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Introduction

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Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* concludes with an unusually terse exchange between the Black Knight and dreamer:

> "She ys ded!" "Nay!" "Yis, be my trouthe!"
> "Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!"[1]

The Knight's simple statement of loss contrasts starkly with his earlier elaborately rhetorical descriptions of his love for White. In them the Knight outlined the path to *fin'amor* as a carefully staged teleological movement from initially painful feelings of love, to lessons from his lady in how to structure that experience, and finally to the fulfillment he felt when White eventually showed him true *pite*. The awkward rawness of this last exchange between dreamer and Knight, however, pulls the poem up short. That the episode communicates a palpably intense, yet nearly inexpressible connection between Knight and dreamer is clear. But at the conclusion of this truncated exchange, when "al was doon, / For that tyme, the hert-huntyng" (1312–13), something remains unsaid between them. Unarticulated feelings are left hanging as "this kyng / Gan homwarde for to ryde" (1314–15) and the dreamer wakes up.

How, exactly, should we understand the significance of the emotional connection here – at once physical and spiritual, involving both mind and body? Contemporary affect theories offer one set of critical vocabularies and methodological frameworks with which to consider the pre-social, pre-linguistic intensities of feeling circulating between the Knight and dreamer, and to suggest how such feeling might provide forms of embodied cognition capable of linking individuals with the social in new ways. Historians of emotion offer an alternative model that focuses instead on the recovery of emotion as a social artifact capable of change and re-articulation across different social situations and historical periods. But neither approach, on its own, would appear to capture fully the play of affect, feeling, and emotion that Chaucer's poem presents here. For the

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something left unsaid foregrounded at the conclusion of the *Book of the Duchess* incites a kind of embodied cognition on the part of the dreamer and his audience that exceeds the methodologies and critical vocabularies developed by contemporary affect theorists and scholars of the history of emotions.[2] The Black Knight's self-identification as one overcome with loss clearly corresponds at crucial points to an account of elite masculinity scripted by medieval narratives of *fin'amor*. In other words, his identity as a courtly lover becomes legible according to what history of emotions scholars might see as scripted norms of feeling for a community-produced identity. Yet, when the Black Knight repeatedly shows himself unable to express his loss, he does more than conform to an "emotional script" that is expected for courtly lovers; he also shows the ways that affective intensity takes on a power of its own, one that exhausts the Knight's rational and somatic resources. We witness him overcome by feeling *tout court*, in a way that resonates with contemporary accounts of affective intensities felt on the body and before socialization. And when the dreamer takes up the Knight's tale, his account challenges distinctions of inside and outside that usually distinguish subject and object. We are left asking: Whose story is this, and whose feelings are involved?

This brief example from the *Book of the Duchess* underscores how premodern writings theorize affect and emotion in ways that show their inherent intersectionality. In thinking through this intersection of affect, feeling, and emotion more generally in late medieval literatures, the essays in this volume chart a relationship between ideas that have often been treated as separate, even adversarial. In doing so, they suggest that medieval writings offer a unique opportunity to reassess the importance of feelings – their physical and rational elements – because medievals did not think about affects or emotions in the same ways that we do. As medievalists acknowledge in different ways, the word "emotion" did not enter English until the early modern period. Equally, affect's Latin history gives the concept of *affectus* a distinctly rhetorical or religio-philosophical cast often at odds with the use of affect in contemporary theory. Historicizing premodern affect, feeling, and emotion, then, requires creating a certain degree of conceptual space between modern theories of affect and emotion where they might better do justice to the specificities of medieval representations of the cognitive and corporeal experiences that feelings involve. The essays in this volume thus foreground the necessary intersectionality of contemporary affect studies, histories of emotion, and medievalist historicization.[3]

In the remainder of this introduction we explore how an intersectional premodern affect/emotion studies seeks first, to historicize affect, and thus

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to speak to what Patricia Clough has called the "affective turn" in contemporary literary and cultural studies; and second, to challenge an assumption that the history of emotions should function as the privileged method of investigation for feeling before the modern period. This requires us to outline the most salient features of contemporary affect studies, as well as key differences between modern and medieval understandings. We then consider the benefits that the history of emotions offers to studies of premodern sources, as well as limitations or "gaps" that might be overlooked by this methodology. Most importantly, we ultimately outline a new, intersectional approach to what medievals called affects and what moderns call emotions, paying particular attention to how this alternative methodology is taken up in the essays of this volume.

Paying attention to the intersections of affect and emotion in the premodern period first requires us to confront several lacunae in modern affect theory: Can the body's unprocessed feelings be represented? How do affects create communities? What would it mean to admit that different affects have particular histories? For example, Fiona Somerset's recent argument – contending that Lollard writers "taught their audiences how to feel" – attests to affect's ability to traverse inside and outside, the spiritual and social, in ways that modern theorists have yet to recognize or contemplate.[4] If affect theory often seems closed off to historicist study, perhaps this is because it has too easily allowed itself to be confined to a consideration of modernity's shaping questions. In arguing for the recovery of specific premodern affects, this volume offers a "medieval turn" in affect studies in order to challenge this history of implicit "presentism" in affect theory.

As Michael Hardt has noted, the recent "affective turn" in the humanities and social sciences, self-consciously distinguishing itself from an earlier linguistic turn in much postmodern theory of the 1980s and 90s, has two precursors: "the focus on the body, which has been most extensively advanced in feminist theory, and the exploration of emotions, conducted predominantly in queer theory."[5] As Hardt and others have observed, crucial to this rethinking of the mind's power to think as parallel to the body's power to act is a non-Cartesian philosophical tradition inspired by the work of Baruch Spinoza and developed most innovatively in terms of affect by Gilles Deleuze. A related line of queer inquiry, pioneered in the work of Eve Sedgwick, arises out of psychoanalytic models of affects developed by Sigmund Freud and Silvan Tomkins.[6] As even this brief synopsis makes clear, the affective turn is really a complex assemblage of turns.[7] And affect theory is still unfolding, of course, with powerful

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articulations by Rosi Braidotti, Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Teresa Brennan, among others.[8] These thinkers, like those we discuss in more detail, challenge the intentionalist, ableist model of modern subjectivity, and yet, we would also note, in their calls to rethink the workings of politics, language, identity, and even proximity, they share with medieval writers a fundamental disinterest in privileging the self-cultivating individual as the prime mover in shared forms of life. Contemporary affect theory has much to offer medievalists, and we cannot do justice, we should say from the outset, to the dynamic, changing shape of this field. For our purposes, we would like to highlight *two* areas where the contemporary affective turn is generative for a new historicization of premodern affect.

Not surprisingly, one early (and continuing) critical question raised by affect studies has been exactly how (or if) affect can be clearly distinguished from emotion. Brian Massumi and Patricia Clough have articulated most strongly the need to clearly distinguish between affect and emotion. Massumi, for example, argues that emotion is "a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal," while affect is feeling or "intensity" disconnected from "meaningful sequencing, from narration."[9] Yet as Clough acknowledges, affect cannot simply be thought of as "presocial" and emotion as "social." Quoting Massumi, Clough stresses the *in-between-ness* of affect:

> There is a reflux back from conscious experience to affect, which is registered, however, as affect, such that "past action and contexts are conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed." Affect constitutes a nonlinear complexity out of which the narration of conscious states such as emotion are subtracted, but always with "a never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder."[10]

And many of the most influential critics and theorists of affect in contemporary literary and cultural studies have found it useful to resist too fixed a distinction between affect and emotion. Sianne Ngai, for example, argues that the difference between affect and emotion is:

> a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than a formal difference of quality or kind. My assumption is that affects are *less* formed and structured than emotions, but not lacking form or structure altogether; *less* "sociolinguistically fixed," but by no means code-free or meaningless; *less* "organized in response to our interpretations of situations," but by no means entirely devoid of organization or diagnostic powers . . . What the switch from formal to modal difference enables is an analysis of the *transitions* from one pole to the other: the passages whereby affects acquire the semantic

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> density and narrative complexity of emotions, and emotions conversely denature into affects.[11]

Ngai's suggestion that the difference between affect and emotion might be a modal difference of intensity or degree rather than a formal difference of quality or kind is particularly useful in underscoring the particular contributions that medieval literary contexts might provide for the study of medieval affect.[12] To return to the example from the *Book of the Duchess*, above, how do the dreamer's questions trace the transition from affect to emotion, and how do they produce new intensities that potentially overwhelm the dialogue between Knight and dreamer?

Contemporary affect studies have also challenged the primacy of the bounded human body as a model for theorizing affect, feeling, and emotion. Sara Ahmed, for example, has focused attention on the role that objects can play in providing affective connections between individuals and social groupings. "Affect," she notes, "is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects." As such, certain objects may accumulate positive affective value as they are passed around, become "sticky," in her words, and thereby circulate as social goods.[13] And Patricia Clough has argued that affect must be theorized not only in terms of the human body but "in relation to the technologies that are allowing us both to 'see' affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body's organic-physiological constraints . . . The affective turn, therefore, expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory."[14] These would seem important areas of overlap for both contemporary and medieval affect studies.

Despite these promising points of contact, the affective turn in literary and cultural studies has until recently been a largely presentist one, preoccupied with modernity and postmodernity, and thus standing outside the project of historicizing as most medievalists would understand it. Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, for example, despite its many strengths, limits what can be understood as constituting queer history by grouping together "a handful of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors under the rubric of backward modernism."[15] Yet the emphasis in contemporary affect theory on the material, embodied context for feeling suggests the usefulness of literary textual culture in excavating affect's past and providing alternative modes of historicization, or at least new ways of seeing embodied forms of agency that bring the individual and the social into contact in innovative and

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mobile ways. To return to our example of the *Book of the Duchess*, White as a character in the Knight's *fin'amor* narratives can take him outside history into a modality of feeling where love's service is perceived as endlessly repeatable and applicable to lovers of any age or situation. Or, it can take him back into history felt in its harshly material specificities – White as dead and gone, and the significance of this experience limited to the poem's status as an occasional poem addressed to John of Gaunt in memory of his dead wife. Seeing the Knight's history in this way, though, requires two other elements that are largely absent from modern affect theory: it requires us to consider bodily intensity as the effect of a creative (not simply diagnostic) process, and it urges us to regard non-intentional experiences as sites where social inscriptions (including what we think of as emotions) take hold. The play of affect, feeling, and emotion that is constituted by the dialogue framing the Black Knight's monologues, and kept open by the poem's unresolved ending, keeps Chaucer's narrative productively in between "history" (a narrow pinning down of who means what) and abstraction (reinforcing some "timeless" truth about love). In the process audiences may come to understand just how a lover is constituted as an identity by *fin'amor* service and with that the continued use value of *fin'amor* and the aristocratic definitions of nobility it undergirds. We thus become aware of the "Englishness" of this dialogue, as well as a certain useful, revivifying (and potentially disturbing) uncertainty about just what that signifies: Is *fin'amor* here shown to be irremediably "foreign," "dead," untranslatable? As our reading of the *Book of the Duchess* hopefully demonstrates, affect and emotion are contemporaneous, since the Black Knight experiences an irruption of bodily intensity even as he endeavors to organize his account according to the recognizable contours of *fin'amor*.

Those recognizable contours, we would like to emphasize, should be credited to those adapting a "history of emotions" approach to medieval texts and societies. The appeal of this methodology, as several authors in this collection attest, lies in its ability to study the social conventions that make feelings historically legible. Medieval studies of emotion began with legal historians such as Stephen D. White, Paul Hyams, and Daniel Lord Smail, who in the 1980s and 90s took on such topics as affect and honor, anger and lordship, rancor and hatred in legal discourse.[16] But arguably it is the paradigmatic work of Barbara H. Rosenwein that has had the strongest and widest influence inside and outside medieval studies.[17] In her important 2006 book, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, Rosenwein draws on the work of

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early modern historian William Reddy and his articulation of a theory of emotives, that is, "first-person, present tense emotion claims" that, like performatives, have the potential to do things to the world.[18] Reddy uses the concept of an emotive to analyze how groups can be bound together to form emotional "regimes" tied to state formation and hegemony (or its opposite). Rosenwein argues instead for the value of studying looser, more varied groupings in the Middle Ages, which she terms "emotional communities."[19] By resisting the "grand narrative" that characterized medieval feelings as primitive, even childish, Rosenwein's work has invited medievalists to investigate the historical specificity of emotions as deliberate cultural constructions.[20]

Scholars studying medieval emotions as historical productions are attentive to issues of representation, circulation, and dissemination. For instance, in her 2009 essay, "Feeling," Sarah McNamer calls for "a more imaginative, large-scale experiment with the literal: with conceiving of a wide array of Middle English texts as literal scripts that vigorously enlist *literariness* as a means of generating feelings and putting them into play in history."[21] And in her 2010 book, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, McNamer examines a series of literary texts promoting affective meditation on the Passion. Arguing that such texts function quite literally as intimate "scripts for the performance of feeling" and "often explicitly aspire to performative efficacy," McNamer claims that the study of them "contributes to a body of empirical work that is building a case for a performative model of affect as the default mode for this period."[22] As with Rosenwein's work, McNamer's discussion of compassion as an emotion "invented" by medieval culture takes up its long history, spanning the period from 1050 to 1550. McNamer also explores the particular usefulness of this emotion in developing "emotional communities" of women (as well as the particularly gendered performative reading practices its intimate scripts made possible). As the essays in this volume affirm, there is much to recommend this approach; it has added significantly, and continues to add, to our understanding of the importance of medieval emotional practices. Perhaps most fundamentally, recognizing that emotions have histories allows us to begin to understand how emotions are not biological, coming from inside, as early modern theories of the passions or some modern biological theories might suggest, but historically contingent, arising out of a set of particular cultural and linguistic practices. As these essays suggest, we should not assume that medieval emotions, even if they share the same names as modern emotions, are describing the same experience or having the same effects in the world.[23]

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Historicizing medieval emotions can also help us understand how performing emotion can produce embodied forms of agency that link the individual and the social in ways that function alongside, but also in excess of, institutional and state formations. They can show us where affects happen, and how affects might arise from certain emotional scripts, or within particular emotional experiences. Rosenwein's concept of an "emotional community," to that end, allows for a nuanced understanding of the kinds of shared practices that define and enable gendered identity *in-between* feeling and intellectual assent. Also, as McNamer argues, the performative nature of how emotion is established, felt, and put into action allows us to approach medieval emotion outside the modern authentic/inauthentic binary. If affective attachments are constructed, then such associations must be performed for them to become culturally intelligible. Historians of emotion who study the Middle Ages, we suggest, are already attuned to the intersection of emotion with other states of feeling, namely affect.

Indeed, the intersection of emotion and affect, we believe, has long been present in medievalist scholarship. Almost from the beginning, work on medieval "affective piety" has stressed a complex interplay of affect, feeling, and emotion. In Southern's fascination with Anselm's articulation of a Christianity of love and gentleness rather than one of revenge and authority, there resides an acknowledgment of the ways in which bodily intensities get taken up by and taken into what Rosenwein would later call "emotional communities."[24] Similarly, swooning at the sight of a beloved – either in religious or erotic devotion – is a crucial part of identity cultivation for distinctly different groups in the Middle Ages. Being overcome, in other words, can become part of what McNamer later calls an "intimate script" for the performance of emotion. Caroline Walker Bynum's work on holy women, like that of other feminist scholars of religion, bases the cultivation of an emotional experience of piety on somatic experiences traditionally associated with the feminine, ones that often, if not frequently, take on an independent intensity that overruns, or re-scripts, conventional religious experience.[25] By engaging the scholarly tradition on "affective piety," we hope to emphasize the centrality of medieval writings to what we are arguing is the interdependence of affect, feeling, and emotion.

We do so mainly to acknowledge the complexity of medieval thinking about different forms of feeling. For medieval philosophers, the affects were movements of the intellectual soul, which formed part of the governing apparatus of medieval moral psychology. Affects, like motions of the

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sensitive soul (akin to the emotions), could be shaped by a program of moral training captured by the *habitus*.[26] As work by medievalists including Bruce Holsinger and Katharine Breen has established, *habitus* is a concept widely used in contemporary theory to indicate the background cultural conditions that structure subjectivity, but it is a concept that is deeply indebted to medieval thinkers.[27] Despite her more contemporary usage, Monique Scheer challenges us as medievalists to consider the importance of habituation and social context in understanding emotional practices in history.[28] If emotion does not already exist "inside" the individual, but is formed through individual embodied action within a *habitus*, or set of cultural, social, and linguistic practices already naturalized within the context of the individual emotional actant, then it is the repeated performance of emotion by individual actants that makes the emotion "real" and establishes the "authenticity" of the emotional experience. Unlike modern conceptions, which regard the *habitus* with a degree of suspicion, essays in this volume explore how medieval understandings of the *habitus* link affect and emotion in the production of socially legible, sometimes creative, subjectivities. These essays largely do so in secular contexts, suggesting, unlike scholars of affective piety, that the production of a *habitus* in which affect and emotion intersect is foundational to understanding all domains of medieval subjectivity.

Historicizing feeling gives us new insight into both the supposedly pro forma nature of much didactic literature and orthodox practice and the staged performance of so much other medieval emotion (for example, the anger followed by mercy shown by medieval rulers). But the essays in this collection also suggest that something has been left out in this approach to medieval affect, feeling, and emotion. "History" in such "history of emotion" models is framed largely in diachronic terms that privilege a sequenced account of the external, socially recognizable forms of feeling. Even McNamer's work results in a longitudinal history of one socialized form of medieval emotion. There is also a tendency in such studies to treat literary texts simply as archival data equivalent to the material used by historians of emotion. How feelings are put into play in history remains primarily concerned with the recoverable, objective social forms of feeling as they are expressed textually over time. The particular material contexts for individual performances of emotion, as well as the various literary representations of the play of affect, feeling, and emotion, are at stake across the different chapters in this collection.

An attention to the intersection of affect's "bodily feelings" with the "conscious states" of emotion allows authors in the present anthology to

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treat feelings with more feeling.[29] This is not a gesture of "lumping together," but rather represents a fine parsing of how affect works in tandem with, and sometimes in excess of, socially recognizable emotions. Specific moments in the *Book of the Duchess*, when the Black Knight swoons, or when he ends his tale as a response to overwhelming loss, are outbreaks of intense feeling that cannot adequately be rendered using the expressivist, intentionalist idiom of emotion. It is not that medievalists are unaware of these irruptions. Medieval melancholia has merited careful and detailed study, and inexpressibility is marked by its own *topos* in formal analysis of medieval writings. And as Corinne Saunders has persuasively demonstrated, mind, body, and affect are understood as inextricably linked in medieval medical theory, psychology, philosophy, and theology, in ways that often parallel current theories of embodiment advanced by modern philosophers and cognitive neuroscientists. Saunders has also argued that the nexus of mind, body, and affect is "crucial too for secular writing, and to any analysis of reading imaginative fiction," examining in particular how "across Chaucer's romance writings, mind, body, and affect are inscribed in complex ways that link thinking, feeling, imagining, and remembering: the acts intrinsic to the process of reading."[30] As recent work by Michelle Karnes and D. Vance Smith attests, tracing the presence of cognitive sophistication in what was long characterized as a bodily, feminized, and non-clerical practice of religious intensity has been a major concern in this area of medieval studies.[31]

This is because, to return to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, medieval writings include what we would think of as affects *and* emotions. When the dreamer stumbles upon him, he finds the Knight only able to complain to himself. And while his malady has clear and strong physical effects, it remains largely unprocessed before he enters into dialogue with the dreamer. His recitation, "Withoute noote, withoute song" (472), does not bear the marks of emotion, which organize the intensity of feeling into recognizable, communicable iterations of experience. The Knight's identity is consolidated by such amorphous feeling, however, since other elite lovers are similarly undone.[32] We might say that falling apart in response to desire operates as an "intimate script" that works to make the intensity of a certain kind of bodily experience culturally legible. It does not achieve the status of emotion in this case, however, as the dreamer's response to the Knight's condition subsequently makes clear.

Through his expressions of concern, the dreamer in Chaucer's poem recognizes that the Knight cannot stay in this condition; when he offers to

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