character of spiritual love. Aquinas distinguishes the *complacentia* present in the will, from that which is present in the affectivity of lower animals by affirming that love in the will is the result of our own choices. This is why, although “*amor*” is the general Latin term for love, *dilectio* is most properly the Latin word for love in the will, because spiritual love presupposes a choice (*electio*).³⁰ We choose those whom we love. We choose those in whom we wish to be “well pleased,” and to whom we wish to will good.

The emotional aspects of human love, however, are more complicated. Although Thomas recognizes that our emotions share somewhat in human freedom by being partially under the direction of reason,³¹ he also holds that our emotions only sustain us in our choices when they are well ordered.³² As the long history of human experience reveals, a person's passions are frequently disordered, and these disordered affections can push us away from our commitments. This is part of what troubles Troilus in his opening lament. Like the wind and the waves buffeting a tiny sloop, our passions push us now one way, now another.

. . . thus rolled and shaken sore
 All rudderless within a boat am I
 Amid the sea and out of sight of shore,
 Between two winds contrary evermore (1.414–18).

In the abstract, we may wish to remain faithful to our first love, but then another who is more appealing to our emotions arrives and a veritable storm of passion buffets us toward this second love. If our passions are well ordered, on the other hand, the emotional reaction caused by this second love would be as a soft breeze. It might caress our face, but have little effect on the deep emotional currents and steady trade winds that sustain us in our choice to remain faithful to our first love. This is the ideal: will and emotion (action and passion) occurring in harmony to sustain us in our loves.

²⁹ *ST* II-II 27.2.

³⁰ *ST* I-II 26.3.

³¹ *ST* I-II 26.1.

³² *ST* I-II 57.4, *ST* I-II 19.3 ad 2 and *ST* II-II 47.1 ad 1.

Far too often, however, we experience that if our emotions aren't buffeting us with contrary reactions, they inexplicably desert us. After years of smooth sailing with our beloved, suddenly the winds of passion drop and we are becalmed and adrift. In such a state, we become vulnerable to any new wind of emotion provoked by someone new in our lives. This is how Dillard portrays Maytree's plight after years of happy marriage. Chaucer as well seems to understand Criseyde's shift in allegiance in similar turns. In both cases, love's first passion was no longer sustaining love's first choice. We can therefore reformulate our opening question concerning love's fidelity in the following way. How can we train our passions to support our choices? In other words, how do we become people whose emotional loves support their spiritual loves?

For Thomas Aquinas it is by growing in the traits of character he calls virtues that we order our passions aright and thereby develop an integrated personality. On the deepest level, the capacity to remain true to our choices is a gift of grace. This gift penetrates, elevates, and heals the powers of the soul—intellect, will, and emotions—through the infused virtues. On the one hand, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity offer the Triune God as our intimate end in whom all our actions come to rest and find fulfillment. On the other hand, the infused dispositions that Aquinas describes as the infused cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage and temperance, dispose us to act aright concerning those actions that are integral to the Gospel and thus necessary for our salvation.³³ Aquinas' theology of the infused cardinal virtues has generated many divergent interpretations and remains controversial. A full account of this Thomistic doctrine is beyond the scope of this essay. For our purposes, however, we should note two features of this doctrine. First, although the infused cardinal virtues empower us to do what virtue demands and to remain faithful in our loves, they do not immediately heal and integrate our passions. Although the grace of conversion empowers us to live the Gospel, we may still struggle under the residual effects of our acquired vices and disordered affections.³⁴ This fact points to the second feature of Aquinas' account: it is only by living according to the Gospel—by repeatedly engaging in acts of virtue and of faithful love—that our passions become integrated, well ordered and start to support the choices underlying our spiritual love. In other words, it is by engaging in acts of charity, that our passions gradually advance in the long process of integration. Ideally, a person's emotional love for his beloved will become like a deep burning charcoal, warmly sustaining the choices of his spiritual love.

³³ *ST* I-II 63.3. See also *ST* II-II 47.14 ad 3.

³⁴ *ST* I-II, 65.3 ad 2. See also *De virtutibus*, 1.10 ad 16.

But what concretely do we mean by living the Gospel or engaging in acts of charity? Far too often our understanding of what charity entails has been shaped by an angelic individualism that forgets that when we love, even with the spiritual love of charity, we do so as animals—as rational animals, but as animals nonetheless. Acts of charity, therefore, only promote emotional integration to the extent that they are done in a fully human way, in a way that respects our animal nature. It is here that recent research in clinical and experimental psychology can help us understand the lasting value of Aquinas' theory of love. Although we should not reduce the dynamics of Charity and the life of grace merely to the quantitative level proper to the behavioral sciences, grace nevertheless presupposes nature. We live charity's love in and through a concrete genetic, familial and cultural context that influences our emotional life. Since, in Aquinas' view, the spiritual love proper to the will acts in and through the emotions, whatever shapes our emotions will influence—for good or for ill—how we love with the love of charity. Whatever clinical and experimental psychology can tell us about the dynamics of emotional love, therefore, can deepen our understanding of the relationship between love as passion and love as choice.

III. Love and the Psychological Sciences

The last thirty years have seen growing interest in the dynamics of human love among experts from what are known as the bio-psycho-social sciences. Researchers from a broad spectrum of specialties have analyzed the mechanisms of infatuation, desire, romance, attachment, comfort and care and have proposed an array of theories to explain these mechanisms. Unfortunately, as Karin Weis notes in her recent survey of the principal scientific literature, the goal of developing an “all-encompassing theory of love,” is still “a distant prospect.”³⁵ Although Weis is encouraged by the amount of “overlap”³⁶ existing between the dominant theories and by the extent to which these theories seem to exhibit “a minimum amount of agreement,”³⁷ she acknowledges that “there is still no common understanding of how many different kinds of love there are or of what distinguishes them.”³⁸ Indeed, “there are still no specific definitions”

³⁵ Karin Weis, “Conclusion: The Nature and Interrelations of Theories of Love,” in Robert J. Sternberg and Karin Weis, eds., *The New Psychology of Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 313.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 313, 314, 320.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 320.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

of love, nor even “a common conceptual vocabulary of love to allow for unambiguous discourse about love.”³⁹ As one team of researchers has recently noted, “only a few things worth knowing about love can be proven, and just a few things amenable to proof are worth knowing at all.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this same team of pragmatic clinicians employs recent discoveries in neuroscience to identify three features of emotional development that have transformed their clinical practice. Although these clinicians intemperately describe their findings as offering “a general theory of love,” what they in fact do is almost as important. Thomas Lewis and his colleagues Fari Amini and Richard Lannon identify features of emotional love (love as passion) that can either support or hinder spiritual love (love as choice). These three features are *emotional resonance*, *emotional regulation* and *emotional revision*.⁴¹

Infants from the moment of their birth respond to human emotion. They very quickly recognize the expressions of the human face and learn to respond according to the primary emotions that these facial expressions convey.⁴² At the same time, parents, especially mothers, are able to read the emotional states of their infants. This is what researchers describe as limbic or emotional resonance. This ability is present only in mammals, which are the only creatures to have a limbic brain structure above the reptilian brain. Researchers have aptly described this emotional resonance as a “symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation” that enables mammals to “become attuned to each other’s inner states.”⁴³ It is what underlies “the wordless harmony” we take for granted around us: the harmony “between mother and infant, between a boy and his dog, between lovers holding hands across a restaurant table.”⁴⁴ It is part of what accounts for the unique character of collective activities. One person’s thoughts don’t change the atmosphere in a room, but his emotional state can: “limbic states can leap between minds, feelings are contagious, . . . the limbic activity of those around us draws our emotions into almost

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁴⁰ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 11.

⁴¹ Lewis, Amini and Lannon describe these features as “limbic resonance,” “limbic regulation” and “limbic revision” respectively (*ibid.*, 63, 85, and 144). Since, however, in the standard tripartite theory of the brain adopted by these authors, “limbic” simply refers to the part of the brain that controls emotion, I have replaced “limbic” with “emotional.”

⁴² Giannis Kugiumutzakis, Theano Kokkinaki, Maria Makrodimitraki, and Elena Vitalaki, “Emotions in Early Mimesis” in *Emotional Development: Recent Research Advances*, edited by Jacqueline Nadel and Darwin Muir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 161–82. See also Paul Ekman, “An Argument for Basic Emotions,” *Cognition and Emotion* 6 (1992): 169–200.

⁴³ Lewis, *General Theory of Love*, 63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

immediate congruence.”⁴⁵ Lewis and his colleagues explain that this is what gives communal experiences of the arts such intense emotional vibrancy. When we watch a film in a crowded theater, we are drawn into emotional experiences of wonder, fear, joy, sorrow and anticipation, the intensity of which is lacking when we view the film alone at home. Emotional resonance is also what underlies the fight or flight mechanism that can cause a herd to flee or a mob to attack. More soothingly, these researchers explain, this resonance transforms the simple act of silently being attentive in a room. When you are silent with another or with others, “another world expands and comes alive to your senses—a world governed by forces that were old before humanity began.”⁴⁶

Our emotions not only resonate, they also regulate. As the above descriptions imply, our emotional reactions shape, and are shaped by, the emotional reactions of others. This emotional regulation is part of a larger animal synergy. Mammals, it turns out, have nervous systems that require the presence of other mammals in order for these systems to develop and to function properly.

The human body constantly fine-tunes many thousands of physiologic parameters. . . . But because human physiology is (at least in part) an open-loop arrangement, an individual does not direct all of his own functions. A second person transmits regulatory information that can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune function, and more—inside the body of the first. The reciprocal process occurs simultaneously: the first person regulates the physiology of the second, even as he himself is regulated. Neither is a functioning whole on his own; each has open loops that only somebody else can complete.⁴⁷

This occurs on the deepest level between a mother and her infant child. Not only does the child's nervous system develop in imitation of the mother's, the child learns to respond emotionally to his environment from the emotional responses of his mother to this environment.⁴⁸ As the child grows, the network of people whose emotions regulate his emotional life expands: his father, other caregivers and other members of the family all influence his emotions. It is here that the child learns what it means to love and be loved. It is also during these early years that these primary caregivers imprint patterns of attraction and attachment upon his emotional memory. These emotional attractors will shape a child's sense of what is normal and

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁸ Studies of toddlers' reactions to their mothers' facial expressions and other emotional indicators in the “visual cliff” experiments are especially telling. See Lewis, *General Theory of Love*, 60–2.

influence his future choice of friends as well as his future experiences of romantic attraction. This process occurs well or badly.

A full account of emotional regulation would trace how healthy lovers raise children who will be disposed as adults to love this way and to seek the company of others who do the same. It would also explain how those raised by disordered or neurotic lovers, will be drawn—in spite of themselves—to just this sort of disordered lover as adults.⁴⁹ Chaucer and Dillard, however, are not primarily concerned with the dynamics of falling in love, but with the difficulty of remaining faithful to those whom we have chosen to love. The mystery of Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus and of Maytree's abandonment of Lou are our principal concern. For our purposes, therefore, two features of emotional regulation deserve attention. First, emotional regulation is not merely a childhood phenomenon. "Adults remain social animals: they continue to require a source of stabilization outside themselves. That open-loop design means that in some important ways, people cannot be stable on their own—not should or shouldn't be, but *can't* be."⁵⁰ In order for our emotional lives to have the stability necessary to support us in our choices, we need the help of others. It is not just their opinions that we need: we need the influence of their healthy emotional lives. In other words, faithful love requires communities of faithful love: communities where people love the right things and love them well. Secondly, the chemistry that establishes emotional regulation also makes possible emotional revision, which Lewis and his colleagues describe as "the power to remodel the emotional parts of the people we love."⁵¹ Although our early childhood formation disposes us to love in certain ways, this formation is not fixed in stone. New loves can change how we love. "In a relationship, one mind revises another; one heart changes its partner."⁵² Lovers, simply from the fact of spending their lives together, reshape each other's emotions.

We began this survey of the findings of Lewis, Amini and Lannon as an aid to understanding how our emotions can support our choices. Their research sustains the view that emotional love is formed in community with others. A full account of this complex dynamic would present the work of other researchers to show concretely how this process occurs. Here, however, I would like to note three activities that have a privileged role in regulating and revising our emotions: eating, singing and dancing. Traditional cultures give special attention to all three activities. Indeed, as a growing body of research recognizes, the ritualized regularity of familial or communal meals, the

⁴⁹ See Lewis, *General Theory of Love*, 140–64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 86 (emphasis in the original).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵² *Ibid.*

singing of songs during the various activities of daily life, as well as communal dancing all shape a community's emotional and psychological commitments.⁵³ In traditional societies, it is partly through these activities that the members of the community learn what to love and how to love it. Contemporary Western societies, however, have reduced these activities to a bare minimum. Although we should avoid holding an idealized view of past generations, the fact remains that individuals in contemporary society spend far less time in formal meals and virtually no time singing or dancing with others as compared to previous generations.

The loss of communal singing is perhaps the most striking feature of our contemporary emotional impoverishment. As Ted Gioia has noted, although we are surrounded by music (produced by electronic means), our experience of song has largely become passive.⁵⁴ We listen to music, but we rarely sing together. Previous generations, however, sang regularly. They sang together at work and at play, at home and in the larger community; they sang while they cared for each other; they sang as they prayed; and they sang as they wooed.⁵⁵ We do very little of this. Perhaps this is one source of love's instability.

In the context of our current enquiry, this research would suggest that one way for Toby Maytree's "willful focus of attention" to retain something of "love's first feeling of cliff-jumping" would be by surrounding it with emotional supports: by meals spent together, by a life of shared song and dance, and all of this in a communal context larger than themselves. For the tragic Criseyde, separated by fate from Troilus, sustaining her love for Troilus would require finding others—fellow Trojan exiles—with whom she could share her life and longing. Like exiles everywhere, they would sing the songs of home; they would feast on the food of home, and dance the dances of their people.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Troy fell. Hector's words from the

⁵³ See, for example, Barbara H. Fiese, K. P. Foley, and Mary Spagnola, "Routine and ritual elements in family mealtimes: Contexts for child well-being and family identity," *New Directions in Child and Adolescent Development* 111 (2006): 67-90; Patrik Juslin and John A. Sloboda, eds., *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Derek Matravers, "Recent Philosophical Work on the Connection between Music and the Emotions," *Music Analysis* 29 (2010): 8-18; Sabine C. Koch and Iris Braüninger, "International Dance/Movement Therapy Research: Recent Findings and Perspectives," *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 28 (2006): 127-36; Allison F. Winters, "Emotion, Embodiment, and Mirror Neurons in Dance/Movement Therapy: A Connection Across Disciplines," *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 30 (2008): 84-105.

⁵⁴ Ted Gioia, *Work Songs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 247 and 249.

⁵⁵ See Gioia, *Work Songs* and Ted Gioia, *Healing Songs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁵⁶ There is in Chaucer's account a subtle criticism of the hidden character of Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. See Gerald Morgan, "The Ending of 'Troilus and Criseyde'," *The Modern Language Review* 77 (1982), 268.

Iliad, spoken to his grieving wife, were familiar to Chaucer's audience: "Truly I know in my heart and soul that Troy will fall."⁵⁷ This dark shadow follows Chaucer's narrator throughout the poem, and thus imposes on us one further reflection concerning the relationship between love as passion and love as choice. Even when our passions fully support us in a well-ordered and faithful love for our beloved, we cannot escape our inevitable fate: sooner or later death intervenes.

IV. Chaucer, Fate and the Love of God

Chaucer wrote *Troilus and Criseyde* when he was a middle aged man who had experienced much in the service of the English Court.⁵⁸ Born shortly after the outbreak of the Hundred Years War, he would serve in at least one of its battles (being taken prisoner and later ransomed), and live through its first two phases. The Black Death reached Britain when he was a child of between six and eight, killing nearly half of Britain's population, and would revisit the island thirteen years later, taking another quarter of its inhabitants.⁵⁹ When he began writing *Troilus*, the Papal Schism was at least three years old, Wyclif's teachings had recently been condemned, and the Peasants' Revolt had just been suppressed by the young king, Richard II, and his governing council. This was a time of considerable uncertainty at Court. The young king had not yet reached his majority. His uncle, John of Gaunt (on whom Chaucer's own fortunes largely depended), and the other governing counselors were highly unpopular; moreover, there was unrest among the nobles who would soon tumble England into the Appellant crisis. On top of all this, the French were assembling "the largest invasion fleet ever seen in Europe, with some 30,000 men and elaborate equipment for establishing footholds on the English coast."⁶⁰ New Troy, as London was often styled, seemed poised to suffer a fate similar to its ancient predecessor.⁶¹

It is not surprising, therefore, that Chaucer chose to study "the art of love" (3.1333) from the perspective of its vulnerability to

⁵⁷ Homer, *Iliad* 6.455.

⁵⁸ The following description of the context of Chaucer's life and the composition of his *Troilus* is drawn from Peter Brown, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–63, D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Probable Date and Purpose of Chaucer's *Troilus*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 13 (1985): 143–171 and Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁵⁹ John Hatcher, "England in the Aftermath of the Black Death," *Past and Present* 144 (1994): 3–35.

⁶⁰ Robertson, "Probable Date and Purpose of Chaucer's *Troilus*," 151–52.

⁶¹ Lynch, "Love in Wartime," 113–15, and 125–26, Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 7–8.

Fortune's wheel and the Fates. Chaucer informs his audience at the outset that his poem will be a tale of woe that recounts the "double sorrow" of Troilus in his love for Criseyde (1.1). Chaucer penned his poem shortly after translating Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.⁶² For medieval culture, Boethius symbolized the vulnerability of life at Court and the fleeting character of earthly happiness.⁶³ Chaucer scatters Boethian reflections on the brevity of earthly joy throughout the poem.⁶⁴ Shortly before Criseyde gives her heart to Troilus, for example, she reflects:

How worldly happiness, which scholars call false felicity is mingled with so much bitterness! God knows, the condition of vain prosperity is full of anguish, for either joys come not together or else they will not last (3.813).

By "false," she means here imperfect and transitory, for true happiness in this tradition is one that lacks nothing and lasts forever.⁶⁵ Drawing heavily on the second book of Boethius' *Consolation*, she describes terrestrial happiness as a "fragile well unstable earthly joy" (3.820) and as "fleeting, as every worldly joy must be" (3.826). After the lovers consummate their love, Pandarus warns Troilus to be careful lest he "bring to an end the joy into which [he and Criseyde] have come" (3.1620), explaining that "we hold to worldly joy only by a wire, as we know well because it always breaks so often" (3.1638). Troilus experiences this intimately when he loses both the presence of Criseyde and her love.

In Boethius' work, Lady Philosophy consoles him both by demonstrating that true happiness is found only in heaven and by showing him the way to that happiness. The way is love: faithful love united to the One who is Love. Thus, Lady Philosophy explains,

Love is that common fount of all;
All seek adhesion to that end, the good.

⁶² Geoffrey Chaucer, *Boece in The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, edited by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 395–469. See Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 9.

⁶³ Winthrop Wetherbee, "The *Consolation* and medieval literature," in *Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, edited by John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 279–302.

⁶⁴ See Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 96–109.

⁶⁵ Boethius, in the *Consolation of Philosophy* (book 3, prose 9), after speaking of "mendacis formam felicitatis," which Chaucer translates as "fals welefulnesse," explains what he means by contrasting true and perfect things with false and imperfect things, using the appositive expression "falsum imperfectumque," which Chaucer translates as "false and inparfit." Then, in the following chapter (b. 3, pr. 10), Boethius describes it as an imperfect happiness founded upon a fragile good: "quaedam boni fragilis imperfecta felicitas," which Chaucer translates as "a blisfulnesse that be freel and veyn and inparfyt." Following Boethius' usage, therefore, "fals" for Chaucer in this context means "inparfit" and "freel."

Things cannot otherwise survive
 Unless, in Love's renewed embrace, they flow
 Back to that source, their fount of life.⁶⁶

Only after his death, however, when Troilus has followed the soul's ascent described by Lady Philosophy,⁶⁷ does he see the world aright. Like the Trojan Ripheus, whom Dante is surprised to find in heaven,⁶⁸ Troilus, because of his faithful love, soars after death to the eighth sphere, the sphere of the fixed stars where Dante himself received the illumination necessary to continue his journey.⁶⁹ Just as Beatrice "bids Dante to look down to earth on his ascent to the eighth sphere so that he may have earthly and heavenly things in true proportion,"⁷⁰ so too Troilus sees the earth and its loves in a new light:

And when he was slain thus, his freed spirit went blissfully up into the eighth sphere of heaven, leaving all the elements in their spheres below him. From there he gazed long upon the wandering stars, listening to the harmony of sounds full of heavenly melody, and then down upon this little spot of earth embraced by the sea. And then he began utterly to despise this wretched world, and held all to be vanity in comparison to the full felicity of heaven above (5.1807–19).

From this heavenly perspective, Troilus' tragedy becomes a comedy, and he is able to laugh at his fate and at those who mourn it.⁷¹

At length he cast his eyes down upon the spot where he was slain, and laughed within himself at the grief of those who wept so for his death, and condemned all our deeds who follow so hard after blind pleasures which cannot endure, when we should cast our whole heart on heaven (5.1820–25).

Chaucer thus concludes by addressing his audience directly:

O young joyous people, youths and maidens, in whom love ever grows
 up with your age, get yourself home from worldly vanity. Cast up the

⁶⁶ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, translated with introduction and explanatory notes by P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), book 4, metrum 6, 94.

⁶⁷ See Boethius, *Consolation*, b. 4, especially metra 1 and 7, 72 and 96.

⁶⁸ Dante, *Paradiso* 20.67–69. See Bonnie Wheeler, "Dante, Chaucer, and the Ending of 'Troilus and Criseyde,'" *Philological Quarterly* 61 (1982): 110.

⁶⁹ Dante, *Paradiso* 22.133. See Morgan, "The Ending of *Troilus*," 264 and Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 209–11.

⁷⁰ Morgan, "The Ending of *Troilus*," 264.

⁷¹ Chaucer describes his "little book" as a "little tragedy," and prays "May God yet send your maker power, before he die, to use his pen in some comedy!" (5.1786–8). This prayer is speedily answered, because it is shortly after these lines that Chaucer recounts Troilus' ascent into heaven. See Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 159 and 178. On the longstanding controversies concerning the religious ending of *Troilus*, see Morgan, "The Ending of *Troilus*," 257–71, Windeatt, "Introduction," xlv–xlviii, Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 103–107, 231–34 and John M. Steadman, *Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

eyes of your heart to that God that made you after His image, and think that all this world is but a temporary amusement and passes as soon as the sweet flowers. And love Him who for pure love, to redeem our souls, first died upon the cross, and rose again, and now sits on high in heaven. He will fail no creature (of that be sure) who will set his heart wholly on Him. And since He is most gentle and best to love, what need to seek feigned loves? (5.1835–48)

Like a painter who lovingly captures the bright colors and exquisite beauty of a delicate flower while also conveying its ephemeral character, Chaucer portrays human love with great sympathy, all the while reminding us that it is fleeting. This tragedy becomes a comedy only when we love others with the eyes of eternity: when we love them in Christ and in light of our eternal home.

We began our study with the mystery of human infidelity: Criseyde's infidelity to Troilus, Maytree's infidelity to his wife Lou. Chaucer reminds us that only God's love is perfectly faithful: "He will fail no creature (of that be sure) who will set his heart wholly on Him." When we love each other in Christ and in the mystery of his cross, therefore, we remain true to our first choices. Once again, however, our emotions will support us in this choice only if we love in a fully human way. This implies incarnating our love for God in the song and dance of daily life. In other words, even our love for God requires the supports provided by the mechanisms of emotional resonance, regulation and revision. By expressing our love for God each day through the song and dance that is the liturgy—the liturgies of the domestic church, such as vocal prayer and song (the rosary and the psalms) or the great liturgy that is the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal where Christ himself is our nourishment—we shape each other's emotions and engage these emotions in support of our loves.⁷² Love's rituals, therefore, both human and divine, provide our answer. They are the communal practices that foster emotions in support of our choices.

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⁷² There is also the mysterious music that is only heard in silence, whereby God's presence, especially in the communal adoration of the Eucharist, quietly heals and shapes our emotions, deepening our love for him and for others. Thomas Lewis and his colleagues describe therapy as the healing act of "sitting in a room with another person for hours at a time with no purpose in mind but attending" (Lewis, *General Theory of Love*, 65). If such attending is healing on the natural human level, how much more so when the one in whose presence we are attending is Christ himself, present in the Eucharist?