WILEY

ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Rehearsing Words and Gestures in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*

Stephanie Trigg

School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Australia

Correspondence: Stephanie Trigg (sjtrigg@unimelb.edu.au)

ABSTRACT

Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* offers many rhetorical lessons and models in how to speak and behave well according to the mediaeval conventions of *fin'amor*. The first three books of the poem are especially concerned with the best ways to control and express deep feeling. The two lovers prepare nervously for their first meeting at the beginning of Book III. Troilus, in particular, rehearses and seeks to memorise the best words, gestures, and facial expressions to use when he first speaks with Criseyde. In Book V, Diomede enacts very similar practices in his seduction of Criseyde, but the reader is encouraged to read this as a different kind of deliberate performance. Using the work of Monique Scheer and other theorists of emotional practice and the history of emotions, this essay explores the ambiguity of performance as both a rehearsed theatrical mode; and as the practice and affirmation of conventional forms of emotional expression. It concludes by proposing that Thomas Hoccleve's 'mirror scene' in his *Compleinte* draws on Troilus's rehearsals, adopting the performance anxiety associated with romantic love for his own more social and public concerns.

1 | Introduction

One of the key narrative drivers in the first half of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is the issue of rhetorical and amorous performance: how should the lovers conduct themselves in relation to each other? This form of accomplishment famously drives one of Criseyde's first real questions to Pandarus about Troilus:

> 'Kan he wel speke of loue?' quod she; 'I preye
> Tel me, for I the bet me shal purveye'.[1]
>
> (II. 503)

Significantly, the reason Criseyde gives for her question is so that she may better prepare herself to respond to Troilus's words of love. Books II and III are full of detailed discussions about the best way to behave; and lessons, both explicit and implicit, in controlling feeling and expression. Much of this, though not all,

is played out in scenes with Pandarus, who instructs both lovers in making their next steps. On several occasions, too, Chaucer invites his readers to compare and reflect on their own amorous behaviours and practices.

These extensive discussions about how best to conduct a love affair—how to speak, look, and behave—lead to a degree of nervous anxiety about saying and doing the right thing. This is the source of much of the poem's humour; but its minute discussions about what to do and what not to do also affirm the importance of getting this right. The courtly environment is a very restricted social and cultural context; its customs and practices are minutely scrutinised by all participants; and the lovers observe both themselves and each other as they play out their roles.

This essay explores the concepts of practice and performance in love, paying special attention to the scene in *Troilus and*

Criseyde where the two main characters formally meet each other for the first time. This scene is emotionally intense, but develops quite slowly in narrative terms, being distributed between the end of Book II and the beginning of Book III. In this scene, both Troilus and Criseyde are shown preparing to encounter each other, planning both the words they will say as well as their bodily gestures and facial expressions. They can each be said to be rehearsing, or practising, for a kind of performance, in a manner that has very few, if any precedents in Middle English.

My analysis takes as a starting-point some of John Ganim's influential ideas about performance and theatricality in his 1990 study *Chaucerian Theatricality* (Ganim 1990). The textual moment I'm working with belongs to a very different form of cultural context—the conduct of a courtly love affair—from the emphasis on the more ephemeral and popular texts that thread through Ganim's reading of the *Canterbury Tales*. Nevertheless, this scene helps us extend his insights into the way performance is so crucial for the representation of cultural authority, even in the relatively homogenous courtly setting of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Ganim offers a reading of a Chaucer who is 'conditional, more provisional, appropriating the improvisational and performative qualities of mediaeval theatricality' (Ganim 1990, 4). Crucial to Ganim's reading is the concept of 'talk', the different forms of speech, both formal and official, that resound through the *Tales*. Ganim stresses the uniqueness of Chaucer's text, in 'the manner in which it embodies as well as imitates such talk' (Ganim 1990, 4). As he writes:

> Even the most rudimentary forms of conversation, the language of traders, the language of children, make comments about their own volume, tone, or intelligibility. Chaucer's forms of 'talk' comment on the act of speech itself. As courtier, politician, Londoner, diplomat, let alone poet, he must always have been alert to the varieties of register, the unspoken behind the spoken.
>
> (Ganim 1990, 123)

Turning to this earlier work of Chaucer's, one whose text-world is far more constrained and restricted in scope than that of the *Tales*, it is hard not to be struck by the way *Troilus and Criseyde* foregrounds this question of 'talk' as an important means of progressing the love affair.

In the conduct of *fin'amor*, the pursuit of verbal, facial, and gestural control is not primarily, or solely, about mastering an authentic form of personal expression; it is also a matter of conforming with desired and expected forms of behaviour. This raises some intriguing ambiguities about love as a form of conscious and unconscious emotional practice, in the sense of that word developed by a number of sociologists, historians and theorists of emotions. Love is a feeling, yes, but it can take different forms; and as Chaucer tells us in the Proem to Book II, the expressive forms and styles of love change dramatically in different historical contexts. *Troilus and Criseyde* is a powerful witness to the force of cultural expectations in the besieged town of Troy, within the special constraints of secrecy and tact. As an emotional and social practice, the conduct of love insists on the meaningfulness of its established conventions, and its implicit hierarchies of authority and expertise.

Monique Scheer's conception of emotions as a form of social and cultural practice—indeed, as an important component of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*—has been very attractive to literary critics and cultural historians of emotion (Trigg 2014; Downes and McNamara 2016; Flannery 2016; Burger and Crocker 2019), because Scheer emphasizes 'the mutual embeddedness of minds, bodies, and social relations in order to historicize the body and its contributions to the learned experience of emotion' (Scheer 2012, 199). This approach allows us to work across highly individualized literary texts and the bodies, objects, and practices of everyday life; as well as broader patterns of social movements and cultural change. For Scheer, 'Emotions can thus be viewed as acts executed by a mindful body, as cultural practices' (Scheer 2012, 205). As she explains:

> ... the habits of the mindful body are executed outside of consciousness and rely on social scripts from historically situated fields. That is to say, a distinction between incorporated society and the parts of the body generating emotion is hard to make. ... the feeling self executes emotions, and experiences them in varying degrees and proportions, as inside and outside, subjective and objective, depending on the situation.
>
> (Scheer 2012, 207)

Scheer's emphasis on the variability of affective experience and its dependence on social scripts is crucial to my work in this essay, as I seek to untangle some of the ethical and emotional dilemmas raised by the concept of rehearsing a lover's behaviour. There is no doubt about Troilus's love for Criseyde, yet he is beset by anxiety about how to perform. So, what is the relation between these two senses of practice: first, to rehearse; and second, to play a role, as it were, in the cultural performance of love?

To answer these questions, I pay special attention to the way the lovers plan to discipline their bodies, in addition to the words they plan to say. In the first part of the essay, I follow the usual pattern of paying special critical attention to Troilus. In the second part, I turn to Criseyde, to suggest that she too is preparing for their encounter, though with very different effect. The third and final part of the essay seeks to contextualise and theorise these performances as emotional practices (taught or learned) with some comparisons of texts that precede and follow Chaucer's example.

2 | What Shal He Seye?

We recall that at the end of Book II, Chaucer has left Troilus in the mysterious 'kankedort' (II. 1752) of uncertainty, lying in bed, pretending to be sick, in Deiphebus' house, and awaiting Criseyde's entrance into the bedchamber. This will be the first time they have been able to speak directly to each other. Book II ends with an open question: 'O myghty God, what shal he seye?' (II. 1757). It's easy to read this as a rhetorical *demande d'amour*: an invitation to the audience to discuss what their own first words to Criseyde might be. Indeed, this final stanza of book II

opens with the narrator's formal address to the amorously in-clined members of his courtly audience: 'But now to yow, ye loveres that ben here...' (II. 1751). This would not be the only time Chaucer opens a space for his readers to debate the niceties of courtly practice, or indeed, to fill in the blanks of courtly discourse. The Franklin's question—'Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?' (line 1621)—at the end of his *Tale* is Chaucer's most obvious example of the *demande d'amour*, but the narrator of the *Troilus* consistently attributes rhetorical authority in matters of love to his readers.

This question at the end of Book II foregrounds the question of performance. In a social context where the poem was being read aloud, this would be a perfect opportunity for the audience to discuss this question, or at the very least, to appreciate the suspense it raises. The delay serves to defer narrative desire and to elevate performance anxiety, but it also factors in a space for the listeners to insert themselves, to 'practise' what they them-selves might say and do.

Before the narrative can continue in Book III, the narrator himself intervenes to delay the action further with a highly accomplished rhetorical performance of his own: the beautiful invocation and proem to Venus. Despite its clear mastery, the proem concludes with another rhetorical question that shows the contaminative effect of performance anxiety, when it becomes the narrator's turn to raise doubts about how he himself might proceed:

> How I mot telle anonright the gladnesse
> Of Troilus, to Venus heryinge?
> To which gladnesse, who nede hath, God hym brynge!
>
> (III. 47–49)

Even as the narrator foretells the happy outcome of Troilus's performance, he shares his own anxiety about poetic perfor-mance, deferring once more to the fictional audience of lovers.

When the narrative action recommences, the narrator takes us back to where he left off, with Troilus lying in bed still waiting for Criseyde: 'Lay al this mene while Troilus' (III. 50). And as he waits, he rehearses the formal declaration of love he hopes to make to Criseyde when she enters the room for their first pri-vate meeting.

As Chaucer says, he is 'recording his lesson', like a schoolboy committing a speech to memory.

> Lay al this mene while Troilus,
> Recordyng his lesson in this manere:
> 'Mafay,' thoughte he, 'thus wol I sey, and thus;
> Thus wol I pleyne unto my lady dere;
> That word is good, and this shal be my cheere;
> This nyl I nought foryeten in no wise.'
> God leve hym werken as he kan devyse!
>
> (III. 50–56)

Troilus is making a kind of mental list of the topics he will cover. He anticipates the genre of his speech—it will be a 'complaint'; the phrases he will use; and indeed, the facial expression he will employ. The stanza even seems to enact a form of memory

practice by voicing the negative fear of forgetting: 'This nyl I nought foryeten in no wise'.

How may we parse this complicated utterance, after Troilus' French oath to himself—'Ma fay'—(III. 53)? Are we to imagine him thinking, as if speaking silently to himself, vocalising 'thus' (in this way) and 'this' (with these words)? It is easier to think of this discourse not as silent direct speech, but as a more mediated representation of his cognitive process. The demonstratives in lines 54, 55 ('that' and 'this') would then function as indexes to unspecified topoi: the clusters of words and ideas arrayed in his memory as he desperately seeks to recall them and put them in the correct order.

In Middle English, 'recorden' means predominantly 'to commit to memory, keep in mind', to 'remember' and 'repeat' (MED 2000, *recorden*). Coupled with the word 'lesson', this helps us see Troilus as a nervous student of rhetorical practice, trying to memorise a set text or a speech for a 'performance', as if in the classroom. This pairing, with 'lesson', is found in several of the examples in the MED, *recorden*, v. 6. The concept also draws, as Maud Burnett McInerney suggests, on the Ovi-dian idea of the *praeceptor* from the *Ars Amatoria*, who instructs the lover on how to speak, write, and behave in order to win his lady's favour (McInerney 1998, 225, 226). McInerney shows how much of Pandarus's advice to Troilus (and we might add, to Criseyde too) adopts these pedagogical models. We might even picture Troilus reading an imaginary book in his mind and pointing to various phrases or passages he might deploy, as a form of mnemonic practice.

But Troilus is not just thinking about the words he will say. He also uses 'thus' three times to indicate the *manner* in which he will speak and make his complaint. There are six de-monstratives in all: the first three are adverbial ('thus wol I sey'); and then there is one used as an adjective ('that word'). The action becomes more abstract, finishing with two nominal uses: 'this shal be my cheere'; and the 'this' that he is determined not to forget. Several manuscripts have variations for 'thus' at line 53 ('that' or 'this') and for 'this' at line 54 ('thus' or 'that'), suggesting some uncertainty about the references for these de-monstratives. In addition to the 'talk', then, the content of his discourse, Troilus is also anticipating the style and mode of his address. Strikingly, he seems to rehearse the facial or bodily gestures that will accompany his speech: 'this shal be my cheere'. To this extent he is also following the precepts of rhetorical manuals, such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*, that emphasise the importance of matching face and gesture to words (Burrow 2002, 69). Vinsauf writes about the three tongues ('tres linguae'): the tongue of the speaker's mouth, face and gestures: the expressive force of the speaking face is crucial to Troilus's plan (Nims 1967, 90), and underlines the context of embodied rhetorical performance.

Chaucer invites his accomplished courtly audience to imagine the content of these speeches: the accepted forms of address Troilus might use; the appropriate expressions of love, service, and fi-delity; and indeed, the facial expressions and gestures that might best accompany them. The final line of the stanza leaves his cogitations still unresolved. At this point Troilus hears Pandarus bringing Criseyde into the room, and his heart begins to beat

faster ('quappe', III. 57) and he seems to sigh with quick breaths ('shorte for to sike', III. 58). His careful cognitive preparations are displaced by the involuntary embodied expression of emotion.

In his Norton edition, Stephen Barney glosses 'werken' in line 56 as 'perform', and 'deuyse' as plan: in effect, 'May God allow him to perform in the way he plans' (Barney 2006, 151). The sexual overtones of 'werken' in Middle English are perhaps also present here, suggesting a proleptic association between the successful accomplishment of Troilus's rhetorical performance and his erotic aspirations (see also McInerney 1998, 222–224). But the principal orientation of the stanza is clear: we are invited to empathise with Troilus's nervous rehearsal and attempts to memorise his speech.

When Pandarus brings Criseyde into the room, Troilus delivers none of his fine words. Instead, he groans and says he cannot see clearly.

> 'Ha, a,' quod Troilus so reufully,
> 'Wher me be wo, O myghty God, thow woost!
> Who is al ther? I se nought trewely'.
>
> (III. 65–67)

This is carefully ambiguous. Troilus' first syllables are incoherent groans, and the audience is invited to guess whether he is keeping up the pretence of being too sick and weak to rise and kneel before Criseyde; or is indeed, so genuinely overcome by the occasion that he cannot tell who is in the room (see also Nuttall 2012, 65, 73). Performing the weakness of illness has a very similar effect to the performance—unconscious or not—of being deeply affected by love. As McInerney argues, the idea of appearing to be ill with love-sickness is a familiar and deliberate method of seduction in mediaeval culture; but again and again, Troilus finds he does not need to pretend or 'perform' at all (McInerney 1998, 226). Paradoxically, forgetting his carefully prepared speech is the best way to show how overcome he is by love. Even the way he 'blurts out' Windeatt (1984, 253) the endearment 'Ye, swete herte?' (III. 69) is suddenly touching.

Troilus struggles to raise himself up in bed (and indeed, Robert Benson suggests this is a calculated gesture to elicit Criseyde's sympathy (R. G. Benson 1980, 93)). In any event, Criseyde speaks calmly to him, and lays her hands softly on him to stop him struggling to sit up in bed ('she right tho/ Gan bothe hir hondes softe upon hym leye', III. 71, 72). Criseyde's gesture seems reminiscent of the lady in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* saying she has 'captured' her knight, when she first visits Sir Gawain in his chamber, though Chaucer's text is more precise about the movement of Criseyde's hands on Troilus's chest. (We may note, however, that in the illustration in BL MS Cotton Nero A.x, the lady is shown holding or stroking Sir Gawain's beard as he lies with his eyes closed, pretending to be asleep.)

Despite the authority of her calming gesture, Criseyde then asks Troilus for his patronage and protection: for his 'lordship'. Troilus is so embarrassed, so taken aback, and so ashamed, he 'wex sodeynliche red' (III. 82) and forgets all the things he was rehearsing to say:

> And sire, his lessoun, that he wende konne
> To preyen hire, is thorugh his wit ironne.
>
> (III. 83, 84)

The 'lesson' he thought he had remembered has 'run' through his mind, leaving him with nothing; while his careful facial arrangement is thrown into disarray with his blush. It takes several more stanzas and false starts before he is finally able to deliver a more accomplished rhetorical performance and offer an eloquent declaration of love and service. Troilus can indeed speak well of love, but only when he has recovered from the first meeting with Criseyde, her own calm composure, her affecting gesture, and her rhetorical mastery.

James I. Wimsatt draws attention to a similar passage of lover's nerves in Guillaume de Machaut's *Jugement du Roy de Behainge*, where the lover experiences sudden anxiety in the long-awaited presence of the lover, and his heart loses all reason, composure, and wit ('Qu'en li n'avoit scens, manière, n'avis' (Wimsatt 1976, 293, no. 14, quoting Palmer and Plumley 2016)). Indeed, while acknowledging the structural significance of Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* on the poem, Wimsatt emphasises the importance of Machaut for what we might call the emotional texture and layers of Chaucer's poem (Wimsatt 1976, 285).

Chaucer does not hesitate to affirm the association between a lover's and a poet's anxiety, when he writes:

> But whan his shame gan somwhat to passe,
> His resons, as I may my rymes holde,
> I yow wol telle, as techen bokes olde.
>
> (III. 89–91)

Chaucer's willingness to draw attention both to the textual tradition and the formal demands of his verse form affirms this sense of performing within a textual and cultural tradition of romantic practice that is firmly associated with pedagogic authority.

In the case of Troilus, it is important to emphasise that Chaucer makes no kind of ethical distinction between his rehearsed gestures and those he enacts when Criseyde enters. There is no doubt that Troilus' amorous desires and feelings are genuine. If he is rehearsing them, it is only to give them fullest expression, not to deceive. Troilus is aware of how his face should look when he first meets Criseyde, and he is taking pains to produce the right effect. The emphasis on his nervous anxiety and his eagerness to practise his speech offers insight to a degree of inner self-awareness: the idea that a self might be fashioned, or that a version of the self might be produced for a particular occasion. But the overall effect is to affirm that these are, indeed, the accepted, and perhaps even the only ways of expressing love. The customary forms and conventions of love as an emotional practice are thus affirmed, whether or not Troilus, as a nervous actor, is able to perform them correctly or in good faith. In terms of the cultural habitus, Chaucer's text, at this moment, is quite conservative; it does nothing to challenge the conventions of romantic expression, but it does shows us how desperate Troilus is to do it right.

Given the high drama of this narrative turning-point—Troilus's anxious rehearsal, his spectacular failure, and indeed, the rich cultural contexts of this scene—it is no wonder that the prince's nervousness, illness, and self-realisation have attracted so much critical attention. As Corinne Saunders argues,

> Yet if love unmakes Troilus, it also shapes his identity, and the sufferings of love interweave in the first half of the narrative with a sense of its sublimity, its capacity to elevate the individual to new realms of being. Its power is destructive but also creative, opening onto the ineffable.
>
> (Saunders 2006, 141)

Chaucer has certainly encouraged us to internalise and identify with Troilus' struggles, taking us in detail through his mental and cognitive processes, inviting us to speculate what words he might be planning to say; and to wonder about the implications of this first rhetorical failure for the prince's sexual prowess. In many ways this scene is itself a kind of rehearsal for the lovers' encounter later in Book III, in which Troilus' inability to speak or act decisively is played out at greater length and with even greater good humour.

It is clear in Chaucer's narration that Criseyde is fully aware of what is going on. Her loving response to Troilus's nervousness keeps our attention on Troilus's performance and its reception. But Criseyde also traverses her own trajectory of rehearsal and performance over this bridge between Books II and III. This trajectory is less detailed, but it is still quite a pointed articulation of her mental state, before, during, and after this meeting. Indeed, the drama of Troilus' mental preparations, their initial failure, and their eventual success is carefully framed by Criseyde's own preparations and rhetorical accomplishments.

3 | Criseyde's Preparations

Criseyde has also been preparing for this encounter. Chaucer twice introduces her own private thoughts into the narrative, as the other members of the company speculate about the cause of Troilus's illness at the end of Book II: first, she forebears to 'teche', and speculate with the others about his health, while thinking quietly to herself that she would be his best 'leche', or physician (II. 1582). And second, she takes care to 'notifie' (II. 1591); or take a mental note of everything that is said by Helen, Deiphebus and the others, while disciplining her face so as not to let her emotions show ('with sobre cheere hire herte lough', II. 1592). As we have been shown, Criseyde is ever watchful and concerned about the behaviour of herself and others. On this occasion, her customary anxiety is displaced by the joy of knowing she is loved; yet she conceals this well with an outward show of her 'sobre cheere'. We recall that this planned meeting is the result of an elaborate scheme arranged by Pandarus. He has spread the fiction that Poliphete is threatening to appropriate Criseyde's property; and has encouraged the court to gather at Deiphebus' house to express their support for her. When everyone has gathered, Troilus is pretending to be ill in a separate bedroom where, through an additional ruse that deflects Helen and Deiphebus off into a stairwell and downstairs

into a garden to read a letter from Ector on another matter altogether, the lovers might meet in private.

Finally, in the fifth last stanza of Book II, Pandarus leads her on his arm out of the great chamber towards the room where Troilus is lying. As she prepares to enter the sickroom, Criseyde 'Avysed wel hire wordse and hire cheere' (II. 1726). We are not told the content of her words, but she is evidently both planning what she will say and preparing her general demeanour. That is, Criseyde is conducting the same kind of cognitive and somatic rehearsal as Troilus, in preparation for their first meeting. She is clearly aware of the romantic and erotic charge of the occasion, although as the narrator reminds us ('Al innocent of Pandarus entente', [II. 1723]), she is not fully aware that this will be a private meeting where Troilus will speak to her of his love. Thus, she prepares to speak of her request that Troilus will protect her from the claims of Poliphete, unaware that Pandarus has manufactured this elaborate fiction.

When Criseyde first enters the room, she speaks directly to Troilus, answering his bewildered question about who is there with a confident affirmation that it is she and her uncle: 'Sire', quod Criseyde, 'it is Pandare and I' (III. 68). She tells Troilus not to try to rise to greet her. She lays her hands gently on him and moves quickly to enumerate the two reasons she has come to visit him:

> 'Sire, comen am I to yow for causes tweye:
> First, yow to thonke, and of youre lordshipe eke
> Continuance I wolde yow biseke'.
>
> (III. 75–77)

Criseyde's gracious touch and her self-possession, as she enumerates and articulates the two things she wishes to say, cause Troilus to forget himself, and to go red for embarrassment. She is here adopting the verbal mode of the petitioner, just as she did before Ector in Book I. But her demeanour is strikingly different. In the earlier scene, we do not hear the words she speaks; we learn simply that she falls on her knees, weeps, and begs for mercy:

> On knees she fil biforn Ector adown
> With pitous vois, and tendrely wepynge,
> His mercy bad, hirselven excusynge.
>
> (I. 110–112)

In this later scene, Criseyde speaks the language of feudal subjection; first, she thanks Troilus for his 'lordship' (his protection), and second, she requests its continuance against the claims on her land. But she does not kneel before him. Criseyde is far more confident in this meeting than in her suit to Ector, presumably because she is aware that in the matter of love she already has the upper hand, even though she carefully starts the conversation off in a less amorous courtly mode.

Troilus is completely disarmed by this petition. He blushes, and forgets everything, as we have seen. In this first moment of meeting, it is Criseyde's cognitive and rhetorical mastery—her capacity to make a plan and carry it out—that scores the first blow. Chaucer makes it very clear that she is fully aware of the effect of her words, and understands the situation

comprehensively: she 'al this aspied wel ynough,/ For she was wis and loved hym nevere the lasse' (III. 85, 86). And from this point on, there is no further mention of Poliphete.

After several false starts, when it is clear that he is not pretending, but is genuinely overcome by emotion, Troilus begs for mercy, calling her 'swete herte' three more times; at line 98, at line 127, and again in line 147, when he has finally been able to express his desire to serve her. As Barry Windeatt comments:

> ...even though Troilus' memorized entreaty goes clean out of his mind, the lovers do still address eloquent, stylistically elaborate, first speeches to each other, which serve to establish the terms of their understanding as lady and servant in love. This first meeting of the lovers represents a union in understanding through the medium of language.
>
> (Windeatt 1992, 316, 317)

This understanding is nevertheless hierarchical. Criseyde's emotional and amorous sovereignty over Troilus is crucial in this early stage in their relationship, and this first meeting affirms the inequity very clearly. Criseyde's erotic authority will come to a peak later in Book III, when, in order to explain Troilus's sudden arrival at his house, Pandarus has had to fabricate another lie: namely, the idea that Troilus was fearful that Criseyde had another lover. When the two are together, Troilus must invent the details of his supposed jealousy, but Criseyde reassures him, describing his feeling as 'childish', and saying, 'Now were it worthi that ye were ybete' (III. 1169). In this dynamic, it is Troilus who must seek Criseyde's approval and it is Criseyde who playfully threatens to discipline her lover like a parent or teacher (Trigg 2019, 35–40).

In Book II, however, Troilus's bodily and facial 'performance' are perfect. Even though he is not yet in charge of his words, his face and gestures accord with the humble subjection required of the lover. When faced with Criseyde, Troilus's 'mindful body' is so attuned to the emotional habitus of the courtly lover that whether these gestures are deliberate and volitional or not is impossible to tell. His face behaves in perfect accordance with amorous conventions, in such a way that Chaucer emphasises his manner was 'goodly abaist' (III. 94), just as it was 'a noble game' to see him blush under the adulation of the crowd as he passes by Criseyde's window (II. 645–648).

So while, indeed, this first meeting is primarily erotic and emotional in tone and exquisite sensibility, it is also structured around careful preparations, performance anxiety, and discursive and rhetorical mastery that redounds back onto the narrator.

There is no trace of this pedagogical or performance anxiety in *Il Filostrato*, and almost no trace of this linguistic or textual understanding; instead, it is passionate physicality that cements the lovers' union. In Boccaccio's text, Troilo makes his way to Criseida's house on a cloudy night and enters through a secret doorway and waits for her to come to him. When her household has retired for the night, she comes down the stairs alone, with a torch, to his hiding place. He greets her lovingly in one stanza, they kiss each other passionately and repeatedly in the next, and

then ascend to her bedroom, where they remove their clothes and get into bed, with Criseida asking, still with her last piece of clothing on, asks, 'Spogliomi io? Le nuove spose/ son la note primiera vergognose' ('Shall I strip myself? The newly married are bashful the first night'), III. 31 (Pernicone 1986, 146, 147). By contrast, Chaucer has substantially slowed down the narrative action in his account of their first meeting, encouraging us to pay attention to the way the two lovers only gradually find a way to talk to each other, and indeed, to look at each other directly.

4 | Arranging the Face

I have examined the details of this familiar scene so closely because I wanted to establish the importance of the lovers' relative control of their words and gestures in this scene. We turn now to consider more closely the significance and meaning of the deliberate facial arrangements and gestures in these encounters.

As we have seen, Criseyde and Troilus both pay attention to their 'chere'. A richly ambiguous signifier, 'chere' can mean the face itself, or the expression of a particular emotion on the human face. Less often, it can also refer to a more general demeanour, like the 'cheere/ Of court' Chaucer's Prioress is so keen to imitate (General Prologue, 139, 140). (We do not see the Prioress *rehearsing* her expressions, however.) The word can also be used almost independently of the movement or gesture of the face, when it refers to a 'frame of mind, state of feeling, spirit; mood, humour', etc. (*MED chere* (1) 5 (a); Burrow 2002, 81). For the purpose of this essay, I'm interested primarily in the first two meanings.

The fullest depiction of the appropriate lover's 'chere' in *Troilus and Criseyde* is given when Troilus is ready to make his second attempt to speak to Criseyde:

> In chaunged vois, right for his verray drede,
> Which vois ek quook, and therto his manere
> Goodly abaist, and now his hewes rede,
> Now pale, unto Criseyde, his lady dere,
> With look down cast and humble iyolden chere,
> Lo, the alderfirste word that hym asterte
> Was, twyes, 'Mercy, mercy, swete herte!'
>
> (III. 92–98)

Troilus' manner has changed, in that his voice trembles, his colour changes, he casts down his eyes, and presents an expression that is suitably submissive. Of these expressions, some appear to be involuntary, like the shaking voice and the changing colour of his face, although others, such as the downcast look and submissive expression, might be closer to the facial gestures we have seen him rehearsing before Criseyde enters the room.

As we saw above, it can sometimes be impossible to distinguish the appearance of someone feigning being sick with love from that of someone who really is sick with love. Equally, there are many examples in mediaeval literature of feigning a lover's facial expression and practising the characteristic symptoms and

gestures that are so strongly associated with the state of being in love in courtly literature. John P. Hermann summarises some of the interpretative and critical issues surrounding deceptive gestures in mediaeval literature, and concludes:

> Such hermeneutic difficulties, although frustrating to the scholar reaching after certainty, constitute much of the pleasure of the text for the reader with a critical negative capability. Different critical models will generate different values for individual gestures, and it is unlikely that any scholarly discourse can contain the play of the signifier.
>
> (Hermann 1985, 126)

For another example of the ambiguities of gesture and deliberation, we might look back to Book II, when Pandarus is advising Troilus how to write his first letter Criseyde. 'Biblotte it with thi teris eke a lite' (II. 1027), he advises. Pandarus assumes there will be tears (and indeed he is right, as we see at II. 1086, 1087, when Troilus lets tears fall on the ruby in his ring as he seals the letter), but he seems equally confident that tears might be produced at will, if need be. The subtle difference here between the production and the deployment of tears, and the fine distinction between Pandarus' advice and Troilus's action allow for a great deal of careful and sensitive reading and interpretation (see also Davidson 2020, 163).

Nevertheless, as John Burrow shows, Gower and Chaucer reserve special condemnation for lovers who deliberately attempt such deceit. In Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Theseus and Jason both adopt a 'chere' that is described as deceptive or counterfeited (Burrow 2002, 90–91). Burrow also draws a comparison with the more 'calculated and mechanical' body language and gestures deployed by Diomede in Book V. 925–930 (Burrow 2002, 132, 133). This is an intriguing passage to consider in the context of performance and emotional practice, and we return to it shortly.

As we have seen, although Chaucer does show us Criseyde's preparations for the meeting, much less attention is paid in this sequence to her face and her demeanour, and Chaucer does not show us her face moving and her voice and colour changing as he does with Troilus. At this point, however, we should pause to register the additional stanza that appears uniquely in the Oxford MS Rawlinson Poet. 163 in the Bodleian Library, in Book II at line 1750. The manuscript at this point repeats II. 1676, 1677, and then adds an additional stanza to Pandarus' instructions to Criseyde:

> For ye must outher chaungen your face
> That is so ful of mercy and bountee
> Or elles must ye do this man sum grace
> For this thyng folweth of necessytee
> As sothe as god ys in his magestee
> That crueltee with so benigne a chier
> Ne may not last in o persone yfere.

This stanza—which the Riverside editor, Stephen A. Barney, suggests 'is probably genuine' (L. G. Benson 1987, 1168)—is an important moment for the study of facial disposition in late mediaeval culture, and adds a further, if not unproblematic dimension to our discussion of intention and behaviour in the practice of love.

In effect, Pandarus is telling Criseyde that her face is so expressive of mercy and generosity that she must extend some grace to Troilus, since it follows necessarily that a benign face cannot be cruel. This affirmation of Criseyde's natural expression of kindness is not spoken from a lover's perspective. Nor is Pandarus praising her beauty, but instead affirms an inviolable link between facial expression and feeling, or character. In *On Christian Doctrine*, St Augustine describes this kind of facial expression as a 'natural' sign, an involuntary and unaffected sign of personality or feeling (Robertson 1958, 34). Perhaps there is also an echo here of Pandarus' intense gaze at Criseyde in Book II, where he tells her she is his 'frend so feythfully':

> And with that word he gan right inwardly
> Byholden hire and loken on hire face,
> And seyde, 'On swich a mirour goode grace!'
>
> (II. 264–266)

Here, Pandarus may be admiring Criseyde's beauty, but there is also a benediction here, wishing good fortune on his friend, whose face is hereby associated with grace. Later in Book III, when Troilus and Criseyde are finally in bed together, Troilus ponders the mystery of such face-reading, when he says, 'Though ther be mercy written in youre cheere, /God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!' (III. 1356, 1357) (Trigg 2017, 35, 366). This is a lovely example of the way this poem deploys the conventional practices of love, while also carefully mystifying them and preserving their wonder.

But the unique stanza in the Rawlinson manuscript makes a stronger point about the way Criseyde's face will drive the action to come. The philosophical language of 'necessytee' prefigures Troilus's meditations on predestination and foreknowledge in Book IV, suggesting there must be a kind of inevitability to Criseyde's mercy, which itself might be sanctified by God's grace. At the same time, Pandarus' opening injunction is somewhat confusing. The stanza seems to being with a grammatical imperative: 'ye must … chaungen your face.' As the stanza unfolds, however, it becomes clear that this line is part of a different grammatical construction, in which Pandarus suggests that Criseyde might hypothetically be born with a different physiognomy. But eventually, his complex rhetoric is resolved; and it becomes clear that the effect is to affirm that he can see she is already well disposed to be merciful to Troilus because her face suggests that she will be kind, and because cruelty cannot persist long with such a benign face. In contradiction to the way the stanza seems to start, it ends by affirming that Criseyde cannot deliberately change the expression on her face.

This stanza, then, presents almost the opposite idea to Troilus's careful rehearsal of facial expression. The idea of Criseyde's physiognomic destiny—she appears too merciful to withhold grace for long—sits uncomfortably with the idea that expression or 'chere' can be imitated or counterfeited, or simply arranged,

as Troilus is preparing to do in the next room. These discourses are contradictory, though in the unevenly gendered world of mediaeval amorous practice, it should not surprise us if Criseyde's face on this occasion should be presented as consistently and steadfastly, unchangingly beautiful. It is the lover, after all, who is transformed by love, and who most often must adapt his face and his discourse, humbling himself to serve his beloved. These conventions make Criseyde's internal preparations even more remarkable.

Let us now turn to the case of a face that deliberately seeks to deceive. When Diomede first escorts Criseyde on her arrival in the Greek camp, he quickly realises from Troilus' pale face and silent demeanour and from Criseyde's own sadness that she is leaving a lover in Troy. As Windeatt points out (Windeatt 1984, 487, note to IV. 771ff.), Chaucer makes a significant change to his source in Boccaccio's text, to be quite explicit that Diomede plans his seduction of Criseyde *before* their second meeting, 'With al the sleghte and al that evere he kan', to bring Criseyde's heart into his net (V. 773, 775). Diomede visits her father's tent, and they converse for a while, 'as frendes don' (IV. 854), before he suggests she may find a better lover amongst the Greeks; and offers his service as a lover.

> And with that word he gan to waxen red,
> And in his speche a litel wight he quok,
> And caste asyde a litel wight his hed,
> And stynte a while; and afterward he wok,
> And sobreliche on hire he threw his lok
> And seyde, 'I am, al be it yow no joie,
> As gentil man as any wight in Troie'.

(V. 925–931)

The comparison between Diomede here and Troilus at the beginning of Book III is intriguing. Diomede performs very similar gestures and glances to Troilus, and each of them is shown to be planning their behaviour, to follow the display rules, as it were, of true feeling in love. The sense that Diomede is ticking these gestures (blushing, stammering, looking away, looking serious) off a scripted list is rhetorically conjured by the repetition of 'And' at the beginning of each line. In one sense, this is not all that dissimilar to Troilus enumerating the things he wants to say and do, or even Criseyde planning the two points she wants to make to Troilus, but with the significant difference that Diomede carries out his courtship with decisive instincts: there is no sign that he has laboured to *rehearse* any of these gestures beforehand.

I'm not suggesting there is any great ethical ambiguity here. Troilus acts from true feelings of love, and Diomede does not. Nevertheless, they both *perform*, whether deliberately, or haplessly, the same symptoms of lovesickness and speak its eloquent language as best they can. The idea of love as an emotional practice helps us see that in this competitive context, the question of intention or 'real' feeling is to some degree irrelevant. The structural situation, after all, is the same: the two men and their mindful bodies must perform these symptoms and speak this discourse, and Criseyde must assess their performance.

These emotional, performative, and ethical variations on the question of arranging face, gestures, and words in love may not always be consistent, but it is the fine differences and distinctions between them that open up a space for the discerning reader to discriminate and judge, at a basic level, how well they express desire; and at a second level, the extent to which it is reasonable to want to fashion one's appearance in love. The fact that we are able to distinguish so clearly between Troilus rehearsing, then failing to perform the appropriate words, gestures, and faces of love, on the one hand; and Diomede succeeding in an accomplished, perfect, but insincere performance on the other, is a powerful key to understanding the concept of emotions as a practice. The discourse of love can be learned and taught, but it can also be self-consciously exploited. Using the vocabulary developed by Scheer (2012), Downes and McNamara (2016) show how emotion is presented as 'a process' in the poem. Social and emotional practices are never completely stable or static, of course, and once they can become simulated or manipulated, they are already in the process of modification and historical change. As Downes and McNamara write, 'emotions themselves both modify and are modified by the behaviour of characters' (Downes and McNamara 2016, 16). The ease with which Diomede can produce the same symptoms over which Troilus labours so painfully is an implicit indication, amongst many others, of how Troy seems doomed to collapse, as the poem winds entropically to a close, and as Fortune 'Gan pulle awey the fetheres brighte of Troie/ Fro day to day, til they ben bare of joie' (V. 1546, 1547). The elaborate world of courtly sensibility, established and affirmed with such care for the greater part of five books, is quickly displaced, first by Diomede's more pragmatic approach to seduction, and then, even more emphatically, by Troilus's apotheosis. From his vantage point in the heavens, he looks down on 'this wrecched world' (V. 1817), laughs at the sorrow of those mourning his death, and damns 'al oure werk that foloweth so/ The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste' (V. 1823, 1824). All of Troilus' endeavours, whether amorous or military, have become worthless in the 'false worlds brotelnesse' (V. 1832). And so finally, the practice of love has become meaningless.

5 | Hoccleve's Rehearsal

By way of conclusion, let us look ahead briefly to the future of rhetorical practice in mediaeval literature. Criseyde, as we have seen, has 'avysed well' her cheere (II. 1726); and 'This shal be my cheere', says Troilus to himself (III. 54). In neither case is any kind of mirror mentioned, but it is hard not to think about Thomas Hoccleve examining his own facial expressions in the mirror in his *Compleinte*, looking to see what might be a normal appearance, or 'chere': 'To loke howe þat me of my chere þou3t,/ If any other were it than it ou3t' (Ellis 2001, lines 158, 159). Attempting to correct his appearance, to stop people looking at him oddly or avoiding him in the street, Hoccleve rehearses his public appearance in the privacy of his own chamber

> Many a saute made I to this mirrour,
> Thinking, 'If þat I looke in þis manere
> Amonge folke as I nowe do, noon errour
> Of suspecte look may in my face appere.
> This countinaunce, I am sure, and þis chere,
> If I it forthe vse, is nothing repreuable
> To hem þat han conceitis reasonable'.
>
> (Ellis 2001, *My Compleinte*, 162–168)

The comparison with Troilus is striking. Both rehearsals take place in a private chamber, under conditions of distress. Like Troilus, Hoccleve uses demonstrative expressions ('this countinaunce' and 'þis chere') to mark the moments that he arranges his face in different ways; and checks his appearance in the mirror. I've always presumed Hoccleve is imitating Chaucer's text here, borrowing the idea of rehearsing behaviour and facial expressions in private, and even using similar grammatical place holders to suggest spaces where readers might imagine or even themselves rehearse those expressions. It's almost, indeed, as if Hoccleve is performing being Troilus. The context is quite different, of course. Instead of the rarefied and fraught context of amorous and erotic performance, the context Hoccleve is anxious about is that of his peers: friends, colleagues and acquaintances who seem predominantly male.

In this scene, and at many other moments in his writing, Hoccleve seems strikingly 'modern' to many readers. His sense of alienation from others, his lonely life in the city, his inability to maintain the modest lifestyle he feels he should, all seem to resonate with modern urban subjects. And in this scene, as he practises the ways he will seek to persuade his sceptical friends that he has in fact recovered from mental illness, he seems particularly and self-consciously like a modern subject. Certainly, the instruction manuals of this period have a great deal to say about the mastery of facial expression in a courtly or service context, and facial control of this kind will be espoused by Castiglione and others in the sixteenth century. And yet, in what seems like an acknowledgement of Chaucer's Troilus, Hoccleve seems to be adopting a mode of rehearsal *before* his social encounters, a mode that resembles the nervous behaviour of a lover. As far as I am aware, Hoccleve scholars have not drawn this parallel between Hoccleve and Chaucer's Troilus (and Criseyde) rehearsing their words and gestures, perhaps because they are often focused on articulating the discursive modes, and the urban and professional contexts in which Hoccleve defines himself. Goldie, for example, is keen to distinguish Hoccleve's 'madness' from that found in romance narratives (Goldie 1999, 36); and summarises the 'texts and expectations—the legal, medical, and class-related discourses—about faces, bodies, and wildness in early fifteenth-century London' (Goldie 1999, 39, also citing Scanlon 1994, 300). Ethan Knapp similarly emphasises the 'mutual surveillance' of Hoccleve and his friends and associates in the professional space of urban London (Knapp 2001, 169). As Knapp writes, 'Here in front of the mirror, the mutual surveillance that Hoccleve had earlier experienced in the press is now transformed into an internal fragmentation, into bits of consciousness determined to spy on each other' (Knapp 2001, 169). For all his rehearsals, Hoccleve is barely able to convince himself he can perform

normality; and the self on show here seems provisional and exploratory. In contrast, Troilus's anxiety reinforces the strength of his identity as a lover.

It is often acknowledged that the intense emotional world of *fin'amor* offers a powerful model for the improvisation and performance of the self. When behaviour—words, gestures, facial expressions—come under such close scrutiny; and when the difference between performances is judged with equal intensity by actors, observers, and readers alike, the various textual practices of mediaeval love can offer an engaging reflection on literature's capacity to model different, and changing, ways of being in the world.

Chaucer's scenes of anticipation, preparation, and rehearsal draw attention to the highly fraught nature of erotic encounter as a social practice and as intimate performance. Troilus' preparations demonstrate his determination to express *all* the things he feels he must say ('This nyl I nought foryeten in no wise', as he says), while Criseyde equally carefully prepares to control her gestures and her own words, just as she prepares herself to receive those of Troilus. These forms of 'talk', to return to Ganim's emphasis on the provisional, conversational and above all, reflective presentations of spoken discourse in the *Canterbury Tales*, are more restrictive, formulaic and rule-bound than the more experimental and diverse forms found in that later work. Nevertheless, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer draws our attention in an original and powerful way to the manner in which his characters seek to anticipate the forms of conversation, making elaborate mnemonic, textual and gestural plans, not to deceive, but to best articulate their feelings. These rehearsals certainly work to develop the erotic and rhetorical tension of the scene and the way the lovers want to perform for each other. In their silent anticipation of the long-desired encounter, they are also surprising eloquent and expressive. The famous scene in Hoccleve's *Complaint* suggests that Chaucer's innovations here are profoundly suggestive for the dramatic exploration of the performative self in mediaeval literature.

Endnotes

[1] All quotations from Chaucer are taken from the Riverside edition (L. G. Benson 1987) unless otherwise specified.

References

Barney, S., ed. 2006. *Geoffrey Chaucer*, Troilus and Criseyde. New York: W. W. Norton and Co.

Benson, L. G., Gen. ed. 1987. *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd ed. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Benson, R. G. 1980. *Medieval Body Language: A Study of the Use of Gesture in Chaucer's Poetry*. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger.

Burger, G. D., and H. A. Crocker. 2019. "Introduction." In *Medieval Affect, Feeling, and Emotion*, edited by G. D. Burger and H. A. Crocker, 1–24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burrow, J. A. 2002. *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davidson, C. 2020. "Reading in Bed With *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Chaucer Review* 55, no. 2: 147–170. https://doi.org/10.5325/chaucerrev.55.2.0147.

Downes, S., and R. F. McNamara. 2016. "The History of Emotions and Middle English Literature." *Literature Compass* 13, no. 6: 444–456. https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12318.

Ellis, R., ed. 2001. *Thomas Hoccleve, "My Compleinte" and Other Poems*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

Flannery, M. C. 2016. "Personification and Embodied Emotional Practice in Middle English Literature." *Literature Compass* 13, no. 6: 3511–3561. https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12316.

Ganim, J. M. 1990. *Chaucerian Theatricality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Goldie, M. B. 1999. "Psychosomatic Illness and Identity in London, 1416–1421: Hoccleve's *Complaint* and *Dialogue With a Friend*." *Exemplaria* 11, no. 1: 23–52. https://doi.org/10.1179/104125799790496863.

Hermann, J. P. 1985. "Gesture and Seduction in *Troilus and Criseyde*." *SAC* 7, no. 1: 107–135. https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.1985.0004.

Knapp, E. 2001. *The Bureaucratic Muse: Thomas Hoccleve and the Literature of Late Medieval England*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

McInerney, M. B. 1998. "'Is This a Mannes Herte?': Unmanning Troilus Through Ovidian Allusion." In *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the 'Canterbury Tales' and 'Troilus and Criseyde'*, edited by P. G. Beidler, 221–235. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

MED. 2000. "Middle English Dictionary." In *Middle English Compendium*, edited by F. McSparran, et al., online ed. University of Michigan Library. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/.

Nims, M., Trans. 1967. *Poetria Nova*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies.

Nuttall, J. 2012. *Troilus and Criseyde: A Reader's Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Palmer, R. B., and Y. Plumley, eds. 2016. *Guillaume de Machaut: The Complete Poetry and Music, Volume 1: The Debate Series. TEAMS Middle English Text Series*. University of Rochester. https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/palmer-machaut-thedebateseries-bohemia.

Pernicone, V., ed. R. P. apRoberts, and A. B. Seldis, Trans. 1986. *Giovanni Boccaccio, Il Filostrato*. New York: Garland.

Robertson, D. W., Trans. 1958. *Saint Augustine, On Christian Doctrine*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Saunders, C. 2006. "Love and the Making of the Self: Troilus and Criseyde." In *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*, edited by C. Saunders, 134–155. Oxford: Blackwell.

Scanlon, L. 1994. *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scheer, M. 2012. "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion." *History and Theory* 51, no. 2: 193–220. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2012.00621.x.

Trigg, S. 2014. "Introduction: Emotional Histories: Beyond the Personalization of the Past and the Abstraction of Affect Theory." *Exemplaria* 26, no. 1: 3–15. https://doi.org/10.1179/1041257313Z.00000000043.

Trigg, S. 2017. "Chaucer's Silent Discourse." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39, no. 2017: 31–56. https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.2017.0048.

Trigg, S. 2019. "Weeping Like a Beaten Child: Figurative Language and the Emotions in Chaucer and Malory." In *Medieval Affect, Feeling, and Emotion*, edited by G. D. Burger and H. A. Crocker, 25–46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wimsatt, J. I. 1976. "Guillaume de Machaut and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Medium Aevum* 45, no. 3: 277–293. https://doi.org/10.2307/43628226.

Windeatt, B., ed. 1984. *Geoffrey Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde: A New Edition of 'The Book of Troilus'*. London: Longman.

Windeatt, B. 1992. *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.