"WE WITEN NAT WHAT THING WE PREYEN HEERE": THE FAILURE OF THE NOBLE LIFE IN CHAUCER'S "KNIGHT'S TALE"

By

Alexander Harper

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APPROVAL

Name: Alexander Harper
Degree: M.A.
Title of Thesis: "We Witen Nat What Thing We Preyen Heere": The Failure of the Noble Life in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale"

Exaining Committee: Chair: Professor Chin Banerjee

Professor Mary-Ann Stouck
Senior Supervisor
Associate Professor of English
Simon Fraser University

Professor Harvey De Roo
Assistant Professor of English
Simon Fraser University

Professor Iain Higgins
External Examiner
Assistant Professor of English
University of British Columbia
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Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

"WE WITEN NAT WHAT THING WE PREYEN HEERE":

THE FAILURE OF THE NOBLE LIFE IN CHAUCER'S

"KNIGHT'S TALE"

Author:

(signature)

Mr. ALEXANDER HARPER

(name)

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(date)
ABSTRACT

In writing about the "Knight's Tale," critics customarily discuss the additions and deletions made by Chaucer to his major source, Boccaccio's The Book of Theseus. For the most part, however, these comparisons are sporadic in nature; they fail to present a complete rationale for Chaucer's changes in terms of the poem he creates. Yet Chaucer's changes are remarkably consistent. Considered in the context of the tale as a whole, they call into question the morality and even the practicality of a society predicated upon courtly and chivalric values. Chaucer's second source, Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, provides the frame of reference for showing that the affinities of the noble life, with its emphasis on violence and erotic love, lie with pagan rather than Christian values.

The four-part English poem can be effectively divided into three sections. Parts I and II show that man's irascible and concupiscible impulses are exacerbated by the same values of chivalry which, in the Italian version, help to restrain those impulses. Part III of the tale substitutes for Boccaccio's rendering of a glorious chivalric tournament an exploration and exposure of the contest's underlying values. As a noble solution to the problems posed by man's chaotic emotions, the tournament is doomed to failure. Chaucer shows that the noble life idolizes the forces it purports to subdue. The final part of Chaucer's tale focuses upon an expanded version of two speeches delivered by the duke near the end of the Italian version. In Boccaccio, the more important of these speeches convinces the mourners that they must put Arcites's death behind them and proceed to celebrate Palaemon and Emilia's marriage. Theseus's view is acceptable and convincing here since Arcites does not die questioning the codes that guided him through life, and he achieves peace in the afterlife. Chaucer's Arcite, on the other hand, questions the values that have led to his death, leaving Theseus with a
great deal to explain about the justice of the contest's outcome. But the duke's views are limited by his pagan beliefs which ultimately make him incapable of offering a satisfactory explanation for Arcite's death.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Both Boccaccio’s *The Book of Theseus* and Chaucer’s "Knight’s Tale" are explorations of the world of chivalry and courtly love. Boccaccio’s poem focusses on the chivalric and courtly codes’ power to restrain man’s impulsive/emotional nature. His Theseus and Arcites (and to a lesser extent Palaemon) use these codes to subdue the potentially destructive effect of their emotions and thereby solve the problems they encounter. Chaucer, on the other hand, illustrates the strength of the emotional and impulsive side of man and shows why the codes in the tale cannot cope with these impulses. The first two parts of his poem dealing with events up to the duke’s suggestion in the grove of a solution to the Thebans’ dispute anatomize the problems which stem from man’s irascible and concupiscible nature. The courtly and chivalric codes in his tale sanction rather than restrain the expression of these impulses. In a key sense, then, the attitudes of the English and Italian author to the way of life depicted are antithetical.

The opening one hundred and fifty lines of Chaucer’s poem illustrate the workings of the chivalric code separately from the courtly code. Theseus’s behaviour here indicates that he or any other knight in war may possess little in the way of a genuine moral code of behaviour. Chaucer’s assessment of the courtly code begins with the Thebans’ sight of Emelye and makes use of several strategies for discrediting courtly love: he satirizes courtly rituals, coarsens the cousins’ behaviour in comparison to Boccaccio’s poem and, through imagery, associates courtly love with the blood, violence and death that usually result from man’s irascible impulse. Finally, he changes the complex and generally admirable character of Emilia in Boccaccio’s

1. When referring to Boccaccio’s poem I will employ his version’s spelling of Arcites’s, Palaemon’s and Emilia’s names in order to clarify which poem’s characters I am discussing. Other critics sometimes use different spellings for both sets of characters’ names which I will not alter.
version into a shadowy figure whose only characteristic is her wish to remain chaste.

The association of courtly love with violence underlines the destructive interaction of the two central codes Chaucer’s characters live by. The love for Emilia that gives pleasure in the Italian version, and is harmoniously shared by the cousins while they remain in prison, destroys the cousins’ friendship in the English version. This friendship is based upon a chivalrous oath, and its collapse suggests that chivalric and courtly values are held to be mutually exclusive in Chaucer’s tale. The destructive interaction of these values is the most important reason why these codes cannot succeed in controlling man’s emotions.

The frequent allusions to, and mistaken application of, Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy by the Thebans in Chaucer’s version offer a moral commentary on the destructive effect of the courtly and chivalric codes they live by. Love and martial aggression are shown to blind the cousins by making them lose the capacity to reason clearly and to seek instead false felicity. Love also leads them into despair: all of these effects contradict the Boethian thinking the poem so frequently echoes. Boccaccio’s poem does not use Boethius and does not in any sense criticize the characters’ way of life.

Chaucer also reshapes the plausible way the plot unfolds in The Book of Theseus to show how the Thebans are manipulated by fortune. The events at the grove, with their emphasis on violence, unrestrained emotion and loss of reason particularly show how man loses free will and makes himself fortune’s captive through adherence to the courtly and chivalric codes. The enactment of courtly and chivalric rituals in Chaucer’s tale often becomes the means by which fortune manipulates these characters.

The difficulty in viewing the tale as a criticism of the chivalric way of life is that it is told by a knight—a man who makes his living and name through the commerce of war. Chaucer needs the knight to narrate because he is the only pilgrim present who
has the legitimacy to portray the world of chivalry and courtly love. It would be unreasonable, however, to expect the story he tells to be openly critical of the noble life. Criticism therefore usually emerges through what happens in the tale itself (Arcite's grim death, for example), rather than through any open condemnation by the narrator of the events he describes. The unlikelihood of having a knight tell an anti-chivalric story is also perhaps why Chaucer never allows him to develop a full-fledged personality. Although he will sometimes appear sarcastic or critical of these characters' behaviour and beliefs, he will just as often appear approving. Compare, for example, the narrator's patronizing comment on the behaviour of a lovelorn Arcite (1528-33) with his approving attitude towards the horrors he describes in the temples. These apparently "personal" opinions are not often expressed and their inconsistency suggests that they are not meant to be viewed as the expression of a full-fledged personality. Instead, the knight becomes the occasional mouthpiece for points that Chaucer finds it difficult to make except through direct commentary. It is because of his knightly status, therefore, rather than his personal identity that Chaucer has chosen the knight to narrate this tale.

I. CHIVALRY AND THE IRASCIBLE IMPULSE

One of the few areas of agreement in criticism of the "Knight's Tale" is that Chaucer's poem deals, in some fashion, with chivalry. But while some critics believe that the tale merely demonstrates chivalric values (e.g. Jordan 1967; 160), others argue that it reveals the tensions inherent in late medieval chivalry (e.g. Hanning 520). Although chivalry was one of the central preoccupations of medieval thought (Huizinga 197), there is no way, six hundred years later, to gain an exact sense of what was understood by this word at any one period in the middle ages. Medieval histories
explain that chivalric values centred around courage, courtesy, protection of women
and fair play in warfare. But as Maurice Keen comments:

...chivalry is a dangerous word. It can be used to describe the concept
of the soldier as an individual whose vocation in a Christian society was
to defend in arms the cause of faith and justice. The standards such a
vocation would set are obviously high ones, and, if observed, would
fully entitle the soldier's calling to the very high respect which it
certainly enjoyed in the middle ages. To be a soldier then was to be
noble....But as often chivalry is the word used to describe not the ideals
but the social rituals of the military nobility, their passion for blazonry,
tournaments, and courtly romance. (Keen 1965; 2-3)

Keen's comment suggests a duality present in the concept of chivalry which probably
bifurcated into other associative meanings in the late middle ages as chivalry's ideals
became increasingly tainted. Keen describes how

...in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries war had become a commercial
concern at the international level; the ransoming of prisoners and
villages, the sale of safe-conducts and strategically placed forts had
become a legitimate means of making a living. (1965; 245)

To hide the descent from the idealistic to the monetaristic, increasing emphasis was
placed on the symbolic idea of chivalry through ceremony and ritual: "...the aristocracy
had lost its belief in the intrinsic values of the chivalric ideal, only pageantry was made
more splendid to mask the disappearance of ethical values" (Fichte 336). The emphasis
on a pageantry whose very magnificence only serves to spotlight the lack of guiding
moral principles I believe accurately reflects the way much of the splendour is depicted
in Chaucer's tale. Chaucer mercilessly exposes the duality or even hypocrisy present in
this world in the "Knight's Tale." The code Chaucer's knights follow does not consist
of a set of moral principles such as a love of truth, courtesy, wisdom and courage but,
rather, a love of certain emotional characteristics expressed through fighting and courtly
passion. The two hundred knights come to fight in the duke's tournament because they
"lovede chivalrye" (2106). That is: they "lov[ede] paramours" (2112) and value the
"fight for a lady" (2115); all with the ultimate aim of having "a passant name" (2107).

Keen also suggests that diplomacy at the time in which the "Knight's Tale" was
written was beginning to take the place of force motivated, justified and shaped by a
belief in "fairly" practiced individual combat and war: "...councillors and diplomats,
from the late 1380's on, were becoming more interested in exploring means to peace
with France than funding allies to fight her,..." and, as a consequence, "...knights and
gentlemen were beginning to take a rather less rosy view of the glory of war and
chivalry" (Keen 1990; 5). The practical importance of the knight and what he signified
was thus beginning to decline, and this suggests that chivalry's value was becoming
decorative rather than intrinsic.

Central to Chaucer's presentation of chivalry are the actions of Theseus, the
relative merit of whose behaviour is hotly disputed. Theseus has often been seen as
someone who is "a wise and merciful ruler" (D.W. Robertson Jr. 262), as one who
"...stands consistently for the principle of order..." (Kean 6), and who "...represents
knighthood in its full maturity and complexity" (Halverson 614). It is sometimes felt,
however, that the nobility Theseus displays is only surface deep, that the duke's
behaviour is often actually cruel and highly unpredictable (Webb 289). Barbara
Bartholomew suggests Theseus's inconsistency stems "[from the mastery of Fortuna
over him....While he bows to Fortuna, he is stern, rash, hasty, and impulsive; he
delights in the glitter of false felicity..." (Bartholomew 80; see also Reidy 403). Since
fortune is shown to manipulate events in the tale the apparent complexity Theseus
reveals in his behaviour can be seen as no more than a reflection of the variety of
events fortune throws before him. More importantly, these events are presented by
Chaucer in a way that asks questions about the nature and value of chivalry itself. The
particular quality Theseus will display at any given moment will be dictated by what
Chaucer wishes to illustrate about the way of life his tale describes. Theseus is thus
more a reflection of the tale's structure and philosophy than a three-dimensional
psychological character (Burlin 101).
The opening one hundred and fifty lines of Chaucer’s poem constitute the only part of the tale in which Theseus is the centre of attention. The most significant aspect of Chaucer’s treatment of the duke is Theseus’s motivation for aiding the widows by going to war against Thebes. Theseus is so full of his success that he does not notice the grieving Theban widows until he has actually drawn level with the kneeling group (Thurston 72-78; KnT 896-98) and his initial response to them harps on his own needs and possessions (Aers 175; KnT 905-11). The description of Theseus’s final response to the widows’ plea for aid is also suspiciously ambiguous: Theseus

...swoor his ooth, as he was trewe knyght,
He wolde doon so ferforthly his myght
Upon the tirant Creon hem to wreke
That al the peple of Grece sholde speke
How Creon was of Theseus yserved
As he that hadde his deeth ful wel deserved. (959-64)

The emphasis here is on the idea of killing Creon to gain revenge—"How Creon was of Theseus yserved"—and the fame (963) that will fall upon the duke because of his efforts. These implied reasons are couched in chivalric terminology and gestures: Theseus swears on his honour as a knight to aid the widows in the way described. The overall effect of the passage is thus to link the external rituals of chivalry—the oath on the honour of Theseus’s knighthood—with less idealistic motivations. This pattern reflects the sense that by the later middle ages chivalry’s significance as a moral and societal force was purely in the outward show—a show that often hid a selfish motive.

In Boccaccio’s The Book of Theseus, in contrast, the duke’s response to the widows’ pleas is centred as much on compassion as on a desire for revenge. The duke tells the widows:

I wish that I could bring your kings back to life in their former state, just as I believe that I can make it possible to give the honor of burying them to whomever it will please to receive it. May the pride of him who denied what you wanted be humbled. If vengeance can supply comfort for evil received, however, let it be exacted by me. (II. 38)
His speech to the widows looks at the situation from the point of view of the widows, whereas the duke in Chaucer’s tale speaks purely in terms of what he will do and what he will gain through his actions (though the narrator modifies this: 951-58).

The suspect nature of the forces motivating Theseus in his war is further reflected in the description of the banner under which the duke rides:

The rede statue of Mars, with spere and targe,  
So shyneth in his white baner large  
That alle the feeldes glyteren up and doun. (975-77)

The banner is, of course, emblematic of the nature of the forces or reasons that make Theseus set forth with his army. This description implies that the motivating force behind Theseus’s decision to help the Theban widows is a desire to serve Mars, the god of war, rather than to see justice done. The emblematic language Chaucer employs to parallel Theseus and Mars here reveals a leader who is motivated by power and not by human concerns (Aers 175). Furthermore, the redness of Mars in this description—a redness that implies a bloody outcome—is a theme that runs throughout the tale and one which Chaucer has invented (Boitani 1977; 83-84). The importance Chaucer has placed upon this banner and its colour thus luridly combine to suggest the destructive working out of the Martian influence in Theseus’s doings.

The ominous imagery contained in this description is amplified and clarified through the accompanying pennon:

And by his baner born is his penoun  
Of gold ful riche, in which ther was ybete  
The Mynotaur, which that he wan in Crete. (978-80)

The Minotaur, a half-man, half-beast creature, perfectly sums up the idea of the bestial in man. Theseus killed this creature but now carries it as his emblem, thus suggesting that, when it comes to making war, he is an exponent of the very force he destroyed (Spearing 68). In The Book of Theseus there is no description of either Theseus’s banner or pennon. Chaucer has thus gone to some trouble to offer an emblematic
illustration of the nature of the forces motivating his duke and army. While Boccaccio attempts to show, through his words of comfort to the Theban widows, that Theseus undertakes his mission to Thebes to bring the forces of destruction under the civilizing yoke of certain moral rules, Chaucer has his duke go mainly in order to express those forces he is purportedly attempting to subdue.

In The Book of Theseus, the duke gives Creon the opportunity of avoiding a bloody battle at Thebes: "He sent to Creon...to say that he should permit care of the dead or prepare himself, without exchanging a word, for a cruel and bitter battle" (II 51). A few years later in 1408-09, Christine De Pisan detailed the right and wrong ways of making war in the late middle ages and explained that a prince may only seek restitution for the wrongs done to him after arbitration (13). However, the contemporary writings of Froissart indicated that ideal methods in any aspect of war were rarely followed. Chaucer's decision to cut this act of beneficence on Theseus's part is the first of several alterations in this portion of the tale which suggest he wished to depict chivalry in a more realistic light. In Boccaccio's version, once the battle against Thebes has been won, the duke gives the city of Thebes to the widows to do with as they wish (II. 76 & 77). The widows gather the corpses of their husbands, place them on pyres and then set fire to the city (II. 78-81). Theseus's decision is appropriate since it is the widows rather than the Athenians who have suffered wrong-doing at the hands of Creon. But in Chaucer's version the duke does not hand over the city to the widows, nor simply set fire to it. Instead, he literally pulls it to pieces: "And by assaut he wan the citee..., / And rente adoun bothe wall and sparre and rafter" (989-90). Since Theseus and his army have not been wronged, there is much less sense of justice being done here and far more a sense of the Martian desire for destruction.

The fact that Chaucer does away with the civilized fate of Creon's body in Boccaccio's version also makes the duke's efforts morally questionable. In Boccaccio's
version Theseus "...had the body of Creon brought from the field and paid him great
honour with the proper rites and had his ashes deposited in an urn and later placed in
the temple of Lyeus..." (II. 74). The duke’s behaviour shows that despite Creon’s
crimes and appalling treatment of the bodies of the dead knights, Theseus and his army
have not been brought down to Creon’s level of behaviour. The description of
Theseus’s treatment of the tyrant’s body makes the duke’s actions at Thebes serve
principally as a moral example rather than as an act of revenge. When Theseus: "...to
the ladyes...restored agayn / The bones of hir freendes that were slayn" (991-2), in
Chaucer’s version, the absence of any subsequent description concerning the fate of the
tyrant’s body means the duke’s behaviour at Thebes cannot stand in contrast to Creon’s.

Chaucer also manages to suggest that there is very little to choose between the
duke’s and Creon’s behaviour at Thebes by paralleling the central reason for Theseus’s
attack upon Thebes—mistreatment of the dead—with Theseus’s own treatment of the
dead and injured at the battle. When the Theban widows waylay Theseus and beg for
his help, they describe how Creon,

...for despit and for his tirannye,
To do the dede bodyes vileynyne
Of alle oure lorde whiche that been yslawe,
[he] Hath alle the bodyes on an heep ydrawe,
And wol nat suffren hem, by noon assent,
Neither to been yburyed nor ybrent. (941-46)

The picture of a pile of rotting bodies is thus the principal image of Creon’s wrong-
doing offered by Chaucer. But the idea that a wrong has been righted through the
duke’s efforts at Thebes is brought into question by the image Chaucer offers of "...the
taas of bodyes dede" which Theseus’s army "...strepe of harneys and of wede,..... /
After the bataille and disconfiture" (1006, 1008). No such pile of bodies exists in
Boccaccio’s version. The Greeks search the battlefield only with the purpose of finding
their own dead and injured. Boccaccio’s Theseus also makes arrangements for all the
dead and wounded: "...Theseus had the plain searched and every wounded man who
was found was given medical aid, and every corpse was buried" (II. 84).

Chaucer’s redaction of his source text here is at odds with the way the dead were treated in another famous medieval battle, the battle of Crecy in 1346 described by Froissart:

The Kyng caused the deed bodyes of the great lordees to be taken up, and conveyed to Mutterell, and there buried in holy grounde, and made a crye in the countrey to graunt truse for thre dayes, to thyntent that they of the countrey might serche the felde of Cressy to bury the deed bodyes.

(Froissart 303-04)

And Christine De Pisan advised that the army should be well enough paid that they need not descend to the level of pillaging (Book I. 44). There were, however, plenty of other examples where the behaviour of the victorious army was far less noble. That Chaucer chose to change his source text and present events in a less appealing light again suggests that he had in mind the often grisly nature of 14th-century warfare.

Chaucer’s reevaluation of the forces motivating Theseus’s Theban adventure means that this section of the poem serves as the tale’s first examination of the interaction between the aggressive Martian impulse and chivalry. The significant changes Chaucer has made to the Theban episode imply that when it comes to matters of death or destruction—matters Martian—it is very hard to maintain a level of just or chivalrous behaviour. The pointed contrast between Theseus’s actions and Creon’s in the Italian version allows Boccaccio to suggest that Theseus is primarily righting a wrong, but Chaucer’s depiction blurs the line of differentiation between Theseus and Creon to the extent that it is difficult to see a moral contrast in their behaviour. Instead, the similarities direct Chaucer’s audience to question, not merely approve, the morality of Theseus’s actions.

The dichotomy between Chaucer and Boccaccio’s depictions does not, however, reside mainly in the way each treats Theseus’s character. Theseus is less attractive in Chaucer’s version because of the effect in the "Knight’s Tale" on Theseus’s character
(and of course, on Arcite and Palamon's) of living in a world where the central values are martial aggression and idealizing love. Chaucer's Theseus comes off worse than Boccaccio's at Thebes, then, not because he is quantifiably less admirable than Boccaccio's character (or indeed in any sense a "real" character), but because Chaucer wishes to show that the chivalric way of life only affords the duke and his army the opportunity to express their more destructive impulses. The way of life represented in Theseus's decision to make war on Thebes fails to ennoble the duke or produce the best in him because the system of values encourages him to destroy rather than to act justly. His behaviour may satisfy the needs of the Theban women but it is satisfaction achieved at a terrible cost.

The end of Theseus's war on Thebes is the beginning of Arcite's and Palamon's role in the tale, but even in the midst of their discovery by the conquering army the duke's harshness is still the dominant note. The pillagers

...han hem caried softe unto the tente  
Of Theseus; and he ful soone hem sente  
To Atthenes, to dwellen in prisoun  
Perpetually--he nolde no raunsoun. (1021-24)

After they reach Athens Theseus has them imprisoned in a tower where

...in angwissh and in wo,  
This Palamon and his felawe Arcite  
For everemoore; ther may no gold hem quite. (1030-32)

This treatment is in stark contrast to the duke's treatment of his prisoners in Boccaccio. Before sending them to Athens, Theseus "...did what he could by means of his doctors and every skill so that their wounds were healed" (II. 89). And once in Athens, Arcites and Palammon "...live in the palace...in a room where they were served at their pleasure" (II. 99), a destination very different from "The grete tour...so thikke and stroong, / Which of the castle was the chief dongeoun" (1056-57) in which Arcite and Palamon are housed. These changes suggest that "If Theseus represents the 'principle of order' in this culture, then Chaucer is leading us to see that we should never
celebrate abstractions such as 'order' but inquire about the kind of order and its specific human content" (Aers 177).

II. COURTLY LOVE AND THE CONCUPISCIBLE IMPULSE

With the introduction of the Thebans, the "Knight's Tale" begins to explore the world of courtly love, both through the way in which it fosters the expression of the concupiscible appetite and also through the way in which it relates to chivalry and the expression of the irascible appetite. The world of chivalry and courtly love are inextricably connected (Barber 59; Halverson 613). And as with "chivalry," the term "courtly love" is both vast and stubbornly amorphous. The fact, however, that so much time and energy were spent in the middle ages on anatomizing love indicates a great desire and need to have a term that defines an emotion that differs from ordinary lust. In modern times the medieval obsession with idealized love has come to be termed "courtly love." Chaucer plays with, evaluates, satirizes and, ultimately, criticizes the configuration of customs, modes of behaviour and beliefs that are signified (however unclearly) for a modern audience by this phrase.

When compared to The Book of Theseus, all aspects of the "Knight's Tale" connected to Arcite and Palaemon denote the failure of the courtly code. As Terry Jones notes, "Chaucer himself was perfectly able to write in the courtly love style--one has only to read the graceful courtly love debate between the three eagles in "The Parliament of Fowls..." (Jones 147). As Jones suggests, in the "Knight's Tale" Chaucer has taken Boccaccio's story and "...systematically stripped it of all the underlying values of courtly love: generosity, sympathy, respect, humility and even love itself" (Jones 147). The "Knight's Tale" is thus only about courtly love in the sense that it involves Chaucer's effort to discredit it.
The question of Chaucer’s treatment of courtly love naturally revolves around his portrayal of Palamon and Arcite. In Boccaccio’s version Arcites is the centre of attention. He receives far more space in the text than his cousin and is shown to be superior to him as a knight through the courtesy and restraint he maintains when Palaemon is incapable of doing so (Boitani 1977; 137, Wright 52). While unconvincing arguments have suggested that Chaucer also differentiates between the two (Fairchild 285-93), the real issue is why Chaucer is so careful to afford the Thebans equal time, space and prominence in his tale. By doing away with the differences between them Chaucer turns our attention away from exploring their characters—whether singly or in comparison to each other. In place of character, we are left to ponder the extreme emotions the Thebans express, what their suffering and passion signify and what sort of universal order they illustrate (Moseley 52). The audience is thus invited to ask what drives Arcite and Palamon rather than focus on finding out "who" they are. Love, anger and despair are the primary emotions (one might almost say characteristics) Arcite and Palamon display: a clear indication of how strongly they are controlled by Venerean and Martian impulses. (2)

Chaucer has several strategies for subverting the courtly ideal. Most importantly, he consistently shows how both the courtly (Venerean) and the chivalric (Martian) set of values, by which Arcite and Palamon live, deprive them of free will by impeding their ability to reason. Through appropriate imagery he illustrates the loss of free will resulting from their love for Emelye. He makes courtly love the almost indistinguishable equivalent of the Martian forces in the tale which are responsible for so much death and destruction, since the imagery he uses to describe love is just as

2. It is important to point out that although Theseus is the intellectual and philosophical heart of the tale, in many ways the Thebans are even more important. For the bulk of the tale, we have only the actions of Arcite and Palamon by which to assess Chaucer’s evaluation of the code they live by. Theseus may make all the decisions but he does not—apart from the opening portion—do very much acting in the tale.
violent and bloody as that used to describe war. He derides the idealization/deification of the loved one through his use of the language of religious worship—an integral part of the courtly love tradition. And finally, he coarsens the behaviour and language of the tale’s two courtly suitors, showing that he does not believe a feudal knight’s values will allow him to maintain the courtesy and restraint Boccaccio’s knights display in almost all situations.

The most damaging aspect of Chaucer’s treatment of courtly love is the degree to which his Thebans are shown to lose the power to reason clearly because of their love for Emelye. Arcite is so emotionally overcome when he is released from prison that he no longer attempts to reason but gives himself up to misery:

> How greet a sorwe suffreth now Arcite!  
> The deeth he feeleth thurgh his herte smyte;  
> He wepeth, wayleth, crieth pitously;  
> To sleen hymself he waiteth prively.  
> He seyde, "Allas that day that I was born!  
> Now is my prisoun worse than biforn;  
> Now is me shape eternally to dwelle  
> Noght in purgatorie, but in helle." (1219-26)

He has surrendered to the Christian sin of despair, and Chaucer invites his readers to criticize his behaviour from a Christian perspective by having him misuse Christian terminology: "Blisse" (1230), "grace" (1232, 1245), "blisfully" (1236), "paradys" (1237), are all used to illustrate his thoughts and wishes (Moseley 103). Arcite now talks of the bliss of being perpetually imprisoned:

> Allas, that evere knew I Perotheus!  
> For elles hadde I dwelled with Theseus,  
> Yfetered in his prisoun evermo.  
> Thanne hadde I been in blisse and nat in wo. (1227-30)

Paradise is being with Emelye; hell is being without her. And Arcite’s use of the Christian parallel in his despair allows Chaucer to point out how his courtly form of love encourages him to transgress Christian teaching by placing a human form, rather than God, in heaven.
In Boccaccio’s version, the values Arcites lives by help him to continue to reason in the face of the powerful and potentially destructive emotions engendered by his love for Emilia. Thus although initially he wishes that he were not being released from prison and exiled from Emilia (III. 69), "...reason quickly checked his foolhardy will and restrained him with three good arguments..." (III. 70). These "arguments" illustrate how the chivalric code helps him to keep control of his emotions. Pondering his inclination to prefer imprisonment to exile, Arcites thinks:

If you were to say this to anyone, they would not say, "Love holds him captive," but would say, "Because he does not believe in his own valor, he has surrendered to this great cowardice, rather than have the freedom he wants." (III. 70)

Arcites’s code of honour, therefore, overrules love because he knows he must act courageously, act, presumably, as a knight should. Arcites’s powers of reasoning also allow him to recognize that while he is out of prison something could happen to him that might put him in a better position to gain Emilia (III. 71). He already considers the possibility of returning to Athens in secret at a later date (III. 71). Finally, he considers that if Emilia marries and goes to live in another country at least he will able to follow her there (III. 72). Boccaccio closes this episode by saying: "These counsels dissuaded Arcites from his ill-advised and wicked intention and gave his embittered spirit the strength to hope" (III. 73). The despair that Arcite feels in Chaucer’s version would therefore be considered wicked by Boccaccio’s Arcites. His knight does not succumb to the emotional depths Chaucer’s character does, because the process of rational thinking in The Book of Theseus is a component of what it means to be a true and brave knight. Chaucer’s depiction of his knights shows, on the other hand, that their courtly and chivalric code encourages them to reject reason in favour of emotion. Although Theseus’s behaviour sometimes shows that reason can be a component of what it means to be a knight, it is implied that he too loses the ability to reason in the face of love. His speech on love in the grove clearly suggests that he also was once
made a fool of by love (1815-17).

When the Thebans first see Emelye, Chaucer uses imagery to suggest that one key result of their subsequent abandonment of reason will be the loss of a personal and psychological freedom. Chaucer’s juxtaposition of Emelye walking freely in her garden with Arcite and Palamon imprisoned in the tower foreshadows the destruction of this freedom:

The grete tour, that was so thikke and stroong,  
Which of the castle was the chief dongeoun  
(Ther as the knyghtes weren in prisoun  
Of whiche I tolde yow and tellen shal),  
Was evene joynant to the gardyn wal  
Ther as this Emelye hadde hir pleynge. (1056-1061)

Here, "...garden and prison are literally as well as thematically contiguous" (Cooper 95), since the cousins will hereafter be emotionally "incarcerated" by the romantic/sexual love signified by the garden and Emelye’s presence in it through her desire to do "observaunce" (1045).

The pattern of imprisonment through carnal love initiated in this description is taken a step further after Arcite is released from prison and Palamon is left to reflect on his fate:

Therwith the fyr of jalousie up sterte  
Withinne his brest, and hente him by the herte  
So woody that he lyk was to biholde  
The boxtree or the ashen dede and colde. (1299-1302)

Palamon is now not only imprisoned by shackles and by love, he is also "hente" in his heart by jealousy. This jealousy, the imagery suggests, will lead to death. The comparison of Palamon’s pale face first to the pale wood of the box tree and then to ashes metaphorically foreshadows the transformation from wood to ashes of Arcite’s body upon a funeral pyre composed of many different kinds of woods including box (2922)—a fate which will have been brought about through the raging fire of jealous conflict over Emelye. The description also presages the description of Palamon’s
"asshy heeres" (2883) at Arcite's funeral. Chaucer's use of imagery linking violent death with courtly love thus goes beyond traditional usage here and elsewhere to point out how the Thebans' emotions will take them down the path to destruction. The yoking of the poetical language of courtly love with what is truly destructive suggests that it is the idealization of the loved one as revealed in courtly love language which brings about death and destruction—surely because it is such an extreme form of love.

Love is also painful in *The Book of Theseus* (see III. 20) but it still gives the Thebans' pleasure—especially when they first catch sight of Emilia. From their window vantage point the cousins "...enjoyed themselves, breathless and attentive, keeping their eyes and ears fixed on her, and marveling much over her and over the time they had lost in their grieving, time which had passed before they saw her" (III. 15). Here, instead of images that suggest pain (1096-97, 1114), wounding (1078-79, 1115), and loss of freedom, the maiden's appearance brings the Thebans' misery momentarily to an end. Chaucer's reversal of this dynamic means that until the very end of the tale his cousins do nothing but suffer because of their love for Emelye. The suffering induced by Eros is of such an intensity that in terms of imagery it is almost indistinguishable from the Martian side of knighthood in the tale. By mixing pleasure and pain in his description of the Thebans' love for Emelye, Boccaccio never goes beyond the traditional use of courtly language.

Chaucer also discredits courtly love through blatant satire—such as occurs in Arcite and Palamon's subsequent argument over Emelye. When her

...angelic beauty gives rise to the technicality of whether Palamon first adored her as a goddess or as a woman, the idealization of the courtly style is taken so literally that we can no longer be serious about it.

(David 86)

In Boccaccio's version both Thebans are happy to see Emilia as a "goddess" (III. 17). Emilia is credited at various moments with being Venus/Cytherea and their comments on her stay on the purely poetical level:
Arcites said: "O Palaemon, do you see what I behold in those beautiful immortal eyes?"

"What?" answered Palaemon. Arcites said: "I see in them the one who wounded the father of Phaeton because of Daphne, If I am not mistaken." (III. 15-16)

This exchange is a ritualistic expression of a certain kind of idealized love. We are not asked to examine critically the substance of what is said but to recognize the particular form of love the Thebans are experiencing.

In Chaucer's version Palamon's equation of Emelye with Venus is placed in the context of an argument. Arcite refutes Palamon's assertion that he loved Emelye first by saying:

For paramour I loved hire first er thow.
What wiltow seyen? Thou woost nat yet now
Whetheir she be a womman or goddesse! (1155-57)

The effect is therefore to discredit the poetical manner in which Palamon first expresses his love for Emelye since Arcite is both pointing out and jeering at his cousin's confusion over whether the maiden in the garden is woman or goddess. The result of this is, as David suggests, a satire on the traditional confusion the courtly suitor feels as to the true nature of his beloved.

Arcite then justifies his love for Emelye by referring to the old lovers' law (1163-73). The substance of Arcite's argument here is that the "law" he is breaking through his disloyalty to his cousin cannot be expected--like any human law--to control the passions of a true lover. The type of love Arcite feels is predicated upon a loss of reason: "A man moot nedes love, maugree his heed" (1169). And this loss of reason is bound up in the courtly nature of their love which sanctions extremes: Arcite believes that Palamon's love for Emelye, like his own, is so "unreasonable" it will continue even though "...it is nat likly al thy lif / To stonden in hir grace..." (1172-73). Deprived of the purely poetical language and context in which such statements are uttered in Boccaccio's version, the reader is far more inclined to take Arcite literally.
After all, his views are not poetical expressions of his lovelorn state but constitute rather an end-comment to the particular point in his argument. In this practical context his comments and attitudes verge on the absurd: their logical conclusion is a descent into "...anarchy and the destruction of positive law, those legal institutions established by generations of wise men" (Minnis 1982; 112). As Minnis also points out, "'Positif lawe and swich decree' is constantly broken in war, Mars having no regard for such things" (1982; 112). Once again Chaucer's changes to Boccaccio suggest that courtly love and martial aggression are equally destructive to society.

Arcite and Palamon's first quarrel in the "Knight's Tale" is typical of most of their verbal exchanges. Their behaviour here and elsewhere contrasts with the courteous behaviour and language in Boccaccio by reflecting a coarser, more realistic mentality much closer in nature to Chaucer's time (Boitani 1977; 139 and 1983; 195). Palamon and Arcite not only lack courtesy in their second argument in the grove, they become downright rude: Arcite is a "false traytour wikke" (1580) according to Palamon and Palamon, according to Arcite, is a "Verray fool" (1606). Chaucer's attempt to make his Thebans more contemporary than his source, combined with his satire of courtly manners, suggests that the criticism implied in that satire is directed at his own society.

In Boccaccio's version, the "courtoisy" that Arcites and Palaemon maintain towards each other allows their friendship to remain almost continuous during their disagreement over Emilia. After catching sight of Emilia, Arcites calls his cousin to the window because he believes it will give Palamon pleasure to look at the maiden:

O Palaemon, come and see. Venus has truly come down here....O, If I mean anything to you, come here quickly. I believe for certain that it will please you to see the angelic beauty down there which has descended to us from the sovereign heights. (III. 13)

Emilia is a pleasure to be shared. Their subsequent enjoyment derived from watching Emilia suggests a happy companionship momentarily intensified through this joint
activity. In Boccaccio’s version "The whole story hinges on the fact that such is their love for each other and such is their true courtesy that they can become rivals for the same lady without falling out with each other" (Jones 149). This level of "courtois" behaviour can only be ascribed to Arcites since Palaemon eventually demands that they duel over Emilia in the grove. But since Arcites is the focal point of Boccaccio’s tale and the embodiment of the ideal knight in action, the poem does argue that in a truly courteous knight there need be no conflict between the demands of love and the demands of war. In fact, the chivalrous and courtly mode of existence the Italian Arcites and Palaemon follow is what enables them not to immediately start quarrelling—like Chaucer’s knights—over Emilia.

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence offered by a comparison of the tales that Chaucer has deliberately set out to question the value of courtly love is the way in which his version deals with Emelye. In the "Knight’s Tale" she remains an essentially shadowy figure who makes rare appearances. In comparison to Boccaccio’s Emilia, Chaucer’s character loses any sense of individuality and instead creates a general impression which signifies nothing more than her romantic role in the tale (Boitani 1983, 195; Cameron 121; Wright 47-49). Both these views stress the idea that Emelye is by far the most symbolic of Chaucer’s four major characters. We have to rely on external descriptions of her during the maying scenes and on what other characters say about her to gain any sense of what she is like or what she represents.

By turning Emelye into a symbol Chaucer also turns the Thebans’ love for her into a symbolic state rather than a courtly expression of devotion for the complex and vibrant character depicted in The Book of Theseus. Boccaccio’s Emilia is the most fully-fleshed out character in the Italian poem (Pratt 1947; 602). In fact, the full title of Boccaccio’s tale is: Teseida delle nozze d’Emilia (Pratt 1947; 614). In Boccaccio’s version, therefore, Emilia makes far more frequent appearances.
charts her progression from immature girl to a mature "maiden" who is worthy of Arcites's and Palaemon's love for her. On her first appearance in the garden in front of their palace window she is vainly aware of the Thebans' admiration of her (III. 19). However, by the time Arcites/Pentheus returns in disguise to Athens, Boccaccio shows that she has matured:

No sooner had she seen him than she laughed to herself and said, "This is that Arcites whom I saw departing in tears...."

It is true that she was discreet and prudent, that she did not say anything about it to anyone, and that she pretended to him that she had never seen him anywhere before. Yet she wondered what illness had altered his complexion from white to an emaciated brown. (IV. 57-58)

Not only has Emilia's character developed, therefore, but the fact that she is the only person who knows Arcites's true identity and does not betray him means that Arcites, at least, is not fighting for a woman who knows nothing about him, as in the English version. Even more important is Emilia's recognition that Arcites/Pentheus loves her:

He gazed on Emilia in the proper place and time, and he knew how to do this well. She took note, but always discreetly, pretending that she did not know that she was loved. Now, however, she was old enough to know something about it. (IV. 61)

Chaucer's decision to make Emelye ignorant portrays love in its most foolish light. Unlike Boccaccio, he is not concerned with the characters who experience love but with the absurdities of behaviour this emotion is capable of producing.

Chaucer's decision to have the duke rather than Emelye--as in Boccaccio's version--discover the knights fighting in the grove also lessens her importance in the tale. In The Book of Theseus, Emilia comes to the grove and "...was immediately recognized by each of the two good warriors. They did not stop at all, however, but became braver and bolder, so ardently were they re-kindled for the maiden they loved with all their hearts" (V. 80). Instead of the irony of two men fighting to the death for a woman who has no knowledge whatsoever of their conflict, Boccaccio has the duel sanctioned, as it were, by having its cause discover them fighting, witness their fury,
feel "stunned" (V. 81), and then call Theseus.

Boccaccio also stresses Emilia's involvement in the events which are initiated in her name through the concern she shows for the well-being of Arcites and Palaemon in her prayers to Diana on the eve of the tournament. Even though she is praying to discover her own fate, she still shows that she is worried about what will happen to the Thebans:

I pray you earnestly to help those who will embroil themselves with sharp but unwise weapons tomorrow because of me. I implore you to allay my tears which will be shed for every injury they will receive for the sake of love. Cause their anguish to change into sweet peace or into whatever else will redound more gloriously to their fame. (VII. 84)

Emilia's concern is thus centred as much on the injuries she fears they will suffer on her behalf as on her own fate. She even recognizes that one of them must lose and feels sympathy for him: "Let the shame of having lost me be enough for the other to suffer, without any other injury" (VII. 86).

In Chaucer's version, Emelye has not accepted that the tournament will be held on the following day between the Thebans, and her prayer to Diana is thus more ambiguously motivated:

Now help me, lady, sith ye may and kan,  
For tho thre formes that thou hast in thee.  
And Palamon, that hath swich love to me,  
And eek Arcite, that loveth me so soore,  
This grace I preye thee withoute moore,  
As sende love and pees bitwixe hem two,  
And fro me turne awey hir hertes so  
That al hire hoote love and hir desir,  
And al hir bisy torment and hir fir  
Be queynt, or turned in another place. (2312-21)

Emelye's wish for peace between them is not because she is concerned about the injuries that will be inflicted in her name—if there cannot be peace between them she will apparently be equally satisfied if their "hoote love" is "turned in another place"—all she really wishes, as the rest of her prayer indicates, is to be left alone. The most significant aspect of her words here, however, is that Chaucer has made them the only
words she utters during the whole tale. Thus although her reduced role may emphasize her iconographic significance in the tale, Chaucer has made this courtly icon bite back at the courtly conventions: she is a courtly lady whose greatest wish is to marry neither Palamon or Arcite.

Chaucer points out the extent of Emelye’s negative feelings through her reaction to the answer to her prayer. After Diana brusquely informs her that she shall be "...wedded unto oon of tho / That han for thee so muchel care and wo" (2351-52), Emelye’s response conveys a sense of betrayal:

...What amounteth this, alas?
I putte me in thy proteccioun,
Dyane, and in thy disposicioun. (2362-64)

Chaucer has thus created a character whose only distinguishable quality is her desire to remain a virgin.

In Boccaccio’s version, Emilia expresses no sense of betrayal because in her original prayer to Diana she has accepted—in fact, even desires—the Thebans:

If the gods have already decreed that they accomplish what they have determined to do, grant that the one who loves me more, the one who desires me with greater constancy may come to my arms, for I myself do not know which one to choose, so winsome does each seem to me. (VII. 85)

Emelye, on the other hand, has had so little contact with Palamon and Arcite that it is hard to imagine how she could feel concerned or even interested in them.

Chaucer’s portrayal of Emelye is also decidedly anti-courtly, since the typical courtly lady must of her own free will vouchsafe her grace to the suitor or suitors. She has the right and is, indeed, expected to set the terms of her suitors’ service (Thurston 147). Emelye is silent; and this means the traditional courtly relationship between suitors and lady is not given voice in Chaucer’s version.

Boccaccio’s Emilia participates in a genuine relationship with her suitors by being deeply involved in the outcome of their service at the tournament. Watching the
injured fall to the ground,

...she was ever fearful that it might be Arcites or Palaemon, and her
sweet voice became piteous as she offered devout prayers to the gods.
What she saw and heard wrought a painful change in her soul. Her
countenance became so pale, that a man might have said that she was not
herself. (VIII. 95)

She also shows humility by bitterly regretting the destruction she and her beauty have
brought about:

...I am not worth so much that it necessary for so many people to display
all the prowess of which they are capable. O, wretched me, would that I
were not priced so high!

O how unfortunate for me that nature endowed me with this beauty,
the price of which had to be a horrible, wicked, and ruthless conflict
waged here only because of my face! (VIII. 97-98)

The artfulness of Boccaccio’s depiction here is that the great modesty which compels
Emilia to chastise herself and generally to feel unworthy of such a conflict has the
effect of making her seem deserving of the Thebans’ great efforts.

In Chaucer’s version Emelye’s reactions to the tournament are almost
completely absent. But her apparently unaffected state after watching the tournament--
which is revealed when a victorious Arcite approaches her on horseback--seems morally
dubious, considering the violence of the tournament and considering it has been fought
because of her. Looking down on Arcite,

...she agayn hym caste a frendlich ye
(For wommen, as to speken in comune,
Thei folwen alle the favour of Fortune). (2680-82)

The implication of this comment is that Emelye is not expressing her true feelings here
but bowing to the necessity of what Fortune has vouchsafed her. How could we expect
her to react otherwise--considering her response to Diana’s stern pronouncement on her
fate? Chaucer’s emphasis on the idea of Emelye following the whims of fortune in her
response again distances her attitude from that of the traditional courtly lover (Mandel
286).
Chaucer's treatment of Emelye's character and role in the tale is traditional in one sense, however. The conflict she causes the Thebans to feel between their love for her and their own friendship was a common literary theme and central plot element in a large number of fourteenth-century romances (Mathew 359). Eugene Slaughter argues that the dynamic of this tension is created by two opposing ideas of love developed in the writings of important medieval religious and philosophical writers. Charity places a love of God above a love of creatures and sees reason as dictating that a love of God be most valued. Cupidity, its opposite, places human love above a love for God and ignores the dictates of reason. The reason-centred, religio-philosophic view regards charity as a source of goodness and cupidity as evil. The latter regards itself as the good and will ignore charity or treat it as a form of vice if it interferes with the pursuit or possession of the loved one (Slaughter 48). Both ideas can be said to play a role in Chaucer's tale. Cupiditas is represented literally through the implied "worship" of Emelye by Arcite and the worship of Venus by Palamon. The worship of an earthly (or earthy) form of love is set against the religio-philosophic view of love present in Chaucer's version through the frequent references to Boethian thought.

Slaughter goes on to explain that as the middle ages progressed, writers attempted to find a balance between these two forms of love. Writers of the School of Chartres saw man as a dual creature who has the right to express both kinds of love and who will only live a stable life if he walks the middle way between both (Slaughter 184). In the "Knight's Tale" an imbalance in the dynamic of this tension is expressed through the collapse of Arcite's and Palamon's friendship (and their ability to reason clearly) in the face of their love for Emelye. The absence of a Christian God in this pagan world helps to explain why Chaucer chooses to depict the immediate disintegration of Arcite and Palamon's friendship under the onslaught of cupidinous love. Chaucer dismisses the possibility of walking the "middle way" achieved by
Arcites and Palaemon as they continue to live in harmony in prison after falling in love with Emilia.

One of the most unsettling aspects of Arcite and Palamon's loss of friendship is that Chaucer's depiction offers not the slightest possibility of compromise. The second after Arcite has pronounced he also loves Emelye, Palamon feels nothing but fury:

This Palamon, whan he tho wordes herde,
Dispitously he looked and answerde,
"Wheither seistow this in ernest or in pley?" (1123-25)

The completeness and speed of the cousins' possession by Eros is thus matched by the completeness and speed of their descent into aggression. This yoking of the irascible and the concupiscible (Haller 81) is Chaucer's invention and comment upon both their interdependence and their destructive interaction. The almost simultaneous appearance of these two primary emotions also underlines the idea that to move from caritas to cupidinous love is also to move from reason to emotion. All of the knights' principle emotions—not just the concupiscible—become intensified as they fall in love with Emelye.

The anger Palamon expresses towards Arcite on learning of his cousin's love for Emelye also suggests the mutually exclusive nature of friendship and love:

"It nere," quod he, "to thee no greet honour
For to be fals, ne for to be traitour
To me, that am thy cosyn and thy brother." (1129-31)

As far as Palamon is concerned, Arcite cannot claim friendship with him if he insists on loving Emelye. Their friendship, moreover, has been enshrined in the chivalric code by an act of sworn loyalty to one another. Palamon and Arcite are

"Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,
That nevere, for to dye in the peyne,
Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,
Ne in noon oother cas, my leve brother,
But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me
In every cas, as I shal forthren thee—"
This was thyn ooth, and myn also, certeyn. (1132-39)
Ironically, the accusation applies equally to its speaker: he is just as duty-bound to help Arcite in his love for Emelye as vice-versa. This oath is Chaucer’s invention (Thurston 169). And the significance of Palamon’s accusation here is primarily that Chaucer has him paraphrase a sworn oath of allegiance in the form of an accusation against Arcite’s love for Emelye. In this context courtly love and chivalry are antithetical. Chaucer has thus taken an amicably shared affection for Emilia in *The Book of Theseus* and turned it into an impasse in the "Knight’s Tale": a powerful illustration of the destructive effect of courtly love and chivalry upon one another.

**III. THE BOETHIAN PERSPECTIVE**

The manner in which Arcite attempts both to refute Palamon’s accusation of disloyalty and dismiss their friendship—by citing the old lovers’ law (1163-68)—represents the tale’s first significant allusion to Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (see: III, m. 12, lines 53-54). These allusions are Chaucer’s addition to his version and occur frequently in the Thebans’ speeches. Their misuse of Boethian philosophy here and elsewhere works as an ironic commentary on the tale, serving as a constant reminder of what is wrong rather than what is right with the values and beliefs depicted. Specifically, Chaucer uses the *Consolation* to point out that these characters’ worship of earthly goods through the courtly and chivalric system is synonymous with a pagan system of beliefs. Boethius’s Christian philosophy (Bennett 20) preaches against characters who value and worship the aggressive and erotic instead of ultimately rejecting them for a love of God. Lady Philosophy relates in the *Consolation* the story of Orpheus and his wife, and like Arcite, she asks: "But what is he that may yeven a lawe to loverys?" (III, m. 12, lines 53-54). Naturally, "...Orpheus lokede abakward on Erudyce his wif, and lost hire, and was deed" (III, m. 12, lines 58-59). The echoing of
the *Consolation* is hence purely ironic. Lady Philosophy relates this story as a warning:

> For whoso that evere be so overcomen that he ficche his eien into the put of helle, that is to seyn, whoso sette his thoughtes in erthly thinges, al that evere he hath drawen of the noble good celestial he lesith it, whanne he loketh the helles, that is to seyn, into lowe thinges of the erthe. (III, m. 12, lines 63-69)

Chaucer has chosen to make Arcite and Palamon look down on Emelye from their vantage point in the tower (1063-65, 1075-77, 1112-13) so that their position physically illustrates Lady Philosophy’s description of those who look into "the put of helle" or into the bowels of earthly temptation. The Thebans have also been overcome through their visual sense: Palamon "...cast his eye upon Emelya" (1077) and Arcite does "espye" (1112) her. The paralleling of the Thebans’ first sight of Emelye with Boethius here thus invites the reader to view the cousins’ desires from the perspective of this philosophical text—as the sinful, "hellish" act described in the *Consolation*. The courtly nature of the meeting in Boccaccio’s version has been subverted and turned into a moral lesson in Chaucer’s version.

Chaucer did not copy the description of the cousins’ first sight of Emelye from Boccaccio, for there the cousins are not housed in a tower and thus do not look down on Emilia from on high as into a pit of temptation; nor does Boccaccio make any reference to the *Consolation*. The ultimate conclusion to be drawn from Chaucer’s careful parallel with the Boethian text is not only that, like Orpheus, the Thebans stop looking up to the light of reason immediately they catch sight of Emelye, but also that they will suffer the consequences, as Orpheus does. If *The Book of Theseus* is the narrative source of Chaucer’s tale, therefore, the *Consolation* may be said to be his moral and philosophical source. And, hence, the most effective way of looking at Chaucer’s version is to assess the changes he makes to Boccaccio from a Boethian perspective. The satire Chaucer employs in his treatment of Arcite and Palamon works in conjunction with the Boethian allusions to illustrate the grounds on which the tale
disapproves of their behaviour and values.

Chaucer combines Boethian material with a continuing satire of the courtly lover at the end of the Thebans' first argument, when Arcite compares his cousin and himself to hounds fighting over a bone (1177-80). This example is of course the antithesis of the usual courtly metaphor in which the loved one is deified, but its significance here comes through reference to Boethius: "For certes swiche is the condicioun of alle mankynde, that oonly whan it hath knowynge of itself, thanne passeth it in noblesse alle othere thynges; and whan it forletith the knowynge of itself, thanne is it brought bynethen alle beestes" (II. pr. 5, lines 148-54). Chaucer's satire here thus not only pokes fun at courtly love, it also implies this form of love encourages man to turn from God and from his own rational nature, by rejecting reason in favour of mindless passion. To do so, as far as Boethius is concerned, is a sin: "...wan that men leeten the knowynge of hemself, it cometh hem of vice" (II. pr. 5, lines 156-57).

After his release from prison, Arcite and the still incarcerated Palamon deliver a pair of philosophical speeches which borrow heavily from the Consolation, but the speakers do not appear to listen to their own voices of reason. Rather, their speeches offer Chaucer an opportunity to show more clearly the ways in which the courtly and chivalric value system lead them away from the God present in the philosophy they utter and into the pagan worship of earthly goods. Arcite's opening comment,

...why pleynen folk so in commune
On purveaunce of God, or of Fortune,
That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
Wel bettre than they kan hemself devyse? (1251-54)

thus comes on the heels of his complaining about his fate generally and in comparison to his cousin's. And the rest of his speech illustrates, like the Consolation, the foolishness of those who continue to yearn after what they do not have (for principal sources in Boethius for his speech see: IV. pr. 6; III. pr. 2; II. pr. 5). He ends with the drunken man/mouse example, in which a man made drunk by his ill-advised desires
is led down the road to false felicity and away from his true home or destination (1261-64; derived from a specific passage in the Consolation: III. pr. 2, lines 82-88). Arcite appears to recognize that he is susceptible to this danger when he comments on the foolishness of his previous wish to be released from prison (1268-70), but this recognition only spurs him on more blatantly to transgress his own advice by firmly stating that unless his desire to see Emelye is fulfilled, "I nam but deed..." (1274). By placing this typically courtly expression at the end of a speech full of Boethian wisdom Chaucer clearly shows how the courtly code leads man away from the true good.

Palamon's central philosophic speech is more complex than Arcite's and illustrates the way in which the Thebans' mistaken priorities, state of ignorance and sense of powerlessness are fostered by the courtly and chivalric codes. The emotional maelstrom of unrequited love, despair and jealousy raging through Palamon because of his love for Emelye and Arcite's release from prison leads him to express his own powerlessness and lack of free will:

O cruel goddes that governe
This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,
And writen in the table of athamaunt
Youre parlement and youre eterne graunt,
What is mankynde moore unto you holde
Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde? (1303-08)

The complete domination of the Theban by his emotions means, from a Boethian perspective, that he does lack free will. Palamon's reference to sheep suggests this idea, since to be completely ruled by emotion is to be no more free than the animal famous for being led around without thought or initiative.

Chaucer also makes it clear in this speech that Palamon's ignorance is such that he is no longer capable of distinguishing between man and animal:

For slayn is man right as another beest,
And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest,
And hath siknesse and greet adversitee,
And ofte tymes giltelees, pardee. (1309-12)
From a Boethian perspective, Palamon has forgotten his true nature here:

"...for certes swiche is the condicioun of alle mankynde, that oonly whan it hath knowynge of itself, thanne passeth it in noblesse alle othere thynges; and whan it forletith the knowynge of itself, than is it brought bynethen alle beestes. Forwhi alle othere lyvyng beestes han of kynde to knowe nat hemself; but whan that men leeten the knowynge of hemself, it cometh hem of vice. (II. pr. 5, lines 148-57)"

Here as well as later, in the duel in the grove, Chaucer uses animal imagery to describe the Thebans’ descent to the level of beasts. Palamon’s love for Emelye has made him wish to reject the self-knowledge that sets man apart in the universe; he wishes to surrender to his emotions with the impunity of a beast.

The misery Palamon expresses in his anguished questioning of why God "tormentor innocence" echoes Boethius’s lament before he has been aided by Lady Philosophy’s wisdom:

"Why suffrestow that slydynge Fortune turneth so grete entrechaungynges of thynges? so that anoyous peyne, that sholde duweliche punysche felons, punysscheth innocentz; and folk of wikkide maneres sitten in heie chayeres; and anoyinge folk treden, and that unrightfully, on the nekkes of holi men. (I. m. 5, lines 34-40)"

Lady Philosophy characterizes this state of mind in a way that echoes Palamon’s internal state: "...manye [turbacions] of affeccions han assailed the, and sorwe and ire and wepynge todrawn the diversely..." (I, Prose V, 68-70). To be in this state is for man to be banished from his true home, for as Lady Philosophy says: "Whan I saugh the...sorwful and wepynge, I wiste anoon that thow were a wrecche and exiled..." (I. pr. 5, lines 4-7). Through Palamon’s allusions to Boethian "sentience," therefore, the idea begun in Arcite’s speech describing how man’s desires make him take the wrong path home to the true good is continued here. Both Arcite and Palamon have been exiled, like Boethius, from their true home through their surrender to their emotions. And this surrender and consequent exile is of their own doing: "And yif thou hast levere for to wene that thow be put owt of thy cuntre, thanne hastow put out thyselfe rather than ony other wyght hath" (I. pr. 5, lines 11-14).
Lady Philosophy explains from what kind of country Boethius and, by extension, Palamon and Arcite have put themselves in exile:

For yif thow remembre of what cuntre thow art born, it nys nat governed by emperoures, ne by governement of multitude, as weren the cuntrees of hem of Athenes; but o lord and o kynge, and that is God, that is lord of thi cuntre, whiche that rejoisseth hym of the duellynge of his citezeens, and nat for to puten hem in exil. (I. pr. 5, lines 16-23)

Arcite and Palamon, by falling in love with Emelye, have banished themselves from the country of God. Palamon’s lament,

That man is bounden to his observaunce,  
For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,  
Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille

is a violation of Boethian thinking and hence rejection of the ways of God—since according to Lady Philosophy: "...it is a sovereyn fredom to ben governed by the brydel of hym and obeye to his justice" (I. pr. 5, lines 24-25). That Palamon and Lady Philosophy could hold such antithetical views here reflects their opposing system of values. For Palamon, true freedom would be the right to relinquish all control of his emotions without guilt and act as any animal acts. The courtly and chivalric code which is so steeped in the expression of extreme emotions therefore encourages him to act as a pagan acts. For Lady Philosophy, to be governed by God is to achieve freedom because God frees man from his enslavement to emotions.

Chaucer’s tale supports the Boethian view that extreme emotions deprive man of free will by making fortune’s influence most obvious when the Thebans express their concupiscible/courtly and irascible/chivalric impulses. The key moment in which Palamon looks through a window and first sees Emelye is thus initiated with: "And so bifel, by aventure or cas," (1074); while the scene in which the bodies of Arcite and Palamon are discovered by the pillagers lying in the pile of dead and injured at Thebes is introduced with a "And so bifel" (1009). Fortune’s influence reaches one of two peaks in the tale (the other being the temple scenes) in a scene which involves potent
expressions of both the concupiscible/courtly and the irascible/chivalric values: the confrontation in the grove. Chaucer's Arcite does not frequent the grove in which Palamon discovers him, but on the particular day of Palamon's escaping from prison and hiding in the grove "By aventure his wey he gan to holde" (1506). Chaucer underlines fortune's influence and its subsequent destructiveness in Arcite's reunion with his cousin by commenting that "...litel wiste how ny that was his care, / Til that Fortune had brought him in the snare" (1489-90). Likewise Palamon, "Were it by aventure or destynee--" (1465), escapes from prison and comes by pure chance to meet him there. These acts are tied in by Chaucer with man's passions. Arcite comes to the grove "...to doon his observaunce to May," (1500). Indeed, he travels to the grove "...on the poynyt of his desyr" (1501). Arcite subsequently reveals his identity to a Palamon hiding in the bushes in the course of a prayer he offers up to love (1542-62), thus allowing Chaucer to transmute a meeting that occurs plausibly in Boccaccio's version, into a "snare" (1490) that fortune sets through the enactment of a courtly ritual. After hearing the prayer, Palamon crawls out from his hiding place and confronts Arcite with a raging expression of martial aggression. The effect of Chaucer's emphasis on the influence of fortune in this scene and elsewhere is thus to strengthen the notion that love and war are activities that somehow deprive man of free will. (3)

In *The Book of Theseus*, events usually unfold in a plausible manner which rarely suggests that the poem's central characters are being manipulated by fortune or the pagan gods. The potentially improbable meeting between the cousins in the grove

3. Helen Cooper points out how the pattern of the concupiscible initiating the irascible reoccurs in the poem: "Emily's 'observaunce' of May when the cousins see her in the garden is repeated in Arcite's maying in the forest, and both episodes lead to rivalry between the knights, the first time a quarrel, the second a combat. In both cases the darkness of disorder replaces the brilliance of the celebrations of 'faire, fressh May'" (Cooper 95). Man's fate is thus susceptible to unfortunate reversals when he expresses these primary emotions.
occurs in a convincing fashion. Once Arcites has returned in disguise to Athens he often goes to the grove where Palaemon eventually meets him. (This fact is mentioned on three separate occasions: IV. 63, 66, 79). Although Boccaccio does hold fortune responsible for the course Arcites’ and Palaemon’s lives take in the tale, he does not show her actually in the process of manipulating her subjects as Chaucer does, and, more importantly, he regards her influence as positive (see VI. 1-5).

The duel and Theseus’s intervention which round off the first two parts of Chaucer’s poem bring to a climax Chaucer’s negative portrayal of the courtly/concupiscible and chivalric/irascible codes and impulses. Chaucer’s emphasis upon the duel’s savagery is his addition to the tale and is important because the Thebans’ level of violence shows the final collapse of the reasoning human being in the face of concupiscible and irascible impulses. The Thebans literally become animals:

    Thou myghtest wene that this Palamoun
    In his fightying were a wood leoun,
    And as a cruell tigre was Arcite;
    As wilde bores gonne they to smyte,
    That frothen whit as foom for ire wood.
    Up to the ancle foghte they in hir blood. (1655-60)

In Boccaccio’s depiction the duel is quite sedate:

    With shields on their arms and swords drawn, each striking the other without any more mutual pity, the two barons advanced and retreated over the grass. They had shattered their armor altogether in fighting their long battle, but it was still hard to tell which of the two had the advantage. (V. 76)

Thus while the Thebans remain, despite their ruthlessness, knights in the Italian tale, Chaucer depicts men who have lost all contact with their putative knighthood.

The two dukes also behave antithetically in the grove scenes. While Boccaccio’s depiction shows the triumph of chivalric courtliness and restraint in the duke’s response to the trespassing Thebans (V. 83-98), Chaucer’s depiction shows the triumph of the irascible signified by Mars. Chaucer’s duke’s anger is both instantaneous and long-lasting. He cites Mars in both of his initial responses to his discovery of the knights
Boccaccio's duke mentions Mars only to pacify the contending knights. He suggests that if "...Mars grants victory to him who desires it more..." (V. 83) in the future, each will now "...draw to one side" (V. 83). Chaucer thus sees Mars very differently from his Italian counterpart. The duke's reference to Mars is only a small component of his polite and restrained address to the Thebans in Boccaccio. In Chaucer's version the irascible impulse Mars symbolizes dominates the proceedings: Theseus's apostrophising of him serves as an inducement to anger which in the second invocation (1743-47) expresses a desire to immediately put the cousins to death without recourse to public trial. Chaucer is hence very much concerned with pointing out—as in the opening Thebes section of his tale—that the destructive characteristics which are an integral part of Mars's personality are also a dominant aspect of chivalry.

In *The Book of Theseus*, the Thebans obey the duke's courteous request that they stop fighting and explain themselves in a way that shows that in Boccaccio's poem courtly love, like chivalry, can act as an inducement to restraint as well as to anger. Arcites/Pentheus's immediate explanation to Theseus is that: "We are two knights who are testing our valor with swords for the sake of love" (V. 84). Theseus shortly thereafter agrees to give amnesty to the knights because they are fighting in love's name: "You shall have it, for I see that you are such brave knights, and that you fight for so worthy a cause, that to injure you would be against reason" (V. 85). The interchange is both courteous and ritualistic. Love here is a valuable thing since it leads the duke to act in a noble and restrained fashion in its name. Likewise, even the somewhat hot-headed Palaemon requests that he be forgiven his transgressions in love's name: "Sir, I cannot conceal who I am. Yet your valor assures me that you will not want me to turn your wrath against my innocent spirit, for I escaped from prison for Love. I am your Palaemon" (V. 87). Again, the request for restraint is courteously made on the grounds that love is involved.
In Chaucer’s version the power of Palamon’s emotions makes him betray Arcite’s true identity to Theseus: "This is thy mortal foo, this is Arcite" (1724). Not only does he betray the man whom he has spent so much time self-righteously accusing of betrayal; Palamon also attempts to inflame Theseus’s hostility towards an unmasked Arcite (1724-30). His behaviour here goes against all of chivalry’s rules (Jones 152). In Boccaccio’s version Palaemon only acknowledges his own crime because he now believes he has no chance of winning Emelye. This belief makes him ask to be put to death: "Exalted lord, you have learned everything you wanted to know and desire for death has certainly given me the courage to tell it, for death will put an end to the bitter grief that torments my unhappy soul. I, who fled from your prison, well deserve to be dead" (V. 90).

Both dukes at this point suggest solutions to the Thebans’ quarrel, but the necessity of Theseus’s doing so in Boccaccio’s version only occurs when the cousins start to fight in the grove. Up to this point the codes the cousins live by have given them the resources to cope with both their love and their rivalry for Emilia. In fact, there would not even have been a duel, let alone a tournament, if Palaemon had been of the same mind as his cousin. Arcites, using the force of reason, argues for twenty stanzas against their coming to blows after their grove reunion (V. 45-64). He is willing to let them both pursue Emilia and he is willing to stand back without protest if Palaemon wins her (V. 45). Arcites, as Boccaccio’s principal hero, therefore shows that in a true knight there need be no conflict between the irascible and concupiscible impulses or between friendship and love. All potential conflicts can be dealt with by the chivalric and courtly codes. The supremacy of courtesy and reason in Arcites’s character means that being a true knight does not so much revolve around fighting as in knowing when it is wrong to fight. The fact that Palaemon insists on fighting (V. 53-54) suggests that the duel and the subsequent tournament amount to a failure of
character on his part rather than a failure in the courtly and chivalric system by which these knights live.

In Chaucer's version, the codes the cousins live by break down the first moment they see Emelye. This is because the "Knight's Tale" shows that these codes add to man's problems by sanctioning rather than restraining the expression of extreme emotions. Even before the appearance of Emelye, Theseus's behaviour at Thebes, which is motivated by the ostensibly chivalric purpose of aiding the Theban widows, shows the code he lives by is no more moral than Creon's. The Martian banner under which the duke rides to war indicates that chivalry here is mainly camouflage for selfish motivations and violent impulses. Chaucer's tale is similarly harsh in its depiction of courtly love, pointing out that, as with chivalry, courtly love does not restrain man's desires but only heightens and legitimizes them. The tale satirizes courtly behaviour and language, associates courtly love with the violence and death that usually result from the irascible impulse and, indeed, shows that the love impulse is likely to instigate and destructively interact with the aggressive impulse by having the cousins turn against one another as soon as they fall for Emelye. The tale's allusions to Boethius offer a moral commentary on the cousins' and Theseus's behaviour and show that love and martial aggression blind these characters by making them lose the capacity to reason clearly and to seek instead false felicity. Finally, the tale uses fortune to point out that the unnatural domination of emotion over reason in man will deprive him of freedom, for fortune manipulates the cousins at those moments when they express their courtly/concupiscible and chivalric/irascible impulses.

Considering Chaucer's depiction of events in the first two parts of his tale, the solution the duke proposes in the grove is likely to be of dubious value. The duke's intervention, however, does not mean a continuation of what has gone before (whether good or bad) in either tale. The focus of both tales now moves from a private quarrel.
to a public dispute where the solution is to be sought lawfully through a large
tournament. While Boccaccio will continue to show the triumph of the courtly and
chivalric way of life with this tournament, Chaucer will illustrate how these codes work
destructively at a societal as well as at a personal level.
CHAPTER TWO: THE SOLUTION

Part III of the "Knight's Tale" contains a disproportionately large share of Chaucer's additions to his version: viewed as a separate entity, it comes close to blurring our sense of the distinction between a poem that is primarily a redaction and one that is primarily an original creation. Chaucer's efforts here also seem strangely anomalous since he now begins to expand on a source which he had previously been ruthlessly (if not always consistently) cutting down. Irrespective of the particular changes and additions Chaucer makes in Part III, therefore, these anomalies make it clear that to understand what Chaucer is trying to achieve in his version we must pay special attention to what is dealt with here.

In Part III Chaucer concentrates on detailing the preparations for the proposed tournament. The focus on preparation shows that Chaucer is concerned with how the chivalric and courtly codes, illustrated in the components of the duke's solution, work as a means of ordering society and, more generally, how these codes deal with man's deepest emotions. In Boccaccio's version it is much less apparent that the duke is offering a solution which has any significance beyond that of the spectacle of a joust that almost incidentally solves the Thebans' quarrel. The Italian poem endorses the values of the code illustrated by the spectacle simply by depicting it uncritically for the reader.

Chaucer's decision to create a new stadium and temples for his tournament is significant both from an aesthetic and from a Boethian viewpoint. The narrator's emphasis, through the use of tense and particular modes of description, upon the fact that the stadium solution is this society's own creation also stands out in Chaucer's version, especially compared to the lack of emphasis on the stadium in Boccaccio's. Chaucer also goes into great detail describing the interiors of each of the three temples
constructed within the stadium, suggesting through their re-location from their far-off heavenly sites in the Italian version that what is described within each has far more significance to events than in *The Book of Theseus*.

The prayer of Arcite—the worshipper who has potentially the most cause to be dissatisfied with the result of his devotions—differs in each version, as does the behaviour of the gods in reaction to all the aspirants’ prayers. Chaucer’s gods are far less appealing than their Italian counterparts, and they possess clearly delineated astrological and human aspects not present in *The Book of Theseus*. Chaucer has also added Jupiter and Saturn to his cast of deified characters, making the latter responsible for the unfortunate outcome of the tournament.

Boccaccio’s long descriptive role call of the various noblemen who fight in the tournament is replaced in the English version with a description of two opposing combatants: Lygurie and Emetreus. Their depiction negatively combines opulence and savagery in a way not present in any of the Italian descriptions. The ominous suggestiveness of Chaucer’s description of these two nobles is fulfilled by Arcite’s grisly fate after the tournament. The limited vision and understanding of the universe imposed on Arcite by his pagan beliefs as illustrated in his final speech provide an explanation of the grim end Chaucer gives him. This fate is not shared by the Italian Arcites who celebrates his victory, marries Emilia and is allowed to ascend to heaven despite his pagan affiliations.

* * * * *

In Boccaccio’s version, the stadium and temples used by the knights and Emilia are already built (V. 97) and the description of the stadium is no more than a routine matter (VII. 108-110; Thurston 181). Chaucer’s decision to have a stadium built in his
version and to describe the process of building (1881-1913) means that the duke’s solution is no longer just one man’s idea but a reflection of what helps to create and unify a society around a particular set of values. In the English version, therefore, events are "...both public and sanctioned; what was private has become communal" (Herzman 341) to a degree never achieved in Boccaccio.

The significance of the passages detailing Theseus’s efforts at building the stadium and temples in Chaucer’s version is made clear in the text. The narrator comments that Theseus’s creation is one of the wonders of the man-made world:

And shortly to concluden, swich a place
Was noon in erthe, as in so litel space;
For in the lond ther was no crafty man
That geometrie or ars-metrike kan,
Ne portreyour, ne kervere of ymages,
That Theseus ne yaf mete and wages
The theatre for to maken and devyse. (1895-1901)

There is little doubt, then, that all of Athens’s artistry and craftsmanship, attributes which are often considered the true mark of a civilized society, have been lavished upon Theseus’s solution. The duke’s construction programme in Chaucer’s version involves the community on two different levels: the societal and the religious. The degree of commitment necessitated by the building plan makes Theseus’s solution a representative example of his society’s method of solving disputes which most commonly arise between individual members. The social significance of the dispute is connected to the religious level through the temples which are incorporated into the structure of the stadium. Chaucer’s carefully balanced descriptions of their architectural pattern and adornment mirror the skill of their physical creation. The social meets the religious in these temples through the Athenians’ creativity/skill as artists/artisans combined with the practice of religious ritual. The system of belief and worship displayed in the temples in pictures is this society’s vision of what controls their world, and consequently, offers a guide to individual behaviour.
The presence of the temples within the stadium also relates the chivalrous/courtly code represented by the stadium to the paganism represented by the temples. In Chaucer's poem at least, the system of belief and power signified by these gods is a central component of the courtly and chivalric way of life. In Boccaccio's version the characters pray in previously built temples at unspecified locations in the city of Athens. The prayers Arcites and Palaemon utter before the tournament must fly off to the habitats of Mars and Venus in order to make contact with the gods (VII. 29 and 50). There is much less sense of man's connection with these gods and of Athenian society's relationship with what they represent. And since the society in Boccaccio's tale does not construct the gods' habitats, it cannot be held responsible in any way for what is depicted in them. Thus, although these gods influence what happens at the tournament, their "houses bear neither spatial nor symbolic relationship to it" (Kolve 114). Chaucer's decision to have the duke build temples and incorporate them into the stadium suggests spatially that Theseus's solution has the effect of concentrating the forces symbolized by the gods in the tale.

Jordan has argued that the carefully balanced manner in which Chaucer describes the stadium and temples indicates that he was more interested in the structural possibilities of language and less in the content of his descriptions (Jordan 1967; 177). Jordan's aesthetic emphasis does Chaucer's aims a disservice here, however. Chaucer's careful "structural" descriptions reflect the emphasis Theseus and his society have themselves placed on the outward show of things through carefully arranged ceremonies, rituals and adorned buildings. But the potency of the descriptive detail indicates that Chaucer does not want his audience to lose sight of precisely what is being worshipped by these pagans. Chaucer's wall paintings contribute to the narrative visually by telling a story about the nature of the enshrined forces (Kolve 114). The images display pictorially the pagans' vision of the purpose and nature of existence.
They are thus intrinsic to the meaning of Chaucer's tale rather than merely ornamental.

One might wonder that the Thebans and Emelye in Chaucer's tale do not ponder what is painted on the walls around them. For example, Chaucer's description of Mars' temple shows through a cumulative series of images to whom (or perhaps what) Arcite prays (Boitani 1977; 86). To ponder, however, why Arcite takes no notice is to give too much credence to the idea that he—or by extension his cousin or Emelye—are, in any sense, three dimensional characters. Arcite cannot be expected to pick up the negative messages being visually fed to him if Chaucer intends him to be no more than a cipher for the emotions that dominate him, but the reader does recognize the irony of the lovers' prayer for good fortune in such an ill-omened setting.

To place primary importance on the structure within which these images are presented here, as Jordan does, is to fall into the same trap as Chaucer's Theseus and his society: the belief that a sufficiently ordered and elaborate structure justifies whatever it chooses to shape itself around. The chief decorative feature here, the temples, glorify the opposite principle in their construction: disruptive violence (Spearing 69). The horrible irony here, therefore, is that whereas Chaucer depicts a society which attempts to control the chaos engendered by man's erotic and violent impulses by placing them in a framework of order, control and ritualized ceremony, in fact this society ultimately subverts the value it places on order and structure by worshipping these same chaotic forces. Theseus's structure may be worthy of admiration, aesthetically speaking, but morally it is hideously suspect. At the intersection of aesthetics and religion Chaucer points out the limitations of pagan society's own act of creation: art, existing in a world without the guiding principles of morality provided by Christianity, is doomed to failure. The emphasis on form, structure and their metaphorical extension in ritual and ceremony only serves to underline the failure of Theseus's solution. Chaucer has created a far more ordered and
structured tale than his source, aesthetically speaking, and yet the outcome of his tale is far more unjust than the outcome in *The Book of Theseus*.

Chaucer's description of the temples establishes the fact that this is man's own act of creation by giving the impression that we are present at their construction (Muscantine 1964; 177). The narrator places his descriptions of the interiors of each temple in the particular context of what has been built in his story. Thus after describing what "Hath Theseus doon wrought in noble wyse" (1913), the narrator goes on to say:

> But yet hadde I foryeten to devyse  
> The noble kervyng and the portreitures,  
> The shap, the contenaunce, and the figures  
> That weren in thise oratories thre. (1914-17)

He then places his subsequent descriptions of the temples in the present tense, as if the temples are still there, alive and well, in the fictional world and time of the story he is relating. Hence: "First in the temples of Venus maystow se / Wroght on the wal" (1918-19). The knight even commends the depictions' lifelike quality and comments on the expense (2087-88, 2090; Herz 213). Through these devices Chaucer shows that Athenian society is at least in part responsible for what has been created and for what results from it.

From the Boethian perspective adopted by Chaucer, Theseus's theatre solution only makes those who will actually use the temples as well as the stadium more helpless. "...[T]he settings he provides for their devotion do not point them toward the

1. Chaucer maintains the sense that his narrator is allowing the audience to view something that really exists when he begins to get down to particulars:

> Lust and array, and alle the circumstaunces  
> Of love, whiche that I rekned and rekne shal,  
> By ordre weren peynted on the wal,  
> And mo than I kan make of mencioun. (1932-35)

The list of attributes will therefore follow the order of their appearance on the walls of the temples. (See also 1967-72.)
truth of things unseen: their prayers, influenced by images in these places, only
heighten their sensualitas and worldliness" (Olsson 125). More importantly, if Theseus
truly understands what the gods signify, how can he specifically encourage worship of
them? Since the text suggests that Theseus also worships these gods (lines 1902-04,
1906-07, 1912), he surely cannot fully understand their nature. Assuming that he is not
immoral, he must be a character of limited wisdom (Olsson 125).

Considering the emphasis Chaucer places upon the nature of each god in the
temples and the way in which they manipulate their worshippers, it is important to
understand the relationship between the three humble aspirants and their patrons. Put
simply, the gods' characters, as illustrated in the temples, are "symbolic
externalizations of the forces which motivate Arcite, Palamon and Emelye..."
(Davenport 115). It is certainly true that the characteristics that stand out in Arcite and
Palamon's personalities are their aggressive and erotic impulses, while Emelye's only
discernible characteristic is her wish to remain a virgin. One key reason why Chaucer
stripped down the far more complex Arcites and Palaemon of The Book of Theseus was
apparently to clarify his Thebans' connection with the pagan gods and what they
symbolize.

Chaucer has also given a strong astrological slant to his depiction of the gods in
a way that ties their planetary aspect to the human emotions they symbolize. The most
obvious component of Chaucer's astrological emphasis is the fact that the three
worshippers visit their temples at the zodiacal hour at which each god assumes
planetary prominence in the sky (Manzalaoui 246). This correspondence suggests that
Mars, for instance, is intended to be viewed as both "...the god of war (who stands for
human aggressive impulses) and...the planet (which causes war and other displays of
violence on earth)" (Spearing 60). Sense can be made of both the emotional and the
astrological aspects of Chaucer's gods if we first recognize that the gods' astrological
aspect/influence is a component of the web of influence fortune exerts in the tale: the
gods symbolize the worshippers' emotions and, as established above, fortune
manipulates their lives when they are under the sway of their emotions. For Palamon
and Arcite to pray to the deified embodiment of their carnal and aggressive impulses is
therefore for them indirectly to worship fortune's hegemony over their lives.

But although the planets and stars were considered to influence human
behaviour, in the Christian view they did not determine it (Bennett 161). This limited
influence is partly because the planetary powers are considered to be neutral: only the
human devotees turn their influence into something good or bad (Manzalaoui 246).
This view, however, does not square with the highly unflattering portraits of Venus,
Mars and Saturn: Chaucer's gods are not simply astrological forces but are also
reflections of negative human qualities.

Boethius provides a clearer understanding of the concept of free will explored in
the tale through the relationship between the gods and their worshippers. He wonders
"...yif ther be any liberte of fre wille in this ordre of causes that clyven thus togidre in
hemself, or elles I wolden witen yif that the destinal cheyne constrenith the moevynges
of the corages of men" (V. pr. 2, lines 3-7). Part of Lady Philosophy's response is to
assert that

ther is liberte of fre wil, ne was neve ne nature of reasoun that it ne
hadde liberte of fre wil. For every thing that may naturely usen resoun,
it hath doom by which it discernith and demeth every thing; thanne
knoweth it by itsel thinges that been to fleen and thinges that ben to
desiren. And thilke thing that any wight demeth to ben desired, that
axeth or desireth he; and fleeth thilke thing that he troweth to ben to
fleen. (V. pr. 2, lines 8-18) (Schweitzer 36)

Man's ability to reason therefore gives him the power to evaluate what is good and
what should be avoided. But of course, as Lady Philosophy points out, what is
considered desirable or undesirable is determined entirely by what man judges to be one
or the other. Ultimately, it is man's system of values and beliefs that will provide him
with the criteria for choosing and rejecting. If man has a suspect value-system, therefore, as Chaucer's characters do, he may well choose the bad and reject the good. The tale's elaborate astrological machinery is thus an example of the way the worshippers, by not recognizing the true good, have brought themselves under fortune's hegemony through the exercise of their own choice (Schweitzer 36). In Chaucer's tale the characters' values make them choose to let their emotions decide the outcome of events, as the pagan deities symbolizing those emotions are shown to dictate events on the walls of the temples.

Chaucer makes it perfectly clear that the protagonists have made a grave mistake in deferring to the forces represented in the temples through his detailed depiction of the interior of each structure. The most obvious difference between his version of the temple of Venus and Boccaccio's is Chaucer's emphasis on suffering. Before getting down to details, the narrator sums up the general tenor of what will be described:

First in the temple of Venus maystow se
Wroght on the wal, ful pitous to biholde,
The broken slepes, and the sikes colde,
The sacred teeris and the waymentynge,
The fiery strokes of the desirynge,
That loves servantz in this lyf enduren. (1918-23)

This brief summation, which sees love purely as something that induces misery and pain, is perfectly in keeping with the way in which love is depicted in the tale. In Boccaccio's version love is far less grim. It is presented as an allegory in which the individuated characteristics of love walk about in a beautiful garden. Palaemon's prayer sees: "...a leafy and beautiful garden full of very green plants,...fresh grasses,...every new flower...and...clear fountains springing..." (VII. 51). The emphasis throughout is on natural and artificial beauty (see also VII. 52-53, 57). In this setting Yearning, Voluptuousness, Comeliness, Elegance, Affability, Courtesy, Beauty, Vain Delight, Nobility, mad Boldness, Flattery, and Pandering wander about. It is removed from the world of human affairs because the setting is the mythological
home of Venus where the disembodied prayer of Palaemon has floated off to be heard.

In Chaucer’s version the human responsibility for the temples is also emphasized through reference to the fact that what is described has been created by human hands:

For soothly al the mount of Citheroun,
Ther Venus hath hir principal dwellynge,
Was shewed on the wal in portreyynge. (1936-38; see also 1914-17, 1932-34)

What we see, therefore, is this society’s vision of the meaning of erotic love. No emphasis is placed on beauty however, and not much on the erotic. We are told that what is described is beautiful by the narrator but we are never shown. Thus while Boccaccio’s depiction is straight-forwardly beautiful, the overall effect of Chaucer’s description is sinister, particularly through its references to Lies (1927), Force (1927), and Jealousy (1928; Ferster 41).

In Boccaccio, unlike Chaucer, the long list of the individual characteristics of love is unrelated to the central story. One stanza is devoted to the stories painted on the walls of Venus’s domain (VII.62), but no conclusion is drawn about what is described. Chaucer’s narrator mentions Narcissus, King Solomon, Hercules, Medea, Circe, Turnus and Croesus and then suggests:

Thus may ye seen that wysdom ne richesse,
Beautee ne sleigte, strengthe ne hardynesse,
Ne may with Venus holde champartie,
For as hir list the world than may she gye.
Lo, alle thise folk so caught were in hir las,
Til they for wo ful ofte seyde "allas!"
Suffiseth heere ensamples oon or two,
And though I koude rekene a thousand mo. (1947-54)

The principal message, then, concerns the power of love—but a power so divorced from the romantic or the beautiful that it is easy to forget that the narrator is discussing love here. Chaucer’s account of Venus’s temple thus contradicts typical courtly love imagery (Jones 148), for his aim is to display the grim reality that lies beneath the surface of the ideal. While Boccaccio focusses on those who succumb to the allurement
and beauty of love, Chaucer focusses on Venus's absolute power and the worshippers' absolute helplessness—an emphasis which suggests the Boethian view that the courtly version of love deprives man of freedom by encouraging him to seek false felicity (Bartholomew 91). Chaucer may, however, not attach blame to these characters for pursuing false felicity but only to their cherishing courtly love values which exhort them to pursue false felicity. The grimness of Chaucer's depiction of Venus's temple also emphasizes the idea that the concupiscible appetite is no more worthy than the irascible.

Chaucer's Mars, like his Venus, also differs radically from the Italian version. Chaucer's narrator begins, as with the temple of Venus, by emphasizing that the edifice is the result of human endeavour (see 1967-70, 1975, 2027, 2031). In Boccaccio's version, as before, Arcite's disembodied prayer travels to Mars's home (VII. 29). There is some similarity in each poem's description of Mars's physical environment (compare VII. 30-33 to 1971-94), but the over-all effect of Chaucer's description is far more forbidding than Boccaccio's. There are paintings in Mars's temple depicting his influence on man (VII. 36-37), but although the description is both bloody and grim, it lacks the wealth of human detail of Chaucer's depiction. Boccaccio's description of Mars's temple and Arcites's prayer shows that, generally speaking, he admires the forcefulness of this god (Salter 1983; 157). A clear indication of the two authors' disparate attitudes is the fact that while in Boccaccio's version the altars in the temple of Mars are only covered by the blood shed by men in battle (VII. 35), Chaucer's version depicts many violent deaths that are not the result of battle (Jones 190). The many different kinds of violence—accidents, private suicides, pickpockets, large numbers of dead and towns destroyed—are all bundled discordantly together. The temple's frescoes thus stress the similarity between violence glorified in aristocratic culture and violence officially condemned (Aers 178). These descriptions indicate that
the distinction between sanctioned and unsanctioned violence is the spurious product of a belief in a martial/chivalric lifestyle (Aers 178). Although Boccaccio says that in the Temple of Mars "...anyone ever subjected to violence was here in somber garb" (VII. 36), only the sort of violence that occurs in battles and wars is actually represented. It is clear, therefore, that Chaucer's decision to depict both Venus and Mars's temples so grimly, to locate them in Athens, and to make Theseus and Athens responsible for their construction, raises questions about the morality of a society that worships such forces. I have not dealt with Diana and her temple because, although Chaucer also depicts her negatively, her principal significance in the tale is to show how the chaste is overpowered by the concupiscible and irascible.

The discrepancy between Boccaccio's generally favourable attitude towards the gods and Chaucer's unfavourable one is especially noticeable in the scenes which deal with the gods' resolution of the Thebans' contradictory prayers. In Boccaccio's version, not much is said of this process except that the prayers set off a dispute in the heavens which lasts until "... with masterly skill, a way was found between them [Venus and Mars] to satisfy the petitions of both parties" (VII. 67). No particular god is given the credit and this leaves the impression that the gods act in consort to resolve the situation. The "masterly skill" lies in the gods having found a way to genuinely "satisfy the petitions of both parties." This interpretation is born out later by the way in which the Italian author handles the tournament's outcome.

In the "Knight's Tale," Arcite's and Palamon's prayers produce a less dignified reaction in the gods:

And right anon swich strif ther is bigonne,  
For thilke grauntyng, in the hevene above,  
Bitwixe Venus, the goddesse of love,  
And Mars, the stierne god armypotente,  
That Juppiter was bisy it to stente,  
Til that the pale Saturnus the colde,  
That knew so manye of aventures olde,
The message here is plain and simple: Jupiter, who is generally a just god, cannot find a way of resolving the situation. Only the villainous Saturn is capable of coming up with a solution to Venus and Mars’ dispute.

It is significant that time and space is taken in Chaucer’s abbreviated version of Boccaccio’s tale to describe a god who makes no appearance in The Book of Theseus. One result of this is to underline the ineffectiveness of Jupiter (see 2440-46). In place of the positive sense of order which we would expect to emerge out of a solution invented by this generally decent god, Chaucer has inserted a god known for his destructiveness. And to understand more clearly the kind of order Saturn represents we are given a seventeen-line description of his nature (2454-70). Lines such as "Myn is the ruyn of the hye halles; / The fallynge of the toures and of the walles" (2463-64) show that only an unfortunate outcome can be expected from an event brought about through Saturn’s influence. Chaucer’s Saturn possesses an expedient, as opposed to moral, "wysdom" (2448), which is only likely to bring about an "order" based on human misery and destruction (2456-69; Aers 179).

The fact that this God’s solution to the tournament does not truly satisfy the worshippers’ desires is indicated by Arcite’s prayer to Mars in which he sees the tournament only as a means to the end of winning Emelye. Arcite thinks and talks like a courtly lover and not a warrior (2393-97). He explains to Mars that "...wel I woot, er she me mercy heete, / I moot with strengthe wynne hire in the placen" (2398-99), and begs help from the god of war for the pain of love he himself has suffered:

Thanne help me, lord, tomorwe in my bataille,  
For thilke fyr that whilom brente thee,  
As wel as thilke fyr now brenneth me. (2402-04)

A large portion of his prayer describes Mars’ own sufferings as a lover of Venus and his humiliation at the hands of Vulcan (2383-90). Arcite therefore suggests that Mars
should "For thilke sorwe that was in thyn herte, / Have routhe as wel upon myn peynes smerte" (2391-92).

In Boccaccio's version, Arcites makes a very brief allusion to the pain Mars has suffered as a lover but concentrates primarily on the idea of gaining victory: "Honor me with your might in this coming palestral game. Such a gift certainly would not seem slight to me, but the greatest good" (VII. 27). He also talks and thinks like a follower of Mars rather than of Venus, of someone who will need all his "courage" (VII. 26) in the coming tournament. There is no mention of Emilia and certainly no sense of seeing the tournament primarily as a means to winning her, as Chaucer's Arcite does. The gods' solution in the English version, therefore, leaves much to be desired. In fact, Arcite's prayer makes him the tale's most outstanding example of the ignorance of pagans, and of those who will pay the price because: "We witen nat what thing we preyen heere" (1260; A. Payne 228).

The impasse between Venus and Mars which necessitates Saturn's intervention also shows once more that a conflict between the concupiscible and irascible forces in man (signified here by the two gods) cannot be justly resolved. Jupiter's abilities as a peace-maker and as a force for good are irrelevant because only destruction and chaos will result from the conflict between these forces. The particular manner in which Saturn solves problems, therefore—by bringing about destruction—is entirely appropriate as a way of resolving this dispute. The destructive interaction of the courtly and the chivalric, illustrated in the first two parts of Chaucer's poem by the Thebans' conflict over Emelye, is thus extended into the highest reaches of the duke's solution here. And it is Theseus's solution which is responsible for symbolically concentrating the Venerean and Martian influences by literally incorporating their presence in his stadium. The destructive presence of the gods in the stadium therefore indicates that chivalric and courtly solutions to conflicts will fail because these codes exalt man's
irascible and concupiscible impulses.

Saturn's intervention also completely undermines Theseus's solution in terms of the standards of justice, honour, and the chivalric code generally. Saturn's solution means that Arcite wins the tournament but not the prize he yearns for, while Palamon wins Emelye purely by default (Fifield 103). Although Palaemon also loses the tournament but eventually wins Emily in Boccaccio's version, Arcites has shown that he is more concerned with winning the tournament than Emily. He does, moreover, marry Emily before he dies.

The parallelism between the gods and human characters in both tales also takes on greater significance in the light of Chaucer's adding Saturn to his version. In both versions, Arcite is obviously paired with Mars, Palamon with Venus and Emelye with Diana. Only in Chaucer's version, however, can Theseus be paired off with Saturn, since only there does Saturn step in and resolve the dispute between Mars and Venus, as Theseus has stepped in to resolve the dispute between Arcite and Palamon on a human level of order. The parallels between the duke and Saturn mean the careful structuring of Chaucer's poem has been extended beyond human intercourse to the realm of the gods. More importantly, this extended structure focusses on Saturn as the representative of divine order (Rogers 36), thus pointing out what a reprehensible sort of order Theseus and his society have chosen.

In Boccaccio's version, we are encouraged to believe in the justness and efficacy of the solution worked out at a divine level of power. Venus and Mars are "...satisfied with the sequence of events for the prayers that had been offered them" (IX. 2) after Arcites wins the tournament, even though Venus's follower, Palaemon, has not yet received the answer to his prayers. Venus and Mars discuss events in a harmonious and dignified fashion together. Venus tells Mars:

"You have answered Arcites' prayer well, for as you see, he is victorious; now it rests with me to fulfill Palaemon's, since, as you
observe, he is sad because he has lost." Mars, become gentle, said to her, "What you say is true dear; now do whatever gives you perfect pleasure." (IX. 3)

Boccaccio thus depicts the gods as acting in consort. There is no sense that the legitimacy or suitability of the forces solving the Thebans’ dispute should be questioned.

In the "Knight’s Tale," the gods’ reaction to Arcite’s win is as emotional and selfish as the forces they symbolize. After Arcite’s victory at the tournament, Venus weeps not in sorrow for Palamon’s loss but "...for wantynge of hir wille" (2665). The "queene of love" (2664) epithet used by the narrator in describing her reaction is ironic. There is nothing very majestic in this queen weeping in a fury of frustrated pride. In fact, the image conveyed is of a child-like figure whose tears "the lystes fille" (2666).

The sense of immaturity is maintained when Saturn intervenes by admonishing her:

Doughter, hoold thy pees!
Mars hath his wille, his knyght hath al his boone,
And, by myn heed, thow shalt been esed soone. (2668-70)

Venus obviously does not know of the "solution" which is about to be enacted by Pluto on her behalf. Chaucer has thus made his Venus and Mars as helpless, without Saturn’s help, as are their worshippers, suggesting that as long as the emotions these gods symbolize are given centre stage, the only way their often contradictory desires and wishes can be resolved is through the use of malignant and deceitful forces.

The fact that Chaucer is far more interested in the destructive forces controlling the outcome of Theseus’s tournament than in the joust itself is indicated by his relatively brief description of the combatants. While Boccaccio devotes forty-four stanzas to describing the various nobles who come to the tournament to fight on either side (VI. 13-57), Chaucer affords space only to a description of two representative nobles. These are not so much characters as symbols of the forces which make them
come to fight, forces which are reflected in their external descriptions (Boitani 1977; 141). Thus although neither of the Thebans’ appearance at the tournament is described, the portraits of Emetrius and Lycurgus are also about them, or rather, about the qualities and forces which they and all knights embody (David 83).

The descriptions of Lygurge and Emetreus work in unison rather than as contrasts, as A.C. Spearing puts it, to "...make up a magnificent and terrifying image of the animal in man" (69). Both kings’ facial expressions are described metaphorically as being the equivalent of fierce animals (2133, 2171). Both are surrounded by various animals known for their savagery (2148-49, 2178, 2186) and King Lygurge is also described as wearing a bear-skin (2142) and as having hair as black as any raven’s feather (2144). The transformation of Arcite’s and Palamon’s private duel to prestigious tournament does not mean, therefore, that the knights are no longer operating at the bestial level. Although the conflict is now taking placing in a "civilized" stadium setting, the behaviour remains on the animal level (Rowe 176).

The concentration on the bestial in these descriptions is matched by the sheer opulence of each king’s dress and accoutrements. For example, Emetreus’s cloth vest which bears his coat of arms is "Couched with perles white and rounde and grete;" and "His sadel was of brend gold newe ybete" (2161, 2162). The effect of the description is to fuse the savagery of these kings with a sense of decorative splendour in the same way that splendour and savagery are fused in the stadium and temples. There is no sense, however, of this splendour controlling the savagery; rather, the jewels and the silks and the gold pay homage to force as the knights worship savagery in their temples.

Chaucer, however, does not just rely on symbolic descriptions to make clear the forces that are motivating these knights. The savage description of the two nobles is framed in the text by a direct statement about why the two armies have come to Athens to fight. Just before the appearance of Lygurge and Emetreus we are told:
For every wight that lovede chivalrye  
And wolde, his thankes, han a passant name,  
Hath preyed that he myghte been of that game.  

(2106-08)

Also:

..knowne wel that every lusty knyght  
That loveth paramours and hath his myght,  
Were it in Engelond or elleswhere,  
They wolde, hir thankes, wilnen to be there.  

(2111-14; see also 2182-84)

In Chaucer's version, therefore, the two outstanding representatives of two armies who, we are told, come to fight for the traditional chivalric and courtly reasons, are seen by the English author primarily in bestial terms. In Boccaccio's version an explanation of why these nobles have come to fight is also given: "They did not come here out of necessity, but because of the desire of the lords and their people to display nobility and their desire to acquire fame with honor according to the valor of each" (VI 64). But in the description of the numerous nobles present there is no emphasis upon their savagery and hardly mention of animals.

Not suprisingly, the actual fighting in the stadium differs in each version. Boccaccio's depiction emphasizes the courage, ardour and skill of the contestants. What is described is often violent but it never possesses the personal animosity that Chaucer's Thebans show each other and that contradicts the true spirit of chivalry (Jones 179; compare 2623-35 to VIII. 11-12). It could be argued that Theseus's edict against fighting to the death in Chaucer's version (2541) makes his tournament seem more civilized than Boccaccio's, since Boccaccio's Theseus makes no such stipulation. But Theseus's stipulation only makes Arcite's horrific wounds and death come as a greater shock than it appears to be in the The Book of Theseus (Salter 1983; 169). The failure of the tournament, in fact, is more pronounced because Arcite is fatally injured seconds after Theseus proclaims he "...wol be trewe juge, and no partie. / Arcite of Thebes shal have Emelie" (2657-58).

In the Italian version, the author prepares his audience for Arcite's eventual
injury and death. Before the beginning of his tournament Arcites speaks to his army about the possibilities both of winning and of losing:

   And if the warm altars of our great arms-powerful god did not deceive me yesterday when I went to sacrifice to him, without any doubt I shall be the victor. But if the opposite may come to pass for wrath justly deserved, I pray that it fall on my head before any of you suffer evil. (VII. 137)

Not only does this prepare the audience for the possibility of Arcites eventually losing, but it also shows that Arcites himself has seen this as a possibility.

In his speech Arcites emphasizes the idea of honour: "Should you be more pleased to see me exalted rather than bound by love, the gods have placed honour in the middle of this plain as the reward of prowess" (VII. 140). Arcites's words suggest that in this contest he values the Martian pleasure of victory more highly than the Venerean pleasure of his prize, Emilia. The total effect of Arcites's speech to his men, therefore, is to make the outcome of the tournament the gods have worked out seem just even to the one who will end up dead. Arcites has emphasized the nobility of their battle and the only way for his and his army's valour to come to its fullest fruition is for Arcites actually to die in pursuit of his prize. (2)

The importance of Arcites's victory both to the knight and to Athens is thus emphasized after the contest in The Book of Theseus. In spite of the injuries that result from his fall, Arcites "...was not yet so weak that he could not sit up all dressed in triumphal robes and crowned as was his due with green laurel" (IX. 32). And after leaving the stadium, Arcites first stops at a temple dedicated to Mars to offer up Palaemon's armaments to the god: "...he had the armaments offered to great Mars,

2. All we are told of Palaemon's words to his men is that "Palaemon also invited his men to great honours with noble words, and encouraged them to perform well as earnestly as he could, and he besought them fervently." (VII. 145). Although this ostensibly suggests that Palaemon said much the same thing as Arcites has to his men, the overall effect of the summary is to relegate Palaemon to the role of a supporting player. The vastly unequal weighing of time and attention makes it clear that it is Arcites rather than his cousin who deserves to win the tournament.
whom he thanked with a pious heart for the victory he had received" (IX. 38). Arcites then rides side-by-side with Emilia in a victory parade:

...he circled the countryside with great rejoicing, gazing frequently at Emilia and praising her beauty more than ever....

No person, young or old, maiden or wife, remained in Athens who did not run there with spread wings as that glorious couple approached. The roads and the fields and the roof tops and the houses were all crowded with jubilant people. Everybody chanted the glory of Arcites and the new bride he brought with him. (IX. 39, 41)

Most importantly of all, Arcites actually marries Emilia before he dies, and Boccaccio makes the fulfillment of this act part of Arcites's just reward. Referring to the plan which Theseus required Arcites and his cousin to carry out in order to receive Theseus's pardon, Arcites tells the duke:

Sir, your command has been fulfilled with no slight measure of grievous pain on my part, and on that account I think that I have won Emilia and pardon for my fault. So I claim her, if it be your pleasure and if this is the time for me to have her. (IX. 81)

Theseus replies: "Sweet friend, it is my dear pleasure. I do not want anything as much as this" (IX. 82). This interchange sets the ritualistic seal, as it were, on the justice of Theseus's plan and the gods' execution of that plan. Arcites claims Emilia as his rightful prize and is gracefully accorded that right by the man who has set down the terms by which Arcites may both marry Emilia and right the wrong he and his cousin have committed against the duke. Boccaccio describes how:

...the barons were gathered together...and the sacrifices were properly offered as was customary in those times, and Arcites gracefully wed Emilia there, and the days of their nuptials were prolonged, besides, until he should be strong and well healed. And so it was affirmed and ordained. (IX. 83)

The supremacy of the Martian over the Venerean is maintained here, therefore.

Not surprisingly, Arcites's subsequent death is regarded as a tragedy but one which does not bring into question any of the prevailing values of the Martian and Venerean way of life practiced by the three principal knights in The Book of Theseus.
Although Arcites regrets he may never consummate his marriage to Emilia (X. 18), his final speech to Theseus shows he has not regretted being in love:

Love taught me to become humble; it made me fearless, it made me gracious and gentle, it made my faith holy and pure. It showed me that I should never hold any creature in contempt, it made me courteous and obedient, it made me valiant and steadfast. (X. 23)

Arcites also talks to Theseus about the gifts love gave him and speaks generously of the gods:

...it [love] endowed me with such ready daring that I placed myself in your hands under another name at the risk of dying. Surely, the gods were not hostile to me in that. Rather, they made my plans work out completely and securely... (X. 24)

Arcites does, however, lament his death, regret that Emilia will never be his and feel sad that he will no longer partake in any of life's pleasures (X. 101-110). But his death-bed speech expresses the misery anyone would surely feel if they were to die when they are young and in love. The fact that Arcites does die under these conditions without questioning the courtly and chivalric way of life that has brought him to this end indicates that he does not attach blame or regret to that way of life. His speech in praise of love to Theseus is proof of this.

In the English version Arcite's gruesome injuries and the efforts to treat them become the focus of Chaucer's attention as much as the knight's death-bed utterances. The most that is said about Arcites's injuries in Boccaccio is when Idmon, a famous physician, explains to Theseus that Arcites will inevitably die because he has "...internal fractures, both lengthwise and transversely" (X. 13). Chaucer's description is far more involved:

Swelleth the brest of Arcite, and the soore
Encreeseth at his herte moore and moore.
The clothered blood, for any lechecraft,
Corrupteth, and in his bouk ylaft,
That neither veyne-blood, ne ventusynge,
Ne drynke of herbes may ben his helpynge.
The vertu expulsif, or animal,
Fro thilke vertu cleped natural
Ne may the venym voyden ne expelle.
The cumulative effect of this description is to replace Boccaccio's depiction of the death-bed of a hero with an atmosphere of sickness (Davenport 118-19). The grimness of the description in fact works against the traditional glorification of violence and those who celebrate the military aggression which has brought it about (Aers 183).

Chaucer's description also has repercussions for the ceremonial opulence of the occasion which has brought these injuries about. The transferral of the Thebans' quarrel from the grove to the arena has done nothing to diminish the destructive nature of Arcite's and Palamon's aggression.

Chaucer's decision to deprive Arcite of the enjoyment of the martial aspect of his triumph as well as the final goal of the tournament, Emelye, is perhaps the most significant change he makes to Boccaccio. How much can Arcite's victory win mean to him if he is too ill even to give thanks to Mars--let alone marry Emelye? Chaucer has ensured that only the wishes of the gods are fulfilled in the "Knight's Tale." Mars has his victory and Venus now knows that Palamon will eventually gain Emelye.

Chaucer does not lay responsibility for the tournament's grisly outcome only at Saturn's door, however. The text draws several parallels between Arcite's physical injuries and the "wounds" love inflicted on the knight in Part I, and thus makes the first link in the chain of causes which leads to Arcite's unfortunate demise be courtly love. Just as Arcite's figurative love wounds were inflicted when he first saw Emelye in the garden (1114-16), so he receives his fatal physical wound as he first views Emelye in the stadium after winning the tournament. No such parallel is drawn between Arcite and Emelye in Boccaccio (Schweitzer 23). Arcite's horse, moreover, does not simply rear up at the sight of the fury and fall over backwards onto him, as in Boccaccio.

The pipes of his longes gon to swelle,
And every lacerte in his brest adoun
Is shent with venym and corrupcioun.
Hym gayneth neither, for to gete his lif,
Vomyt upward, ne dounward laxatif.
Al is tobrosten thilke regioun. (2743-57)
Instead, Arcite is "...pighte...on the pomel of his heed" (2689), just as the image of Emelye, in Arcite's imagination, turns "...al up so doun / Bothe habit and eek disposicioun" (1377-78) when he is in exile (Schweitzer 24). Finally, Arcite dies from the congestion of the corrupted blood around the heart, a parallel for the illness love induces in the courtly suitor through his inability to remove his beloved's image from his thoughts (Schweitzer 27).

Chaucer ties together the causes and effects of both sets of "injuries" by making both Saturnian in nature:

...Saturn reigns over the retentive "virtue," or force, in man's body, and it is the domination of the retentive virtue over the expulsive which finally prevents any relief of the "venym and corruption" gathered in Arcite's shattered chest.... (Salter 1983; 169-70)

And while the fury which overthrows Arcite's horse at the tournament and which is responsible for these injuries is summoned by Saturn, love-sickness, too, is a form of Saturnian melancholia engendered by the Saturnian humour (Schweitzer 23-24). Finally, although the fury comes from above in Boccaccio's version (IX. 6-7), in Chaucer it comes up out of the ground, which is cold and dry like Saturnian melancholy (Schweitzer 23-24).

The Saturnian nature of Arcite's wounds, combined with the careful correspondence drawn between his injuries and a traditional lover's malady, reinforce the notion that his injuries have been caused and created by Arcite's all-consuming love for Emelye. In an important moral sense, the wounds of love and the wounds of the body are both fatal and both self-inflicted here through Arcite's submission of his reason to the impulse to love. Chaucer has already ironically implied in the tale that the Theban's love for Emelye may bring about his death. Whilst in exile Arcite comments that "Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye, / I nam but deed; ther nys no remedye" (1273-74). The exact opposite turns out to be true, because when Arcite exchanges his first real glance with Emelye--after winning the tournament--he receives
his death wound. Arcite's earlier lament is thus more than ironical, it is also revelatory: it explains through irony his complete wrong-headedness. The tale's pattern of negative courtly love imagery culminates in these parallels showing that the Venerean/concupiscible impulse is as destructive in its effect on man as the Martian/irascible impulse.

The scientific manner in which Chaucer details both sets of "injuries" argues that he views Arcite's afflictions from a Boethian rather than romantic perspective. Certainly, his descriptions are less poetically imaginative than Boccaccio's (Ciavolella 235). Poetic generalities predominate in Boccaccio's initial description of the love-sick Arcites: "...his heart was pierced by Love and he found no rest. Day and night, without respite, he poured forth sighs as hot as fire. He often expressed his grief by tears, and his sorrows showed clearly in his face" (IV. 26). Chaucer's initial description is more specific and more grim:

His slep, his mete, his drynke, is hym biraft,
That lene he wex and drye as is a shaft;
His eyen holwe, and grisly to biholde,
His hewe falow and pale as ashen colde. (1361-64; 3)

Boccaccio relies on poetical metaphors to express Arcites's suffering: "His voice had diminished, too, and so had his physical strength, so that he seemed to everyone to have come back to the upper regions from the prison of hell more than from any place in this life" (IV. 29). Chaucer substitutes medieval scientific explanation for poetic metaphors:

And in his geere for al the world he ferde
Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye
Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye,
Engendred of humour malencolik
Biforen, in his celle fantastik. (1372-76)

To suffer in the name of love seems no more attractive here than to suffer from small

3. The reference to Arcite looking as "pale as ashen colde" here maintains the pattern of foreshadowing Arcite's eventual fate, while the context of this metaphor's use once again underlines the forces that will bring about that death.
pox. Chaucer's suggestion of mania rather than simple love-sickness also implies, since we know Arcite's sickness has been caused by his love for Emelye, that love-sickness is a kind of madness, the kind of delusion that Lady Philosophy would suggest Arcite is suffering from. The text's final comment on Arcite's love-sickness--"What sholde I al day of his wo endite?" (1380)--also invites us to have little sympathy for the Theban's suffering (Jones 171). Perhaps more importantly, Chaucer's depiction grossly exaggerates the love complaint convention found in corresponding situations in romance or courtly allegory (Thurston 152). Chaucer's approach to Arcite's love-sickness is therefore primarily Boethian since it defines love as a disease which distorts the sufferer's ability to think clearly, just as the overwhelming desire for any earthly good is shown to cloud man's thinking in the Consolation.

Chaucer's negative attitude towards courtly love is continued in Arcite's death-bed speech. This speech comes immediately after the grisly description of the Theban's injuries, and thereby justifies the negative thoughts and feelings Arcite expresses:

Allas, the wo! Allas, the peynes stronge,
That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!
Allas, the deeth! Allas, myn Emelye!
Allas, departynge of oure compaignye!
Allas, myn hertos queene! Allas, my wyf,
Myn hertos lady, endere of my lyf! (2771-76)

Although Arcites in the Italian version also expresses great regret at dying, Chaucer adds an ambiguous note by having Arcite regret both his loss of Emelye and "the peynes stronge" he suffered in her service. The rhythmic repetition of "Allas" compounds Arcite's evaluation of his life and his service to Emelye into one long expression of regret—as if the rhythm of his heart beats more with a feeling of having wasted his life than of still simply loving Emelye. Arcite's death-bed speech is, moreover, far less elaborate and ritualized than Arcites's. He no longer seems to care about the fact of having been a knight.

Chaucer maintains the sense that Arcite has made a very grave mistake in his
life choices even after the knight's death. As Arcite goes through the process of recommending Palamon to Emelye (2783-97), he twice mentions Jupiter who, he believes, will soon guide his soul: "And Juppiter so wys my soule gye" (2786), and, "So Juppiter have of my soule part" (2792). These references to a benign God in charge of Arcite's soul are, however, misinformed in the context of the little information the narrator is willing to give out after Arcite finally dies: "Arcite is coold, ther Mars his soule gye!" (2815). This prospect is grim indeed, considering the tale's depiction of Mars, for it implies that knights have little reason to expect a peaceful or happy afterlife.

In Boccaccio's version there is no confusion and little cause for concern about the god who will take charge of Arcites's soul. Just before his death in The Book of Theseus Arcites makes sacrifices to the god Mercury "...so that in recompense he might be pleased to carry my spirit to a happy clime, since it has been surrendered to him" (X. 90). During his prayer Arcites asks that his soul be allowed to dwell in "...the midst of the holy souls who dwell in Elysium" (X. 95). Arcites sacrifices to Mercury partly because, as he explains in his prayer, it is Mercury's office to "...bear souls from their bodies and then cause them to dwell where [he] think[s] best..." (X. 94). But also, since Mercury is usually a kind god (X. 99), he will be likely to lead Arcites to where he wishes to rest. After Boccaccio has finished describing Arcites's soul looking back down on earth and laughing, he finishes his depiction of its fate by saying that: "Then he went to the place Mercury had chosen for him" (XI. 3). Here again, then, the gods are shown not to fail their human subjects. And although the world depicted by Boccaccio is decidedly pagan, the tale does not generally criticize the forces its characters worship.

Arcites's death ultimately only possesses sadness for those he leaves behind. Boccaccio shows Arcites having a different perspective on his past life after he leaves
his body: "When Arcites had finished naming her whom he had loved more than anyone else in this world, his weightless spirit went soaring towards the concavity of the eighth heaven as it left the convex elements behind" (XI. 1). Soon, "...he turned to look back down on the things he had left behind..." (XI. 2). Eventually,...

...his eyes came to rest, as he turned back, on the spot where he had left his body.

And he laughed to himself at the plaintive laments of the Lernean people, and he severely censured the vanity of humankind, which pursues the false beauty of the world, neglecting heaven out of the clouded madness and darksome blindness of their minds. (XI. 2-3)

Thus while Arcites's death is allowed to keep the noble stature of a tragedy on earth, Boccaccio's audience is encouraged not to view his demise in a negative light. Boccaccio has also infused a sense of Christian purity and wisdom into his description of Arcite's rejection of the human world, implying that salvation, of a kind, is permitted the Theban even though he is a worshipper of pagan gods. Both Theseus and the gods have done well by Arcites in the Italian version, therefore.

In the English version Arcite is not allowed to ascend to heaven or to recognize the limited value of human existence. Chaucer's decision to deny Arcite this level of understanding suggests that he is making a point about the limitations Arcite and his fellow characters' pagan world-view places on their ability to understand the universe. In place of Arcites's after-death spiritual experience, Chaucer's Theban expresses bewilderment:

What is this world? What asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, withouten any compaignye. (2777-79)

His bewilderment here comes immediately after his expression of regret about the way he has lived his life, implying that the courtly and chivalric road Arcite has chosen through service to Emelye leads only to confusion. To be a courtly lover and knight in Chaucer's tale, then, is also to be a pagan whose beliefs deny him the right to the peace
and understanding about the nature of existence a Christian will achieve after death.

The strength of Chaucer’s religiously-motivated indifference to Arcite’s death is also reflected in the unmoved attitude of the narrator to Arcite’s fate. Just after the gruesome description of Arcite’s injuries and just before his death-bed speech, the narrator comments that:

Nature hath now no dominacioun.
And certeinly, ther Nature wol nat wirche,
Fare wel phisik! Go ber the man to chirche! (2758-60)

The reference to church here is ironic since Arcite can never be carried off to the salvation which will be afforded by a Christian church, but only be taken to a pagan temple (Curtis 275). Arcite’s pagan fate after death is also underlined by the narrator’s suggestion that Mars will guide his soul (2815). The reference to Mars is coupled with an emphasis upon the fact of Arcite’s bodily death: "Arcite is coold, ther Mars his soul gye!" (2815). The use of cold here imagistically couples Arcite with the "cold, frosty regioun" (1973) inhabited by Mars. And the implication is that Arcite’s soul will not rise through the spheres heavenward but remain coldy corporeal because his pagan beliefs have marked him out as one who belongs in Mars’s cold, frosty and spiritually unilluminated regions.

Looked at from a Boethian perspective, in fact, Arcite’s bewilderment at how, at one moment, he can be "with his love," and the next, "in his colde grave," can be seen in an ironic light (Salter 1962; 29). From this perspective there is no bewilderment: Arcite has asked for Emelye and has paid the price of desiring something that leads him away from the true good. As W.F. Bolton suggests, "Arcite refers to nothing but the kind of illusion that has led him to this moment, for Emily has never been in his company, never been his wife. The question 'What asketh men to have?' he has already unknowingly answered, 'We witen nat what thing we preyen heere'" (1260) (Bolton 225).
Responsibility for the tragedy of Arcite’s death, though, must principally be laid at the door of the value-system which led him to prize Emelye above all other goods. When Arcite comments that "We witen nat what thing we preyen heere" he understands the foolishness of men who constantly pine for certain earthly goods, but, as shown earlier, the value he places upon gaining Emelye is such that he can immediately refute the understanding his reasoning self shows in a courtly and supremely ironic avowal: "Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye, / I nam but deed; there nys no remedye" (1273-74). Arcite’s bewildered questioning condemns the system of values that have brought him to the point of a seemingly pointless death (Aers 183). And his death is of such a grimness that Theseus will be required to explain and justify its necessity in the last part of the poem.
CHAPTER THREE: THE EXPLICATION

The particular manner in which Arcite dies in Chaucer's version has important repercussions for the remainder of the tale. Arcite dies questioning the system of values that has led him to his death. Furthermore, the city of Athens has difficulty in accepting or understanding his death, as is suggested by the fact that, while the duke persuades Palaemon and Emilia to marry after a period of "many days" (XII. 3) in Boccaccio's version, in Chaucer's poem a certain number of "yeres" (2967) go by before the duke speaks. The nature of the duke's failure to solve the conflict calls into question the way of life depicted in the tale and crystalized for the reader through the tournament. That failure explains why the duke in Chaucer's tale feels it necessary to attempt to clarify and justify what has happened in his final speech.

Three passages surrounding the duke's oration in the "Knight's Tale" help to shed light on the meaning contained in his speech. First, before the speech it is made clear that Theseus has summoned the Athenian Parliament partly in order to achieve an alliance between Athens and Thebes through Emelye and Palamon's marriage. The ostensibly philosophical nature of what the duke says in the speech is thus ultimately subsumed in this political aim by his commanding Emelye, in front of the parliament, to agree to marry Palamon. Second, the views Theseus's father, Egeus, expresses before the speech effectively encapsulate the conclusions Theseus comes to in his speech. Egeus suggests that death provides a happy and inescapable release from a world whose grim nature man must accept rather than hope to understand. Similarly, Theseus offers no comprehensive explanation of life's meaning or of what happens after death, underlining the pagan limitations of both his and his father's world view. Finally, the limitations on the duke's thinking imposed by his pagan world are also suggested by the nature of the questions posed by the Athenian widows, bewildered by
Arcite's death, before the speech.

Not surprisingly, most of the specific proposals made by Theseus in his speech echo but do not accurately reflect Boethian philosophy. Specifically, the duke sees the chain of love as something that deprives man of freedom rather than offering him a guide to achieving freedom, as in Boethius. The duke’s conception of love, as the universal controlling force, is ultimately no different from the concupiscible passion which has controlled and deprived man of freedom during the course of the tale. He fails to achieve his ambitious aim of justifying and explaining the workings of the First Mover to man implied at the beginning of the speech. Indeed, the duke’s views only emphasize man’s lack of freedom through their reliance on death or the mortality of all things to establish the wisdom of the First Mover.

Boccaccio’s duke only makes his final speech from the practical consideration of carrying out Arcites’s wish that Palaemon marry Emilia. The speech is free from both ulterior political motives and ambitious philosophical considerations. It lacks a philosophical dimension because the just outcome of events in the Italian version leaves the duke with nothing to explain or justify. Boccaccio’s duke’s speech shows, moreover, that he does not have the essentially grim view of life Chaucer’s duke has. The duke’s philosophy in the "Knight’s Tale" amounts to no more than stoical endurance—and is thus a distortion of Boethian thinking.

* * * * *

In Chaucer’s version the philosophical substance of the duke’s final speech sits uneasily with his reasons for speaking:

By processe and by lengthe of certeyn yeres,
Al stynted is the moornynge and the teres
Of Grekes, by oon general assent.
Thanne semed me ther was a parlement
At Athenes, upon certein pointz and caas;
Among the whiche pointz yspoken was
To have with certein contrees alliaunce,
And have fully of Thebans obeisaunce. (2967-74)

Philosophy will thus ultimately play second fiddle to the aim of bringing about this political union by persuading Palamon and Emelye to stop grieving over Arcite and marry. In the Italian version the duke achieves no political advantage through Emilia’s union with Palaemon. The sincerity of the duke’s philosophy in the English version is hence open to question in the light of this ulterior motivation. Chaucer has put a “special emphasis” not present in Boccaccio on the personal aims of the duke (Aers 188).

At the end of the philosophical portion of his speech, Theseus spends time (3075-89) persuading (or perhaps we should say, telling) Emelye to marry Palamon. To Palamon he confidently remarks: “I trowe ther nedeth litel sermonyng / To make yow assente to this thyng” (3091-92). In Boccaccio’s version both Palaemon (XII. 21-29) and Emilia (XII. 40-42) are reluctant to assent to Theseus’s request. Emilia, however, has already shown in the stadium scenes that she cares about both Thebans. We are offered no evidence in Chaucer’s version that Emelye truly cares for either Arcite or Palamon; rather, her solitary speech in the tale in Diana’s temple indicates she wishes to remain unmarried. The duke prefixes his request in this fashion: ’Suster’, quod he, ’this is my fulle assent, / With al th’avys heere of my parlement’” (3075-76), and reinforces the pressure after making his request by asking her to “Lene me youre hond, for this is owre accord” (3082). The duke is thus making a request the outcome of which has already been decided with or without Emelye’s consent. The fact that Emelye does not utter a word suggests her response is irrelevant.

The language Theseus employs in attempting to persuade Emelye to marry is full of courtly terminology. Emelye should in her "grace" "rewes" upon Palamon and reveal her "wommanly pitee" by marrying him. The irony is of course that in a
genuine courtly romance (or any relationship) these emotions can only be freely bestowed. Here, this language is yoked with words of command: "...ye shul of youre grace upon hym rewe," (3080) and "Lat se now...youre wommanly pitee" (3083). The total effect of Theseus's words to Emelye is to make light of the courtly tradition. His words are also perfectly in keeping with a tale in which two courtly suitors fight to the death over a maiden who knows nothing about them for most of the tale and, after she does find out about their feelings, wishes they would leave her alone. More importantly, in the light of Theseus's coercive language, his speech looks decidedly less philosophical in its aims. As Judith Ferster suggests, "Its aim is not truth but domination of Emily in order to dominate Thebes. Theseus is seeking not to describe or imitate reality, but to control it." (35). Ferster's insight here accurately captures the emphasis placed by Theseus's philosophy—as revealed in the speech—on control. Theseus preaches the necessity of adopting a philosophical postion of extreme stoicism in which man's only alternative in the face of overwhelming, unpredictable forces is to accept passively whatever occurs.

There is a close approximation between this stoical view and the opinions Egeus expresses before the First Mover speech. Egeus emphasizes the idea that all humans must die (2843-46) and that the world is a place of misery (2847) from which death provides a happy release (2849). The substance of Egeus's views emphasizes his pagan limitations, therefore, since there is no mention of an afterlife or of God's divine mercy. Indeed, the sum of pagan wisdom is that the workings of the universe's higher powers are unintelligible. Egeus and Theseus preach faith in the order of these powers, but they never truly expect to understand that order or, consequently, to structure an existence and a societal order around it (Rogers 37).

Egeus's supremely pessimistic assessment of life is a continuation of the worldview depicted and worshipped in Theseus's temples. These temples show a world
which is, as he says, "...a thurghfare ful of wo" (2847), a world so grim that death
would be welcome as "...an ende of every worldly soore" (2849). The narrator
suggests that Egeus's views comfort the people of Athens:

And over all this yet seyde he muchel moore
To this effect, ful wisely to enhorte
The peple that they sholde hem reconforte. (2850-52)

But the point surely is that there is very little possiblity for someone with Egeus's
beliefs to be able to receive genuine philosophical and spiritual comfort.

Egeus's words come immediately after a description of the mourning which the
Athenians, and particularly the women, experience after Arcite's death. His opinion
can thus be seen as an attempt to comfort both his son and these women who, referring
to Arcite, ask: "Why woldestow be deed,... / And haddest gold ynough, and Emelye?" (2835-36). Some critics feel that we are not meant to take what is asked as a literal
question, or even that we should see the women's words in a bathetic light. These two
lines and Egeus's comments are, however, the only dialogue in almost one hundred and
eighty lines (from 2809 to 2987). The women's comments may sound ridiculous, but
they have been given a prominent place in the text. To ask why Arcite dies when he
has money and Emelye, reveals the limitations of the women's understanding and their
commitment to romantic or courtly love and material wealth. Like Arcite himself,
then, they are bewildered and lost when it comes to dealing with existence beyond the
physical realm (Curtis 282).

The precise meaning of Theseus's speech is difficult to pin down in Chaucer's
version. This is because the speech is really quite deceptive in nature. It slowly
becomes clear that it "...will be in the nature of a substitution, a statement which will
attempt to transcend difficulties, rather than to analyze and solve them" (Salter 1983;
175). Thus although Theseus echoes the Consolation, he avoids the Boethian concern
which has been a central issue in the tale: "We seken faste after felicitee, / But we goon
wrong ful often, trewely" (1266-67; Olsson 126). Arcite’s death has raised a number of key issues centering around the misguided system of values which has encouraged him to abandon all else in the chase after Emelye. Issues such as Arcite’s apparent loss of free will, Athenian society’s moral responsibility for his death and the over-all lack of justice in the way events turned out (Schweitzer 38) need to be addressed, but Theseus’s speech fails to deal with them.

Although the duke’s speech is ultimately no more than an elucidation of the pagan system of belief described in the temples, its opening statement suggests it will explain far more:

The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love,
Greet was th’effect and heigh was his entente.
Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente,
For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee. (2987-93)

This magisterial beginning suggests that both the creator and his creation are worthy of unqualified admiration. Even stronger emphasis, however, is placed on the idea that the remainder of Theseus’s speech will unlock the mystery posed by the opening statement, since the duke implies that the greatness of the creator’s achievement lies in the purpose, result and reasons for his creation: the words emphasized include "entente," "effect" and the fact that the First Mover knew exactly "...why and what thereof he mente" by his creation. But the duke’s subsequent explanation of the workings of this divine chain of love, with its emphasis on absolute control, never offers a more complete or satisfying explanation than one of necessity: man must obey because he has no choice.

In Boccaccio’s version, in a speech whose purpose is to pacify the defeated army of Palamon (IX. 51), the duke cautiously asserts a world view which parallels Theseus’s opening proclamation in the English version:
Sirs, this opinion, which some hold to be true, is not new to me: that is, that in creating the world divine Providence foresaw with perfect lucidity the purpose of every seed sown, whether of rational or of brute being therein, and by eternal decree ordained that what had been foreseen should come to pass.

I do not know whether this be true, but if it should be true, we are guided by the good pleasure of the Fates whose power is forever set in motion by the eternal wheeling of the created spheres. (IX. 52-53)

The qualified way in which this statement is made means it has far less impact than the one in Chaucer’s version. But the key difference is that Boccaccio’s Theseus makes it clear that he will not attempt to establish the validity of this view. The duke does not feel he possesses the knowledge to prove that Providence understands and controls with perfect clarity all that occurs, and therefore he can only suggest that we have faith that it is so, and leave it at that.

The duke’s philosophical ambitions thus come to an end in The Book of Theseus after this statement. The reader does not feel any sense of dissatisfaction about either of Theseus’s two explanatory speeches because his more limited aims are a reflection of the fact that he has far less to explain or to justify. Arcites does not die questioning the values which have led him to his early death, and his ascent to heaven guided by the benign Mercury means that the reader has no reason to question the meaning of his death either. After this philosophically-tinged opening statement, therefore, Boccaccio’s duke speaks for purely practical reasons.

He goes on to deliver a second speech only in order to stop the mourning over Arcite’s death:

If I thought that we might have Arcites back by weeping for him, I should say that we should all weep and I would earnestly request it. But it would not avail. Therefore, from now on, let everyone be joyful and set aside the tears and sighs.... (XII. 17)

Not only are tears futile, but Arcites’s final wish was: "...that Emilia whom he loved so much, should be given to Palaemon" (XII. 18). This wish can only be carried out by ceasing to mourn and beginning to celebrate:
Put aside these black garments, therefore, and when the sorrow and lamentation have ceased, the joyful and bright festivities will begin. Before any lord departs, we shall celebrate with proper splendor and openly the wedding of the couple we have named. (XII. 19)

In Chaucer’s version, however, Theseus’s opening statement at once echoes Lady Philosophy’s conception of love and fails to convey its full meaning. He attempts to explain how the chain of love manifests itself, under the guiding impulse of the First Mover, at the mortal level of existence:

"That same Prince and that same Moevere," quod he, "Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun Certeyne dayes and duracioun To al that is engendred in this place, Over the whiche day they may nat pace, Al mowe they yet tho dayes wel abregge." (2994-99)

But Theseus has mixed up the workings of the supreme being here with fortune’s role as explained in the Consolation (Harder 49). The wretchedness of the world and the temporal nature of things are not regarded by Boethius as products of the chain of love. Instead, Boethius argues that this chain produces happiness in man’s heart if he allows himself to be guided by this power (II. m. 8).

Love, moreover, does not dominate and set limits but guides and joins, often literally:

And yif this love slakede the bridelis, alle thynges that now loven hem togidres wolden maken batayle contynuely, and sryven to fordo the fassoun of this world, the which they now leden in accordable feith by fayre moeynges. This love halt togidres peples joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrament of mariages of chaste loves; and love enditeth lawes to trewe felawes. (II. m. 8, lines 16-25)

While Theseus stresses the absolute control Love possesses, Lady Philosophy stresses the harmony and peaceful order love brings about in both nature and in personal relationships. The image of the bridle Lady Philosophy uses does not suggest coercive control, moreover. Rather, it implies that love guides the world and its inhabitants in certain directions but no more. The aspect of life Lady Philosophy suggests love does completely control is that which exists below the human level of existence. For
The duke’s conception of love, then, sees man as having no more freedom than the sea. His conception is a continuation of the way in which love has been interpreted all through the "Knight’s Tale" and especially in Venus’s temple: as a component of an arbitrary force that completely rules men’s lives, as if their intelligence gave them no more right to free will than has the sea.

The duke begins his second speech in the Italian version with a statement from which Egeus’s words in Chaucer’s version are obviously partly derived and which, like the English speech, underlines man’s lack of freedom:

Just as anyone who never lived, never came to die, so it can be seen that anyone who has not died, has never lived. And when it shall please Him who sets the limits of the world, we who are living now shall also die. Therefore, we ought to bear up cheerfully under the pleasure of the gods, since we cannot resist it. (XII. 6)

This is stoicism in its bluntest form, but since the forces responsible for Arcites’s death have been shown to act fairly both before and after his death, the duke’s request that his audience "...bear up cheerfully under the pleasure of the gods..." is reasonable. The pragmatism and cheerfulness Boccaccio’s Theseus shows here is maintained throughout his speech. Unlike both Egeus and Theseus in the English version, the duke never makes any comment on the bliss of escaping from this "thurghfare ful of wo" and, indeed, does not state how grim life is at any point in his speech. Life is thus not grim under the sway of these pagan forces as it is in Chaucer’s version.

Theseus’s words after his allusion to the "faire cheyne of love" in the English version also move on to the unavoidability of death (2994-99). After this point, however, a discrepancy in purpose between the two speakers becomes more apparent:
Chaucer's duke now attempts to prove his assertion at the beginning of his speech that "The Firste Moevere of the cause above" (2987) "Wel wiste ... why, and what therof he mente" (2990), when he made the universe. Theseus uses his assertion that man can never exceed the span of his allotted days (2994-99) as a sign of the stability of the universe the "Firste Moevere" has created. He illustrates his assertion that the First Mover's control of the universe is manifested through the mortality of man by asking his audience to reflect on their own experience of life:

Ther nedeth noght noon auctoritee t'allegge,  
For it is preeved by experience,  
But that me list declaren my sentence.  
Thanne may men by this orde wel discerne  
That thilke Moevere stable is and eterne. (3000-04)

Theseus will therefore set out examples of the mortality of several forms of life and matter in the universe in order to establish the supreme control and order of the force which has created it. But to establish that everything must die does not necessarily illustrate that the force responsible is either "stable and eterne" or in any sense "Greet" or worthy of admiration.

Furthermore, Theseus's reliance on experience also contradicts Boethian thought, since Boethius believes the truth can only be discovered in the inward light achieved by deep thought: "whose wol seke the depe ground of soth in thought, and wil net ben disseyvid by false proposiciouns that goon amys fro the trouthe, lat hym wel examine and rolle withynne hymself the nature and the propretes of the thing; and let hym yet eftsones examinen andollen his thoughtes by good deliberacioun or that he deme, and lat hym techyn his soule that it hath, by naturel principles kyndeliche ybud withynne itself, al the trouthe the whiche he ymagineth to ben in thinges withoute" (III. m. 11, lines 13-24). In other words the most significant truth lives "within the depresse of . . . thought." (III. m. 11, lines 42-43). The duke's emphasis on the value of experience should therefore be viewed ironically, especially since trusting to
experiential knowledge has proved such a dangerous thing in the tale. Arcite and Palamon have, in a very real sense, allowed experience to guide their behaviour. They trust to the world of appearances when they catch sight of Emelye and fall in love with her and the result is disastrous. Lady Philosophy says of physical beauty: "...yif thow semest fair, thy nature ne maketh nat that, but the deceyvaunce or the feblesse of the eighen that loken" (III. p. 8, lines 46-49). From a Boethian perspective, therefore, man needs to avoid relying purely on knowledge gained through experience and give more weight to inner contemplation if he hopes to avoid making grave errors (Harder 48).

In the English version Theseus also relies for his next point on what man can derive from his physical senses:

Wel may men knowe, but it be a fool,
That every part dirryveth from his hool,
For nature hath nat taken his bigynnyng
Of no partie or cantel of a thyng,
But of a thyng that parfit is and stable,
Descendynge so til it be corrumpable. (3005-10)

To recognize that all of nature is mortal does not provide incontrovertible evidence that nature descended into its mortal form from something perfect and unchanging. The major inducement Theseus offers, in fact, to accept this assertion is the coercive implication that anyone who doesn’t agree with him is a "fool." It is possible that man may come to the duke’s conclusion through the inner reflection that Lady Philosophy advises, but if he listens only to experience, he is likely to believe like Arcite and Palamon that earthly forms are in some sense divine.

Theseus next asserts that an example of the First Mover’s wise foresight is the cyclical manner in which this mortal form of nature works:

And therfore, of his wise purveiaunce,
He hath so wel biset his ordinaunce
That spesces of thynges and progesiouns
Shullen enduren by sucessiouns,
And nat eterne, withouten any lye.
This maystow understonde and seen at ye. (3011-16)
But although Theseus's assertion that continuation of the species is an example of the First Mover's "wise purveiaunce" may have meaning for an animal, for a human-being it is paltry comfort. As Curtis says, "Without any belief in personal immortality, in natural or cosmic justice, or in a final reward for justice and virtue and punishment for injustice and vice, life cannot be easily said to be more than simple brutishness" (Curtis 307).

Mortality is the theme of the next part of the speech (3017-20; see XII. 7). After stating that towns and rivers also die (3024-25) the duke concludes: "Thanne may ye se that al this thyng hath ende" (3026). He then extrapolates—in a decidedly un-Boethian fashion—from the rest of nature to man to emphasize that each of us too must die (3027-34). Boccaccio's duke says roughly the same thing (XII. 7-8), but the context of each point is very different. The inevitability of death in the Italian version only refers to the fact of Arcites's death and the necessity of accepting it. The inevitability of death in Chaucer's version is a continuation of a long chain of assertions that stretch back to Theseus's original statement proclaiming the wisdom of the First Mover and the greatness of his achievement (2987-90). Theseus argues that the First Mover has perfect control of the chain of love because no form of existence can exceed its allotted span (2995-3000). He then asserts that this inevitability shows that the first mover is stable and eternal (3004). He suggests that each mortal part of nature is a debased component of a perfect and unchanging whole (3005-10) and argues that the cyclical regeneration necessitated by this order if each species is to continue is an example of the First Mover's wise foresight, observable through our senses (3011-16). His chain of reasoning developing from his assertion of the greatness and wisdom of the creating force then culminates in the empirical proof that all forms and species of existence, including man, are mortal (3017-34). Mortality is thus the centrepiece of the duke's evidence and proof of the greatness of the originating force.
But while the duke’s emphasis upon the mortality of all of nature echoes the *Consolation*, it is ultimately a gross distortion of that book’s reasoning. Lady Philosophy does assert, like Theseus, that mortality in the form of cyclical regeneration is evidence of the greatness and stability of the chain of love (II. m. 8 and IV. m. 6). And like Theseus, she suggests that the stability and the eternal nature of the chain of love and its creator can be understood in nature’s workings. However, to prove this point she makes reference to those forces which do change, and yet through their constant reappearance ultimately are completely stable: the seasons, tides, stars. She thus, as Westlund suggests, "gives poetic meaning to the concept of stability-in-change" (534). Theseus’s examples, on the other hand, illustrate the opposite: all of his examples (3017-34) concern things which "...seem stable and eternal, but which prove to be subject to decay and death: the oak, rocks, rivers, great towns..." (Westlund 534), even man. Hence, if Chaucer intended Theseus’s speech to be a convincing illustration of the stability and greatness of the forces which control the universe, he could have had the duke use the readily available and convincing examples to help prove his point, not ones that help to undermine it (Westlund 534).

Theseus’s views differ fundamentally from Boethian philosophy, since the latter is congruent with a belief in a Christian God, while Theseus’s views are predicated upon the belief that a pagan god is responsible for all:

> What maketh this but Juppiter, the kyng,  
> That is prince and cause of alle thyng,  
> Convertynge al unto his propre welle  
> From which it is dirryved, sooth to telle? (3035-38)

The attribution of Jupiter is Chaucer’s invention and it once more reminds us that this society has based its system of order upon the forces depicted in the temples it builds rather than on any force Boethius would believe in. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the duke’s philosophy does no more, ultimately, than depict a world as ruthless, controlling and incomprehensible as the gods in the temples.
The other, more obvious problem with the duke's naming of Jupiter as the "prince and cause of alle thyng," is that Chaucer has invented a solution in which Saturn, not Jupiter, is responsible for the central outcome of tale. In the light of this knowledge it is very difficult to take at face value the duke's twice repeated affirmation of Jupiter's power (see also 3069). The duke's false assumption invites us to look skeptically at the whole of his speech and to realize the shortsightedness of his faith in pagan gods.

After pointing out Jupiter's responsibility for all things, the duke makes it clear that Jupiter's ability to bring about death in all forms of life, and to return that life "unto his propre welle" (3037) is a force, "...heer-agayns no creature on lyve, / Of no degree, availleth for to stryve" (3039-40). In many ways this is the point to which everything Theseus has said has been tending: that death is inevitable, unavoidable and must therefore be accepted whenever and wherever it happens (including even Arcite's demise). Death is the central proof the duke offers of the First Mover's great wisdom. The only way, however, in which Theseus can make Arcite's unhappy death palatable is to assert the misery and lack of freedom Arcite and other human beings experience while they are alive:

Why grucchen we, why have we hevynesse,
That goode Arcite, of chivalrie flour,
Departed is with duetee and honour
Out of this foule prisoun of this lyf? (3058-61)

And this assertion, in its emphasis on man's complete lack of freedom, contradicts Boethian thought in a key sense. In Boethius, man enjoys conditional freedom when it comes to his actions. Lady Philosophy illustrates this by comparing an action caused purely by God with an action that is initiated by man:

...tho thinges that I purposide the a litel her-byforn--that is to seyn, the sonne arysynge and the man walkynge--that ther-whiles that thilke thinges ben idoon, they ne myghte nat ben undoon; natheles that oon of hem, or it was idoon, it byhovide by necessite that it was idoon, but nat that oothir. Ryht so is it here, that the thinges that God hath present,
withoute doute thei shollen ben. But som of hem descendith of the
nature of thinges (as the sonne arysynge); and som descendith of the
power of the doeris (as the man walkynge). (V. p. 6, lines 220-232)

Lady Philosophy later categorically states that "...fredom of arbitre...duelleth hool and
unwemmed to mortal men" (V. p. 6, lines 288-90).

Man, therefore, "...is free in proportion as he understands and obeys what god
has ordained for him and the world in which he lives" (Ruggiers 301). The duke’s
vision of life on earth as "this foule prisoun of this lyf" (3061) points to his limited
understanding and, consequently, his lack of freedom. The inevitability of death leads
Chaucer’s duke to make his famous statement espousing stoical acceptance:

Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,
To maken vertu of necessitee,
And take it weel that we may nat eschue,
And namely that to us alle is due.
And whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye,
And rebel is to hym that al may gye. (3041-46)

The duke is calmly asking his audience to accept whatever occurs in life--including
their own and Arcite’s death--presumably because he now thinks his speech has proved
his initial assertion of the wisdom and greatness of the forces that control existence.
But all that the duke has offered his audience is an existence in which they must expect
to endure nothing but misery, to have no free will and to be satisfied purely by the fact
that their species will continue to exist through future generations.

The duke in Boccaccio’s version proposes precisely the same thing with regard
to accepting Arcites’s death: "And it is wisdom, therefore, to make a virtue of necessity
when one must" (XII. 11). The duke does not suggest, however, that the people of
Athens should stop mourning by being grateful that Arcites has escaped life but
because: "...whatever is born to us, dies on us as well, no matter what our desire is"
(XII. 16), and because

...we have paid proper honor to him whom we are mourning now, and
with reason I think that it would be better to divest ourselves of this
gloomy dress and set sorrow aside, for it is womanish behaviour rather
than virile. (XII. 16)
Chaucer’s duke offers one last inducement to his audience to look favourably on Arcite’s death:

And certeinly a man hath moost honour
To dyen in his excellence and flour,
Whan he is siker of his goode name;
Thanne hath he doon his freend, ne hym, no shame.
And gladder oghte his freend been of his deeth,
Whan with honour up yolden is his breeth,
Than whan his name apalled is for age,
For al forgeten is his vassellage.
Thanne is it best, as for a worthy fame,
To dyen whan that he is best of name. (3047-56)

But fame, luck, all that Theseus’s society are asked to value here is a matter of fortune, and posterity may afford a worthless person as much veneration as someone truly worthy (Minnis 1982; 129).

Lady Philosophy’s comments upon the suspect nature of fame have particular relevance for Arcite. She postulates the value of fame to a man whose body and soul die at death—as implied in the description of Arcite’s "coold" body. She comments:

For if it so be that men dyen in all (that is to seyen, body and soule), the whiche thing our reson defendeth us to byleeven, thanne is ther no glorie in no wyse; For what schulde thilke glorie ben, whan he, of whom thilke glorie is seyd to be, nys ryht naught in no wise? (II. p. 7, lines 145-51)

And if the opposite were true:

And yif the soule, whiche that hath in itself science of gode werkes, unbownden fro the pryson of the erthe, weendeth frely to the hevene, despiseth it nat thanne al erthely ocupacioun; and [usynge] hevene rejoyseth that it is exempt fro alle erthely thynges? (As who seith, thanne rekketh the soule of no glorye of renoun of this world). (II. p. 7, lines 152-59)

In Boccaccio’s version the duke also values fame. He believes that a virtue can be made out of the necessity of Arcites’s death because his fame is assured. Referring to the virtue inherent in accepting death, the duke advises that such is the case in "...the death of someone whose valor was so great and of such a nature, that its flower is followed by the graceful fruit of fame. If we thought deeply about this, we would set aside this wretched grief and turn our efforts toward a valiant life that would win us
glorious fame" (XII. 12). The duke’s endorsement of fame is acceptable here since Arcites indicates before his death that he will gain some satisfaction from the knowledge that he will be famous: "...I have been honored by the victory given me as reward for my service, for this will always be remembered by those yet to come" (X. 27).

Ultimately, the sum of the duke’s philosophy in Chaucer’s version amounts to no more than stoical acceptance of whatever life chooses to inflict. And this stoicism does not satisfactorily answer the questions the tale has raised since Arcite’s unhappy and bewildered death is not, to any compassionate human-being, suddenly made acceptable or understandable by our being told that all any human can do is stoically endure what befalls. Stoicism is moreover, a distortion of Boethian thinking because although Boethius advocates it, man can in fact place himself beyond the vagaries of fortune by striving for the good (Jones 204). The duke’s philosophy does not extend beyond advising passive submission to whatever fortune chooses to throw in each individual’s path, because he does not actually believe in or understand a higher good—a good that suggests that the universe is just and is thus more than an expression of fortune. Ultimately, Theseus’s philosophy suggests man does not have free will, and that the First Mover’s foreknowledge of all events is the equivalent of Predestination. This is why Theseus constantly preaches that man must resign himself to whatever fate befalls him (Fichte 350). Necessity is morally unsatisfactory to a creature who has the power of thought and who is interested in and capable of understanding more than the procreation which ensures the continuation of his species. Theseus’s essentially pagan philosophy would thus not satisfy a member of Chaucer’s medieval audience, someone who believes he is

...personally immortal..., [and] made by a personal creator, whose deeds will separate or draw him closer to that creator. In the latter is virtue and eternal life; in the former is perpetuity of the species only. (Curtis 307-08)
When we consider the unsatisfactory nature of the duke's speech, the apparent transition from misery to joy with which he concludes his oration is difficult to take at face value:

What may I conclude of this longe serye,  
But after wo I rede us to be merye  
And thanken Juppiter of al his grace?  
And er that we departen from this place  
I rede we make of sorwes two  
O parfit joye, lastynge everemo. (3067-72)

The most obvious problem with Theseus's views here is that the idea of creating "O parfit joye, lastynge everemo" ignores and contradicts the duke's much emphasized vision of life as inherently unstable and grim: the world cannot be simultaneously a misery from which Arcite should be glad to have escaped, and a place where the couple can blissfully live out the remainder of their days (Justman 9).

Palamon and Emelye's marriage is hurried off the stage in fifteen short lines (3094-3108) as if Chaucer himself is aware that the audience would neither believe a permanently happy ending is likely, nor feel that to speak of their happiness does anything but underline the uneasiness they still feel about Arcite's death. We are left wondering why the knight finds it is necessary to point out "That nevere was ther no word hem bitwene / Of jalousie or any oother teene" (3105-06) when Palamon and Emelye have never exchanged a word during the whole of the tale. The narrator's comments here about jealousy and emotional strife merely serve to remind us of Arcite and Palamon's own conflict.

In Boccaccio's version, thirty-four stanzas are devoted to Palamon and Emilia's wedding, Emilia's appearance before her wedding, the celebrations after the wedding and their wedding night (XII. 47-80). The transformation from the mourning surrounding Arcites's death to the joy of the subsequent wedding is fully realized, therefore, through ceremony and detailed descriptions. Thus while the Italian poem ends with a sense of satisfaction and emotional fulfillment, Chaucer's hurried
conclusion deprives the poem of a genuine sense of closure, and, more importantly, ruptures its carefully controlled aesthetic structure in which significant ceremonial occasions are elaborately and formally described. Chaucer backs away from any more ceremonies and formalities as if he knows that by now we have come to see not only their limitations but their downright hollowness.
CONCLUSION

Perhaps one cannot go so far as to suggest that Chaucer intends the "Knight's Tale" as a criticism of his own society. Nevertheless, there are some inescapable similarities between the world of his pagans and current historical views of the late fourteenth-century in England. Even those medieval writers who extolled the virtues of chivalry in Chaucer's time could not disguise what lay beneath the surface glitter. As Huizinga suggests,

"...the political and military history of the last centuries of the Middle Ages as described by Froissart, Monstrelet, Chastellian, and so many others reveals very little chivalry and a great deal of covetousness, cruelty, cold calculation, well-understood self-interest, and diplomatic subtlety." (198)

Froissart is probably the most famous writer to detail the world of chivalry in the late middle ages. One surprising aspect of his writing to twentieth-century eyes is its uncritical description of all aspects of medieval warfare despite the inclusion of "...an endless list of betrayals and cruelties..." (Huizinga 198). A fairly typical example of Froissart's writing is a description of a battle between the English and French at Caguant in 1337:

There was a sore batayle, and well foughten hande to hande: but finally the Flemmynges were put to the chase, and were slayne mo than three thousande, what in the havyn, stretes and houses. Sir Guy the bastarde of Flaunders was taken, and Sir Dutres de Haluyn and Sir John de Rodes wer slayn, and the two bretherne of Bonquedent, and squyers; and the town taken and pylled, and all the goodes and prisoners put into the shippes, and the town Brent. And so thus the Englysshemen retourned into Englande without any damage; the kyng caused sir Guy bastarde of Flanders to swere and to bynde hymselfe prisoner; and in the same yere he became Englysshe, and dyd fayth and homage to the kyng of Englande. (Froissart 99)

There is rampant destruction and murder here that takes place after the losing army has been put to flight—not to mention noblemen switching allegiances for expedient rather than honourable purposes.
Froissart describes in an equally impartial manner the Earl of Mountfort’s assault upon the castle of Brest in 1341 where the behaviour of the attackers seems far more "chivalrous" than those at the battle at Caguant.

Than the duke Mountfort caused a great assuat over the dykes to come to the hard walles; they within defended themselfe as well as they myght, tyll it was noone: than the duke desyred them to yelde, and to take hym for their duke, and he would freely pardon them; whereupon they toke counsell, and the duke caused the assuat to cease, and fyndally they yielded them, their lyves and goodes saved. (Froissart 174)

There are other incidents of what we would regard as "civilized" behaviour in Froissart’s chronicle to contrast with the battle at Caguant and others like it; but they are far outnumbered by the first, much more brutal, attack described. Chaucer’s description of the battle at Thebes echoes many of Froissart’s more bloody descriptions. This similarity suggests that Chaucer has altered his source in order to offer a realistic depiction of the behaviour of knights. Specifically, Theseus’s behaviour at Thebes reveals the general grisly rule of warfare in medieval Europe, rather than the occasional chivalrous exception. More importantly, Froissart’s impartial acceptance of the brutality, cruelty and injustice in the way war was waged is reflected in the attitude of the characters in Chaucer’s tale. Neither Froissart nor the knights in the tale question the lack of morality and justice in the violence and destructiveness exhibited. Froissart’s writings and the attitudes of Chaucer’s characters both indicate that the moral infrastructure implied by the code of chivalry and perhaps once sincerely followed had become no more than a cover for exploitative deeds.

That the indifference Chaucer’s characters display to violence and death is an expression of the current attitude to chivalry is most strongly suggested in Chaucer’s depiction of Mars’s temple, which indiscriminately details all sorts of violence. The advent of the mercenary armies and the Free Companies in Chaucer’s time meant that bloodshed no longer occurred just on the battlefield between knights. Many of the acts of civil destruction described in the temple are not associated with chivalrous behaviour.
but with those of mercenaries and thieves (Jones 190-91). Chaucer’s Mars hence represents not chivalric warfare but merely evil destructiveness.

The relevancy of what is described in Mars’s temple to Chaucer’s own society is underlined by his creation in other parts of the tale of a realistic picture of the times in which he lived (Cummings 126-27; Boitani 1977; 142). The use of heralds to introduce the tournament (2533-36, 2672), the clinical description of Arcite’s injuries and their treatment (2743-60), and finally, the parliament held at the end of the tale are all examples of this attempt (Cummings 145). In fact, the poem "...abounds in characteristic modes of genuine mediaeval battle, tournament, court ceremonial, everyday speech and clamour, thought and philosophy" (Cummings 146). The modernization of the fighting scenes and the depiction of the tournament also underscore Chaucer’s need for the knight, the only character on the pilgrimage who could be expected to possess this knowledge, to narrate the tale.

The tale’s tournament also has similarities with the more impressive gatherings held in Chaucer’s time. The tournament was at its peak in the late fourteenth century (Barber 170), and as with Theseus’s tournament, the preparations were increasingly lengthy and elaborate (Barber 170). Chaucer’s depiction of the joust also bears a close resemblance to a tournament held at Smithfields in 1390 and described by eyewitnesses—one of whom may have been Chaucer (Parr 318). The general plan of the tournament, moreover, with the hundred knights on each side and rules for the fighting, was very typical of Chaucer’s century (S. Robertson 235; Spearing 7). In fact, the "less severe" regulations used in the joust are those found in the majority of the tournaments described by Froissart (S. Robertson 238).

Chaucer’s efforts at modernizing his source imply he was deliberately attempting to turn writing on chivalry away from the idealized, poetic model used by Boccaccio and others and into a more accurate representation of reality. The absence of
a description of the knights' physical appearance and attractiveness is an indication of a
desire to get away from idealization. Such descriptions are usually a standard part of
chivalric writing (Jones 177-78), and both Arcites and Palaemon are carefully described
(III. 49-50) in The Book of Theseus. The emphasis on detail that reflects the times
Chaucer lived in at the expense of conventional expressions of the hero (or heroine’s)
attractiveness means the focus switches from automatic approval of these characters as
detailed in Boccaccio, to an examination of their actions shorn of any poetical overtones
in Chaucer.

Chaucer's parallels suggest a connection is being drawn between the current
feudal way of life and the pagan: as well as "paganizing" his tournament by
concentrating upon the pagan gods and their temples, he also underlines the similarities
between a pagan tournament and contemporary Christian events. His ultimate purpose
in his redaction, therefore, may well be to criticize the corrupt state of contemporary
courtly and chivalric life. Chaucer encourages his audience to compare the pagan
society of the tale to their own society because the glorification of bloodshed and the
idealization of erotic love is common to both. This key similarity implies that for
Chaucer the noble life may have had more in common with paganism than with
Christianity.
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