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**Anthony Bale**

*Afterword: three letters*

‘Feeling can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations, dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with.’ Sara Ahmed, ‘Happy objects.’

The essays gathered in this volume reveal a rich and nuanced world of personal and interpersonal ‘feeling’ in medieval sources. The cultural history of emotions as it is practised here is not merely an exercise in spotting emotions in the past – joy here, heartbreak there – but rather a site for sophisticated discursive reflections on representation and subjectivity. In particular, we are now in a position to reject a history of emotions that strives for continuity (grand narratives of ‘affective piety’ or ‘medieval fear’ for instance) and instead examine differences in feeling across time, space, gender, and class. The essays here excavate the many expressive and interpretative possibilities of thinking with emotion and affect; the expressive multi-dimensionality of medieval subjectivity must now be acknowledged as we see that medieval emotional communities were many and their emotional scripts diverse.

A cultural history of emotions is not simply the province of the social psychologist or the neuroscientist. The fact remains, as the essays gathered in this volume show, that when we talk about feelings in the past, we are usually talking about mediated feelings. Emotions come to reside in words, affects are exhibited in gestures and physical activities, and medieval texts are revealed to be a rich source for the ways in which both emotion and affect were communicated and transmitted.

When we turn to affect as a critical category it is all too easy to look for something

that connects us with the the people in our sources: emotions clearly have a history, and affects are clearly linked to emotions, but does one of the contentions of this volume – that there are are specific contextual valences of late medieval English affective culture – get us any closer to understanding what *feeling* is? If we try to move beyond the over-personalisation of historical figures and their disclosed emotions, are we not in danger of asserting our presentist concerns onto our sources? And yet if we explore each source as its own disclosure of a moment of feeling, are we not in danger of one of the perils of micro-histories: that of producing ever more microscopic analyses that reduce human feeling to unconnected moments of mediated experience?

In this afterword, I will reflect on some of the themes and issues that have been covered by the essays in this volume, doing so through three medieval English letters. As Brantley Bryant's essay on manorial documents demonstrates, 'non-literary' texts and documentary forms can be valuable sites for the recovery of affective transactions. Letters, whether historical or fictional, with their assumptions of intersubjective communication, are a productive place to look at how emotional situations are rendered into written documents in specific circumstances and can help us explore the intersection of affect, emotion, and feeling.

### **Margaret Paston on grief.**

One Christmas Eve, probably in 1459, the Norfolk gentry-woman Margaret Paston had a letter written to her husband John Paston I. The letter was started by one scribe and completed by another, so it is best thought of as a collaborative text. It is part of the extensive collection of letters sent between the Paston family and their associates during the fifteenth century.

Margaret's letter begins with a discussion of grief and its effects, in the wake of the death of her relative Sir John Fastolf (1380-1459). In effect, the letter documents the social regulation of feeling in the context of mourning. The letter begins:

Ryght wvrschipful husband, I recomaund me on-to yov. Plese it yov to wete that I sent yovr eldest svnne to my Lady Morlee to haue knolage qwat sportys were husyd in here hows in Kyrstemesse next folloyng afryr the deceysse of my lord here husband. And sche seyde that þere were non dysgysnyngys nere harping nere lvtynge nere syngyn, nere non lowed dysportys, but pleyng at the tabyllys and schesse and cardys, sweche dysportys sche gave here folkys leve to play, and non odyr.<sup>1</sup>

[Right worshipful husband, I recommend myself to you. It will please you to know that I sent your oldest son to my Lady Morley to know what sports took place in her house at Christmas, immediately following the death of my lord, her paterfamilias [i.e. Fastolf]. And she said that there were neither disguisings nor harping nor luting nor singing, nor any loud recreations, just playing at the tables and chess and cards, such recreations as she gave her people permission to play, and no others.]

The letter appears on first sight to be a gossipy titbit, eschewing elaborate formal rhetoric and getting to the point in order to report that Margaret Paston had sent her son to see how Lady Morley had been 'celebrating' Christmas. To gauge this, Paston checked on the 'sportys' in Lady Morley's household: disguisings (masques or

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<sup>1</sup> 'To John Paston I', *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 257.

playlets), harping, luting, singing, and other ‘lowed dysportys’ were clearly considered inappropriate whereas quiet games of cards and chess were permitted.

Margaret Paston’s letter is poised somewhere between the documentary (it is a letter about everyday things, and is part of the Pastons’ bureaucratic interactions as a family) and the literary (insofar as it is a rhetorically-constructed version of events). But such letters offer us a moment of emotional response in a textual frame, and they provide one way of approaching the issue of emotional authenticity in the distant past. Rather than offering a description of how somebody felt, the letter portrays the social comprehension of feeling, that which is now frequently called an ‘emotional practice’ by historians of emotions.<sup>2</sup> ‘Emotional practices’ are always conditioned by their social context, and are thus historically located; at the same time, ‘emotional practices’ can only be retrieved through discourse, language, or enactment, and so letters, texts, poems, images, games, and all sorts of cultural media become highly valuable in gauging the construction of feeling. Margaret Paston, her son, her scribes, and Lady Morley were all real people with real feelings; but Paston’s letter shows the conjunction of grief with a practical engagement with the world, in effect showing the culturally-constructed and textually-recorded movement from grief (the feeling) to mourning (the ‘emotional practice’ of grieving). At the same time, we should be mindful of the letter’s status as a bearer of emotions, able to effect an affective communication, in which one person was able to consider the feelings of another: here, ‘feelings’ are not in the mind, but first in the physical activities of Lady Morley’s household and then in the words on Margaret Paston’s scribes’ page.

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<sup>2</sup> See Monique Scheer, ‘Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion’, *History and Theory* 51 (2012), 193-220.

Margaret Paston's letter discloses several levels of the regulation and surveillance of the performance of feeling: not only via Margaret Paston and the two scribes who wrote her letter, and her son who visited Lady Morley, but by Lady Morley herself, who 'gave her folkys leve' to play certain games but not others. This letter narrates a premodern community of people concerned with reading each other's emotional states, judging emotional inclination by social performance, and generating something akin to what Holly Crocker identifies in Hoccleve's writings as a 'regimented system [of] well-governed feeling.' An emotional regime is at work here, in which Lady Morley demonstrates to, and requires from, her household a kind of judicious sobriety which indicates a 'proper' emotion and the need to perform that as, or in place of, emotion (such as grief, immoderate lamentation, depression, or other 'emotions' of loss). Barbara Rosenwein has commented in an extended exploration of the Pastons' emotions that '[the] *lack* of emotions is also part of emotions history'; Rosenwein shows, in her survey of the Pastons' letters, that they valued 'equanimity over passion.'<sup>3</sup> But the members of Lady Morley's household are not inert: they are affected by Fastolf's death, but in a regulated way. One of the key insights of this volume is that affect is not anti-autonomous but can rather be read as part of the construction of a self-authorising performance. As Christine Neufeld productively describes, what looks at first like a denial of or detachment from performed feeling via "quiet" recreations could be a potent way of building a form of self-assertion, an "affective labor" as Neufeld describes it – in which a diligent and practical emotional regimen was managed, performed, and received.

We gain from Margaret Paston's letter little sense of what we might today call 'sadness', 'grief', 'angst', or personal loss. Rather, it seems that Margaret Paston

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feelings: A History of Emotions, 600-1700*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 215-21.

wanted to see how Lady Morley was managing emotion and perhaps to model her own behaviour on hers. In this sense, the letter is profoundly about the management of *emotions* – feelings that are displayed, mediated, or performed – rather than *affects* in the sense of pre-personal states in which an unformed but powerful drive achieves an embodied *and* mental state. The letter tells us how Lady Morley’s household is *emoting* rather than how its members were feeling, affectively; yet the performance of ‘appropriate’ sports might be seen as an affective response to grief, just as tears or wailing might have been in other contexts. As Glenn Burger helpfully notes, affect is generally held to cross boundaries of the individual and the social, the oral and the textual, and the textual and the intimate; the ‘scene’ of the gentry household performing its grief challenges us to consider where affect – the impulse to mourn – actually is. Conversely, emotion might be seen to be engendered in very specific and localised emotional communities and, in this case, the sense of emotion we gain from the letter is profoundly influenced by the specific class-based – and *arriviste* – concerns of the newly-wealthy Paston family.

Margaret Paston’s letter offers a glimpse of an emotional community: connecting ideas and feelings with physical activities, the *expression* of an emotion (grief at the death of Fastolf) itself becomes a kind of dramatic *tableau* or playlet, for the enquiring eyes of Margaret Paston’s son, in a way that echoes Emma Lipton’s discussion of a ‘community of neighbours acting as virtuous witnesses’. We will never know how Lady Morley really felt about her late husband, or how her household felt about being asked to perform their grief during the Christmas holiday, but we do know that they entered into a social vocabulary of appropriate responses to grief. The letter shows that the ‘collective knowledge of character and reputation’ described by Lipton in the dramatic performances at York could also be policed in

‘intimate’ letters between kinsmen. So this letter demands of its readers a kind of witnessing of what, in Morley’s household, appears to have been a well-managed collective experience, not unlike a dramatic production (and, perhaps, an extension of the public staging of formalised grief at the funeral). The household then became a ‘stage’ for the performance of well-managed sobriety, in which Lady Morley’s proper control over its members was displayed through their collective version of appropriate emotional response.

Lipton’s essay in this volume is a particularly useful intervention in emotional history and affect studies inasmuch as Lipton urges us to expand our sense of how ‘individual perception and the collective experience of emotion’ were mediated. If, as Lipton suggests we should, we properly understand medieval records of emotional performance as indebted to notions of witnessing, and attendant concerns of false speech and faulty performance, then we can begin to understand why the Pastons might have been so interested in checking on, and documenting, the social forms that Lady Morley’s feelings took. Building on Lipton’s argument, we might suggest that the Paston letter functions as a witness ‘to shape an ethics of affect’ which is at once individual (to Lady Morley), social (to the gentry community of East Anglia at this specific moment), and civic or general.

What is the role of the letter – a communally written text – from Paston to her husband in remediating an emotional scene? Is this letter best considered a record of shared emotion or of leisure practices? A written source like this then is perhaps not especially useful in telling us how people felt, but it does tell us how people wished to appear to be feeling. As Stephanie Trigg observes, medieval sources are not uncomplicated mirrors of how people ‘really felt’ – but, Trigg continues, ‘the use and history of particular motifs and expressions in literary texts can be an important

source for the mutable, but above all, *social* history of emotions and emotional expression.’ The meaning of emotions and affective states in premodern texts should never be taken to be self-evident; Margaret Paston’s letter does not show emotion as residing in Lady Morley’s mind but in the viewed bodies of the members of her household, yet this is clearly not an ‘affective’ state in the sense of it being pre-linguistic or unconscious. It is clear from the letter that ‘grief’ or ‘mourning’ was attended by *enforced* social rituals, what Trigg describes as ‘established social norms and expectations’; a game of cards may seem to us no more or less respectful than the performance by a lute-player, but it clearly was. In other words, to convey the correct emotional state, emotions had to be *seen to be performed* in a socially-governed way, with Lady Morley and Margaret Paston here both complicit in such emotional management.

### **Pandarus on love.**

In book two of Chaucer’s *Troilus & Criseyde*, as the eponymous love-affair builds towards its climax, Pandarus, Troilus’ mentor and confidant, offers his advice on how to write an effective – and affective – love-letter. This famous scene is valuable in showing the use and abuse of emotional stylistics, as it appears to disclose a well-developed medieval theory of emotional manipulation. The three stanzas of Pandarus’ advice are worth quoting in full, as they develop his theory of touching composition:

“Towchyng thi letter, thou art wys ynough.

I woot thow nylyt it dygneliche endite,

As make it with thise argumentes tough;

Ne scryvenyssh or craftily thow it write;

Biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite;  
And if thow write a goodly word al softe,  
Though it be good, reherce it nought to ofte.

“For though the beste harpour upon lyve  
Wolde on the beste sowned joly harpe  
That evere was, with alle his fynghes five  
Touche ay o stryng, or ay o werbul harpe,  
Were his nayles pointed nevere so sharpe,  
It sholde maken every wight to dulle,  
To here his glee, and of his strokes fulle.

“Ne jompre ek no discordant thyng yfeere  
As thus, to usen termes of phisik  
In loves termes; hold of this matere  
The forme always, and do that it be lik;  
For if a peyntour wolde peynte a pyk  
With asses feet, and hedde it as an ape,  
It cordeth naught, so were it but a jape.<sup>5</sup>

Pandarus' advice opens with an emphasis on what to avoid rather than what to include, as if emotional content can be too easily misconstrued or malformed.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> *Troilus & Criseyde* II.1023-1043, from *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> The classic account of Chaucerian letter-writing and rhetorical formulae is Norman Davis, 'The Litera Troili and English Letters', *Review of English Studies* 16 (1965), 233-244.

letter must not be written ‘dygneliche’ (pretentiously, proudly), it must not make ‘tough’, arrogant or obstinate, arguments, it must not be too writerly, formal (‘scryvenyssh’), or artful (‘craftyly’). For Pandarus, the letter and its effects are thus constructed around a set of things that the letter *is not*, things that must not be said. Troilus’ feeling of love-longing is taken for granted as the affective ground upon which the letter is written.

The first thing that Pandarus recommends for inclusion are not words, but tears with which to blot the letter a little: ‘biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite’, a contrivance designed to show the affective state of the *author*. Troilus’ tears, a paratextual device, seem designed to show the physical ‘authenticity’ of Troilus’ emotions through appealing to physical (prelinguistic) signs of emotion, even as these tears are artfully arranged. Ironically, the tear - sometimes a sign of humiliation, loss, pain, and one associated with women, but more often the sign of sincere compunction - becomes the mark of affective authorship. Pandarus then goes on to give a manifesto against expressive repetition and discord. Strikingly – and similar to Lady Morley in Margaret Paston’s letter – he does this in terms of music, as well as medicine and painting, rather than through verbal proficiency or emotional candour. Troilus must be neither like a harper playing on one string nor like someone who mixes lexicons of ‘phisik’ (medicine) and love. There must be no ‘jompre’ (haphazard arrangement, jumble) or unsettling hybridity. Ironically, as he is giving this advice Pandarus’ own language becomes more expressive and poetic, moving excitedly into flowing sentences and subordinate clauses, punctuated with discordant rhymes (‘harpe’/‘sharpe’, ‘lik’/‘pyk’, ‘ape’/‘jape’) and ridiculous imagery which further provide Troilus with a negative example of correct emotive composition.

Throughout, Pandarus draws attention to the barely-concealed craft of writing a love letter. Troilus' tears aside, emotions, in this letter, are largely absent but the letter is, nonetheless, an 'intimate script', to use a term from the history of emotions to describe 'scripts for the performance of feeling'.<sup>7</sup> It is taken for granted that, if the letter is properly executed, then it will have the correct effect on Criseyde (who is also absent from the letter, only implicitly and unflatteringly compared to a harp to be played or a surface for painting). This is a kind of intimacy that is paradoxically non-intimate due to its mechanic, social production. Barry Windeatt has described how, for Pandarus, 'a letter is an essentially non-spontaneous, pre-considered statement, consciously designed to achieve maximum effect'<sup>8</sup>; the letter is not an emotional outburst but a series of socially-agreed gestures and synonyms, yet the letter has within it the affective power to move others.

What, then, is the emotional content of this imagined letter? The answer is in Troilus' reaction, where he reveals himself to be moved not by the letter as such but by the idea of writing the letter:

This conseil liked wel to Troilus,  
But, as a dredful lovere, he seyde this:  
“Allas, my deere brother Pandarus,  
I am ashamed for to write, ywys,  
Lest of myn innocence I seyde amys,  
Or that she nolde it for despit receyve;  
Than were I ded: ther myght it nothyng weyve.”

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Affective Compassion*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Windeatt, 'Love That Oughte Ben Secree in Chaucer's "Troilus"', *Chaucer Review* 14 (1979), 116-31.

Troilus' reaction is replete with emotions and affective drives: 'dred' (terror, anxiety), love, shame, 'despit' (spite, contempt), and his often-repeated suicidal propensities ('than were I ded'). Chaucer depicts the letter's force as residing in fear, worry, and ambitions of the letter-writer, the terror not of self-disclosure but of being misunderstood, the shame of being rejected rather than the embarrassment of articulating one's feelings.

This letter is, foremost, a plot-device in Chaucer's narrative poem. Indeed this letter, and subsequent missives, will go on to play a significant role in the development of the characters' love-affair. But here it is worth thinking about the letter as a vehicle of emotional deferral and intersubjective *misunderstanding*. Chaucer, through Pandarus, is discussing the way in which an 'emotional practice' – the love letter – can be constructed and mobilized; emotion does not need to reside within the love letter, but can be created through it (as is shown by Troilus' reaction) and the 'unpredictable energy' (to use Anke Bernau's helpful phrasing) that resides in affective utterances and cultural forms. Literary emotional utterances may, as Bernau suggests, initiate and stimulate poetic invention even as they might be shown as leading to a kind of emotional alienation and annihilation. Troilus' 'dred' is a quite different state from the courtly love apparently encoded in Pandarus' advice but it is nonetheless a vivid and violent emotional and affective reaction, albeit an unexpected one.

Both Margaret Paston's letter (a historical source) and Pandarus' (fictional) advice on constructing a love letter speak to one of the most dominant ideas in the recent history of emotions, that of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*.<sup>9</sup> *Habitus* – an

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<sup>9</sup> See in particular Sheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?', and Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 268-70.

unconscious, social disposition that informs and regulates everyday practices – emphasises the communal construction and guiding of emotion, in ways that resonates in these letters. Whilst these letters show individuals crafting an emotional ‘self’ in a way that may seem deeply at odds with *habitus*, we might say that in the letters of both Margaret Paston and Pandarus there is strong sense of acceptable and communally-held expressions of emotion – mourning and love – being inculcated and repeated. Both texts share a *social* sense of the construction and regulation of emotion: emotions are not translated from within, but performed outwardly. In a way that foreshadows the writings of anthropologists and psychologists like Claude Levi-Strauss and William James, might we go as far as to suggest that physical expression (or ‘affective reaction’) *is*, in fact, the emotion?<sup>10</sup> Feeling might be the *consequence*, not the *cause*, of the emotive letter, which holds within it a distinctively textual power to transmit affective reactions. Or, to use McNamer’s terminology of ‘intimate script’ and emotional performance, their performative iteration (the sober game, the blotted love-letter) as *emotives* makes the emotion they are scripting: as McNamer argues, “emotions can indeed be willed, faked, performance through the repetition of scripted words’ but ‘through such manifest fakery’, an emotion can come to be ‘true’.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Henry VIII on Anne Boleyn’s breasts**

In the summer of 1528 Henry VIII, king of England, composed a letter in his own hand, possibly seated at the beautiful writing-desk often said to have been made for

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<sup>10</sup> See Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, trans. Tribe, pp. 84-5, on theorists who have argued ‘that emotions were not something internal to the body; instead, physical expression was itself the emotion.’

<sup>11</sup> McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 13.

him.<sup>12</sup> The letter was composed for his then lover, Anne Boleyn, and dates from July 1528, when the king was still married to Catherine of Aragon and some five years before he would be married to Boleyn. It is amongst the letters between the couple now held by the Vatican in Rome, probably taken there by an agent of Rome, gathered as evidence against the king's later divorce of Boleyn. In the current context, this short letter offers a fascinating portrait of the king's expressive self, his emotional literacy, and the use of languages of emotion between the public and private realms. Moreover, it is useful in gauging the historical use of emotional language in the 'courtly' world of a Tudor king and his educated mistress. Henry wrote:

Myne awne sweth-hart, thes shall be to advertes yow off the grete elengnes  
[loneliness] that I fynde her syns your departyng, for, I ensure you,  
methynkyth the tyme lenger syns your departyng now last then I was wonte to  
do a hole fortnyght. I thynke your kyndnes and fervenes off love causyth it for  
other wyse I wolde not have thought it possyble that for so littyll a wyle it  
shulde have grevyd me but now that I am comyng toward yow methynkyth my  
painnys bene halfe relesyed, and allso I am right well comfortyd in so muche  
that my boke makyth substantially for my matter, in wrytyng wheroff I have  
spente above iiii [h]ours thys day, whyche causyd me now to wrytte the  
schortter letter to yow at thys tyme bycause of summe payne in my hed,  
wyshyng myselfe (specially an evenyng) in my swethart harmys whose pretty  
dukkys [breasts, dugs] I trust shortly to cusse [kiss]. Wryttyng with the hand  
of hym that was, is, and shal be yours by his will, H[enricus]. R[ex].<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Now London, Victoria and Albert Museum W.29:1 to 9-1932, on display in the British Galleries.

<sup>13</sup> Edited from the facsimile, in ed. Jasper Ridley, *The Love Letters of Henry VIII*, London, Cassell, 1988, p. 64 (which includes a modern English translation on p. 65).

Troilus-like, Henry's letter is a reflection very much of the writer's concerns, rather than those of the recipient. Henry opens with a declaration of, or complaint about, his 'elengnes', his loneliness, since Boleyn's departure; this feeling of loneliness is cleverly juxtaposed with his lover's 'kyndnes' – her constancy, her affections – and the fervency of their love. Fulcrum-like, the middle of the letter moves from a (past-tense) disclosure of Henry's emotional loneliness to a (future-tense) statement of their coming physical reunion; his 'painnys bene halfe relesyed', he is 'comforted', tracing an emotional trajectory from solitude to anticipation. As with Troilus' letter, the *writing* of the letter has an effect on the author, not the recipient, as Henry's use of emotives moves the letter into its markedly somatic final stage.<sup>14</sup> Henry describes his headache from writing his own book (*A Glasse of the Truthe*, a tract against the validity of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon), he imagines himself in his sweetheart's arms, he longs to kiss her 'dukkys' (her breasts), and he mentions that he is writing the letter with his own hand. Affect here is not disconnected from narration, but rather affect is the culmination, the result, of narration.

The letter is full of expressive strategies, in effect moving through feeling ('elengnes') via emotion and affect ('my painnys bene halfe relesyed') to physical sensation ('in my swethart harmys whose pretty dukkys I trust shortly to cusse'). We might well read it in the terms of 'affect management' proposed by Glenn Burger, in which a range of emotional and physical feelings (what Burger calls 'biological urges') are marshalled into something called – and calling attention to itself as – a 'love letter'. It is a fascinating and illuminating document, but how far can we say that

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<sup>14</sup> In this way, Henry's letter anticipates Barthes' description of the status of the writer of the love letter: 'I have nothing to tell you, save that it is to you that I tell this nothing'; and then, quoting Goethe, 'Why do I turn once again to writing? Beloved, you must not ask such a question, For the truth is, I have nothing to tell you, All the same, your dear hands will hold this note.' (*Lover's Discourse*, p. 157)

it discloses Henry VIII's intimate proto-modern 'self' rather than speaks to an older (*Troilus*-like) tradition of courtly rhetoric and intimate script? If affect is unconscious, physiological, and physical, as is generally suggested, how does it engage writerly and readerly emotion in this letter? That is to say, does emotional longing here trigger erotic reverie and embodied affective response, echoed in the physical labour of Henry's own handwriting, his headaches, and his somatic wishes to kiss Anne's breasts? As Sarah Salih comments, images, objects, and things – including letters – have a power 'to attract and perpetuate desire' through their 'sticky', affective communication; in this letter we see affairs of state comingling with a love-affair, a world of longing and action that refuses modern ideas of 'public' and 'personal' realms. Henry's affective utterances traverse such realms, and the moment of the writing of this letter – during a period of national, political turmoil – is imbricated with his 'intimate' wish to see Boleyn and her body. What governs the letter is its rhetorical appeal to generic formulae, and Henry's apparently unironic similarity to Chaucer's *Troilus*, moaning and groaning whilst composing courtly love-longing.

Letters like this pose productive problems in the interpretation of affective media from the past. 'Originality' and 'authenticity' are rarely appropriate words for understanding medieval texts, but such terms continue to suffuse our sense of what an emotional utterance should be. Both Pandarus' 'ideal' letter and Henry's actual letter veer towards cliché, and Lady Morley's household appears to be under a strict emotional regime, even as each source asserts that bodies – the Morley household's games, *Troilus*' tears, Henry's libido – can be controlled and stimulated by emotion. There seems to be little that is 'automatic' about *Troilus*' tears or Henry's erotic wooing: both are rhetorically framed, just as the mourners in Lady Morley's household were not *spontaneously* playing quiet card-games but had been directed to

do so. All three letters thus show how bodies can be ruled by formal emotions, rather than *vice versa*, bearing out Frederic Jameson's quotation, cited above by Holly Crocker, that 'any proposition about affect is also a proposition about the body, and a historical one at that'. Even in the distant past, culture must therefore, to some extent, be understood to be able to *act* on the body; in each case, the flow of emotion, from feeling to embodied gesture, is mediated through the written word. In terms of how we understand Henry VIII's intimate self, his letter shows that the rhetorical communication, replete with feeling, was both the *outcome* of emotion and the vehicle for engendering an emotional response.

### **Authorship, authenticity, and the writing of emotions.**

In the essays gathered in this volume we have encountered descriptions of a range of 'feelings' – anger, love, zealous vengeance, shame, humiliation, jealousy, alienation, terror – but we have also seen the capacity of texts to *move* their audiences – in sources as diverse as the creepy embodied inventions described by Sarah Salih, the 'flat affect' described by Christine Neufeld, or the systems of manorial management probed by Brantley Bryant.

Scholars of the past now see all kinds of media in which languages of feelings are expressed as important sources through which to construct a historically-sensitive account of emotional subjectivity. On the one hand, letters appear to offer a perfect source for the history of emotions, as sites designed for the disclosure and communication of feelings, often presenting themselves as an intimate exchange. On the other hand, all letters are formalised by language, framed by convention, and fraught with potential miscommunication between the feelings of the author and the recipient. One of the difficulties of working with affective media is, as DiMarco

suggests, the inherent instability of the contexts in which emotions are being evoked. Letters rely on norms of feeling, because they are concerned with communicating one person's state to another, yet they also foreground strong or aberrant emotions, as stylised records of notable feelings. The letter – and in particular the love letter – has been a foundational text in the western emotion landscape, as a place in which to assert and record moments of emotion. The letters by Margaret Paston and Henry VIII are called 'historical sources' whereas Pandarus' advice on letter-writing is a 'literary text', but all three participate in a shared enterprise of rendering an emotional state in a written communication through rhetorical and performative formulae; and all three are full of emotional management and rhetorical tricks which mediate not only emotion (performed feelings) but also affect (nonlinguistic and feeling expressions tied to feeling).

Letters are understood to be key moments of intertextual articulation and, as intersubjective disclosures of emotion, they have been much discussed in the critical theory of authorship. The letter is central to Roland Barthes' *S/Z* and *A Lover's Discourse*, to Jacques Lacan's *Seminar on the Purloined Letter*, in Helene Cixous' *Love Itself in the Letterbox* ('all my soul's caressed tactile extremities were caressing the incessant trembling of the paper'),<sup>15</sup> and others. For Barthes the love letter staged a 'special dialectic', being 'both blank (encoded) and expressive (charged with longing to signify desire)';<sup>16</sup> Barthes says that '[l]ike desire, the love letter waits for an answer; it implicitly enjoins the other to reply, for without a reply the other's image changes, becomes other.'<sup>17</sup> For Lacan, the letter could be a key site 'in

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<sup>15</sup> Helene Cixous, *Love Itself in the Letterbox*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, London, Polity, 2008, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1978, 157

<sup>17</sup> Barthes, *Lover's Discourse*, 158

which...subjects relay each other in their displacement during the intersubjective repetition';<sup>18</sup> that is, the letter, and its movement between people, came to be a kind of displacement of subjectivity and emotion, through the deferral of the audience and through the retransmission of the letter. In the three letters I have briefly introduced above, letters are valuable precisely because of their struggling to find a mode of intelligibility between subjects, in which emotions are rendered in a mutual comprehensible lexicon.

This mode of intelligibility helps us see how writings about emotion are often actually writings about something else: in Margaret Paston's case, about manners and decorum; in Troilus' case, about Pandarus' own voyeurism and manipulation, and the political situation between the Greeks and Trojans; and for Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, about diplomacy, religion, and the regulation of marriage. Yet letters are also important as records of *what they leave out*: for it seems that to write down a feeling or to record someone else's feelings was thought more significant than just expressing an emotion verbally. 'Intimacy' is itself a historically- and socially-bounded concept, and it might be that the most everyday emotional utterances – like 'I love you', 'I'm frustrated', 'I'm sad' – are rarely recorded, or thought worthy of being recorded, whereas those written down were done so with a sense of ceremony, longevity, or formal assertiveness.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, letters as emotional vehicles assert only the perspective of the author's emotional field, and have no guaranteed success in terms of the recipient. Both Troilus and Henry seem to be saying to Criseyde and Anne Boleyn respectively: 'acknowledge my emotions', or 'feel how I am feeling', because

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<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter', trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *Yale French Studies*, 48 (1972), 38-72, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> See further Orest Ranum, 'The Refuges of Intimacy', in Philippe Aries and Roger Chartier (eds.), *A History of Private Life III*, Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1989, 207-63, on letter-writing and 'significant' emotions in the early modern period.

to *send* a written account of one's emotions to someone else is fraught with the missive's finding of its right audience. As Barthes suggests, the love letter is a contingent form, one which is not only expressive but solicits an answer; and without an answer, the love letter is empty, unrealised, an iteration not of love but of longing.

As the essays gathered in this volume amply show, medieval textualities were a rich site for the interrogation of feeling. What becomes clear through this collection of essays is that it would be a mistake to think that medieval emotions are in some way predictable or unambiguous; the codified languages of gesture and iconography did not mean that feelings themselves were rendered in an un-modulated way. It is worth recalling that one of the distinctive pleasures of reading literature from the past is the ambiguity of 'emotional' states. Feelings remain encrypted in languages of convention whilst the terminology of emotion has changed over time. At the same time, we continue, as a twenty-first-century community of readers, to feel an affective connection with writing from the past, and allow ourselves to be seduced by the wayward, unpredictable capacity of sources to evoke an affective reaction across time: do we not feel a kind of awful thrill – at once voyeuristic, prurient, and macabre – on reading Henry VIII's words to his then paramour, whom he would execute just a few years later?

In the writing of the past we can discern how medieval people theorised their feelings, how they placed their reactions into emotional categories, and how they disclosed their desires and their subjectivities within frameworks of intelligent response and performance. Written sources are not only a valuable indicator of the social construction of emotion; in these sources we see that medieval affects often resided neither in bodies nor minds, but in words.