CHAUCER'S KNIGHT'S TALE AND THE
TESEIDA OF BOCCACCIO

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In a consideration of the *Knight's Tale*, it may prove helpful to discuss some of the sources from which Chaucer borrowed in writing his poem. The *Teseida* of Boccaccio has long been considered the major source. One scholar has presented a table showing two hundred seventy-three lines of direct translation, and five hundred more that show a close resemblance to lines in the *Teseida*.\(^1\) Other researchers have shown instances where Chaucer has drawn on the *Teseida* in about seven hundred more lines than previously noted.\(^2\) Though other works such as the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius, the *Speculum Majus* of Vincent of Beauvais and the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun have been indicated, the *Teseida* remains the chief source for the *Knight's Tale*. Consequently, a rather careful consideration of Chaucer's manipulation of this source material seems in order if we are to gain any perspective on his intentions in writing the *Knight's Tale*.

Although Chaucer has used the storyline of the *Teseida* almost without change from Boccaccio's work, he has made some rather important changes in style, tone and structure. The tone and mood of the *Knight's Tale* are radically different from what we find in the epic
proportions of the *Teseida*. These changes and additions point to the totally different kind of tale that Chaucer intended to write. Though the overall storyline is not altered there is a great difference in the treatment of the narrative by the two authors.

The story of the *Teseida* is essentially that of two friends, Palamoun and Arcite, once kind and devoted to one another, but turned rivals for the love of Emily. The rivalry precipitates a great tournament which will decide who is to marry Emily. Before the tournament each rival prays to his special diety for favor in the coming encounter. Palamoun prays to Venus that he may win Emily, while Arcite prays only for victory in the tournament. In the end each gets exactly what he has prayed for; Arcite wins the tournament, but is struck down shortly thereafter and dies, whereas Palamoun though he loses the battle, gains the hand of Emily after the death of Arcite.

From this basic outline Chaucer deviates very little. Yet his manner differs markedly from that of Boccaccio. Boccaccio begins the *Teseida* with a dedication "A Fiametta" in which he reveals the Poet's purpose in writing the story. He addresses Fiametta as a cruel and heartless lady who, in not returning his love, has banished him from all happiness, so that now the memory of her is a source of pain and torment to him. He is able to enjoy none of the pleasures that love should bring. Yet no
matter what he does, he cannot extinguish the flame that she has kindled within him; it must go on burning forever, and she will always be the great guiding light on his life. Because of his torment, the poet has undertaken to adapt an ancient story to the common language. He knows that she always enjoyed such romances, but he warns that the story will be full of false, obscure and hidden meanings, in which his own character and the nature of his love will be presented under the guise of fiction. Fiametta should easily be able to recognize the past in the story, and he hopes that by perceiving the nature of his affection and misery she will take pity on him, and thus the story will relight the flame of love within her and return her to him in the way they were before fortune separated them.

Boccaccio has written the story in order to win back the affection of a fair lady. The Teseida presents in about ten thousand lines an epic of the rivalry of the two friends for the hand of Emily. The poem is marked by long and detailed descriptions of the court and the nobility. Emphasis is placed on dress and pagantry with the costumes and processes of court life presented in almost tedious detail. Chaucer on the other hand presents a tale told by a noble and worthy knight, who loved above all else chivalry, truth, honor, freedom and courtesy. He is a veteran of many campaigns in all parts of the world and has won much honor for his courage and skill at arms, yet he is described as modest and meek as a maid. From
the beginning the story shows a vastly different tone, which is consistently maintained throughout the poem. I intend to examine rather closely the method Chaucer pursues in the *Knight's Tale*, to show where and how it differs from Boccaccio's in order to make some statement about Chaucer's purpose in his adaptation of the *Teseida*.

The most obvious difference is Chaucer's condensation of the original poem. As we have already mentioned, the *Teseida* is about ten thousand lines long, which Chaucer has condensed to 2,250. The condensation is made, however, with a definite idea in mind; it does not merely eliminate epic detail and extraneous plot material. I believe that Chaucer was trying to present in his adaptation of the *Teseida* a moral tale. The story is to offer us several clearly defined moral problems which are to be solved within the course of the poem. The answers are to be dug out by the careful reader. In many ways the moral questions handled in the *Knight's Tale* are the same ones prominent in the *Teseida*, yet the method of treatment is so vastly different that they at times hardly seem to be the same stories at all.

Let us consider as an example of Chaucer's treatment, the use he makes of the first book of the *Teseida*. Book I deals with the war between Teseo the king of Athenes and Ipolita the queen of the Amazons. The followers of Ipolita, once natives of Scythia, had refused to be
subjugated by their men, and slaughtered all males of the realm, established their own kingdom, elected Ipolita their queen and vowed to kill on sight any male that dared enter their kingdom. Teseo took it upon himself to correct this situation with a strong force of men. Ipolita, however, was warned and armed her shores against the invasion. When Teseo arrived he attempted to reason with the queen, but to no avail, and only after a great battle were the Athenians able to establish a beach-head. Teseo then sent a stern message to Ipolita, stating that he intended to avenge her villainy, and that she must either surrender or die. After much deliberation Ipolita decided to surrender and later became the wife of Teseo; with their marriage the strife was ended. The almost eleven hundred lines of this first book Chaucer has condensed to about thirty lines in the Knight's Tale. Yet he has recounted the story of Theseus' conquest in such a way that the moral significance remains outstanding.

Boccaccio explains the moral significance of this first episode in his note to the tenth stanza of the first book. Here he carefully explains that his intention is to present the restraint and control of passions, to show how Emily became involved with Palamoun and Arcite, and to present the honorable and just war that Teseo waged against the beautiful Amazons. The siege against the Amazons has a great deal of significance other than just
interesting story material. It involves the restoration of right order in the Amazon realm, where uncontrolled passions had led them to step outside of their proper position of subjugation to man. Right order is finally reestablished when Teseo marries Ipolita and brings her and her followers back under the rule of man. The war is described as a just one on the part of Teseo for the preservation of order is the proper duty of a ruler. Boccaccio clearly establishes the character of Teseo as a wise and just ruler. In note sixty to Book I, he explains that Athens is a city whose patron saint is Minerva, goddess of wisdom and reason. Teseo becomes then a symbol of wisdom, just as Ipolita represents the raging of uncontrolled passions as the queen of the Amazons.\(^4\)

Chaucer has eliminated all details of the encounter with the Amazons, the ceremony of the wedding and Theseus' long stay in Scythia. He emphasises only what seem the significant moral features of the story. He presents Theseus as the successful and competent ruler of Athenes who "what with his Wysdom and his chivalrie,/ He conquered all the regne of Femenye." (11. 865-66.) Ypolite is pictured as the fair and hardy queen of Scythia, besieged by Theseus, overcome and married to him with great ceremony. D.W. Robertson elaborates on this theme in his discussion of the Knight's Tale. He maintains that the conquest of
the Amazons by Theseus and the consequent marriage represents the conquest of lust and passion by reason and wisdom. Robertson illustrates his interpretation iconographically by a statue representing a man holding tightly the reins of a bridle in the mouth of a woman at his feet. He maintains that this represents the right relationship that should exist between man and woman. There is even the possibility that Chaucer attempted a pun on the word regne which could mean both the rein of the bridle that the Amazons seized from their men or their tenure as rulers of the kingdom of Scythia. It is likely that this is also what Boccaccio meant when he referred to the restraint of passions as one of the chief concerns of the first book.

Since I plan to make a great deal of use of Boccaccio's notes to the _Teseida_ in further discussion of the _Knight's Tale_, it seems appropriate to discuss their significance in the _Teseida_ and just why Boccaccio included them.

In books fourteen and fifteen of Boccaccio's _Genealogia Deorum Gentilium_, he presents what may be considered his theory of poetry. The _Genealogia_ is a large encyclopedia of ancient mythology. In it Boccaccio has attempted to present the history and stories of antiquity; he hopes that the book will serve as a reference book for poets and especially for young students of poetry. In
writing the book he is attempting to preserve for present and future poets the traditions and myths of classical literature. Boccaccio became concerned with the value of classical literature and of all poetry in general, and undertakes in books fourteen and fifteen to defend poetry against its critics. He argues that there is great truth and value in poetry, and though "a few writers of fiction erred, poetry does not therefore deserve universal condemnation, since it offers so many inducements to virtue, in the admonitions and teachings of poets whose care it has been to set forth with lofty intelligence, and utmost candor, in exquisite style and diction, men's thoughts on things of heaven." He continues maintaining that "fiction is a form of discourse, which, under the guise of invention illustrates or proves an idea, and as its superficial aspect is removed the meaning of the author is clear. If, then, sense is revealed from under the veil of fiction the composition of fiction is not idle nonsense." He clinches his argument with the authority of the Bible; "If the events they describe (poets) have not actually taken place, yet since they are common, they could have occurred, or might at some time. My opponents need not be squemisht. Christ, who is God, used this sort of fiction again and again in his parables."8

With this authority behind him, Boccaccio ends the chapter with an exhortation to would-be readers of poetry.
"But I repeat my advice to those who would appreciate poetry, and unwind its difficult involutions. You must read, you must persevere, you must sit up nights, you must inquire, and exert the utmost of your mind. If one way does not lead to the desired meaning, take another, until, if your strength holds out, you will find that clear which at first looked dark. For we are forbidden by divine command to give that which is holy to dogs, or to cast pearls among swine."  

Although there is no evidence available, it seems conceivable that Boccaccio wrote the Chiose to the Teseida in an attempt to exonerate the poem from the kind of attack that we find in the Genealogia, or perhaps at the request of a poorly informed friend or patron who desired a fuller understanding of the poem. The Chiose contains several types of information for the reader. It presents explanations of some of the allusions used within the poem in a factual way, such as the locations of some of the places Arcite visits in his wanderings in Book IV. There are also simple explanations of incidents in the plot, as in Book VII, 90, where Boccaccio elucidates the meaning of the sign that Diana gives to Emily. Perhaps the most important information is that accompanying the description of the temples of Mars and Venus. Here Boccaccio carefully explains the meaning that we are to receive from the iconography surrounding the temples. These notes
define carefully the nature of the passions expressed by the two rivals in their prayers. They are important in the poem, and are as helpful to the modern reader as they must have been to the reader for whom Boccaccio wrote them.

The source of the Chiose seems to be a manuscript of the Teseida, written in Boccaccio's own hand, and signed by him. This manuscript was obtained by the Italian government in 1928. The autographed manuscript presents certain inversions of the other known text, edited by Moutier in 1831. The inversions were thought to be erasures of the Moutier text. The Moutier text contains no notes of any kind and is thought to be the older of the two, and the one from which Boccaccio copied his autograph version. There is also a third text available, which is considered later than either the autograph copy or the Moutier. It contains notes also, but they show many additions not found in the autography manuscript. It is believed that the third copy, which is not in Boccaccio's hand, is a copy of the autograph manuscript with further commentary added by the later scribes or editors.¹⁰

The reason or instance of Boccaccio's adding his Chiose is not known, but they provide a definite help in reading the poem.

Another excellent example of Chaucer's unique use of the material of the Teseida can be found in the first
encounter of the two friends with Emily. In the Teseida
Emily is heard singing in the garden below by Arcite who
quickly calls Palamoun to come to see Venus. They both
praise the beauty and fair qualities of the girl and
Palamoun admits that he has been wounded by one of Cupid's
arrows from the eye of Emily. The lovers continue to
complain of their love heaping more praises upon the fair
vision. Every morning the two friends are found at the
window watching Emily, who, completely aware of their
interest, sings delightfully for the vanity of her beauty.
The two friends grow more and more enamoured each day;
they eat nothing and spend their time writing love songs
in praise of Emily. As the weeks pass their sighs and
laments increase and their passions grow so great that
they are finally unable to sleep or eat.

Chaucer eliminates all of the romantic elements of
Boccaccio's account. He turns the scene into a humorous
incident; all thought of sympathy for either of the lovers
is lost in the pointed satire. Chaucer has retained only
those elements that tend to characterize the lovers and
their love in a certain way, and the elements that have
been added serve to heighten and intensify the humor of
the incident. Palamoun is the first to see Emily, he lets
out a great cry "A!"/As though he stongen were unto the
heart." (ll. 1078-79.) Arcite answers his cry of torment
with an unctious little sermon on patience, which he
quickly forgets when he too sees the lady below, "And with a sigh he sayde pitously;/The fresche beautee sleeth me sodeynly/ Of her that rometh in the yonder place." (11. 1117-18.) Palamoun is a little vexed at this reaction, for he knits his brows and reminds Arcite that since he (Palamoun) saw the lady first, it is Arcite's duty to help him at all times and in every way to further the cause of his love. Arcite replies to this with some of the funniest lines of the entire poem. He says that they love Emily differently, Palamoun's love "is an affeccioun of Holiness,/ and myn is love, as to a creature." Arcite furthers his argument with a quotation from Boethius, "who shal yeve a lovere any lawe?" Love, he says stands outside the jurisdiction of man's earthly law and concludes that he is free from any previous commitments in this special case.

Chaucer's satire and humor is evident when we examine a little more closely some of the detail of the scene. First of all he never leaves us in doubt as to the nature of the love that the two friends feel. He shows us quite clearly just how they love Emily when he describes the onset of their passions, which are identical in both cases. Palamoun tells us quite plainly that "I was hurt right now thurghout myn ye into myn herte." (11. 1196-97.) Arcite suffers his wound in precisely the same way, "Wher as this lady romed to and fro,/ And with that sight hir beautee hurte hym so,/ That, if that Palamoun
was wounded sore, / Arcite is hurt as muche as he, or moore." (11. 1114-16.) Chaucer is careful to emphasise that both were wounded in a similar and very special way. In the mediaeval commentaries this sort of wound is very familiar, and of special significance, for it leads to a well-defined affliction that we will see develop quite rapidly in both young men.

In a commentary on a love poem of Cavalcanti "Donna mi priega," Dino del Garbo, an Italian physician, gives a lengthy explanation of this kind of wound and of the symptoms that develop as a consequence. (In his note on the temple of Venus in the Teseida, Boccaccio specifically refers us to this commentary for a better understanding of the way in which love works. I will discuss the authority of this commentary when we consider the temple of Venus later in this paper.) Love, Dino tells us, is caused by the apprehension of a form which is first seen, but the other senses may play a secondary part in more fully apprehending the form, as in the Teseida when the lovers are pleased by the voice as well as the figure of Emily. Since sight is by far the most important avenue of love, Chaucer emphasises this aspect only, so that there can be no mistake as to what is going on. Dino explains that this kind of love has no place whatsoever in the intellect, but exists entirely within the sensitive appetites, and is a passion akin to anger, fear, rage,
Love stimulates the passions like a dart so that the lover has no sense of fear or danger and cannot refrain from constantly talking about his love. The applicability of this commentary to the scene described by Chaucer seems evident. Both men are wounded through the eyes by sight. The wound is described in Palamoun's case as a sting, and Arcite's is a sore hurt which seems to be a similar wound. These injuries agree with Dino's statement that love wounds like a dart, and also follows closely the idea in the Teseida that Cupid has wounded Palamoun with an arrow. Another important detail in identifying this affliction is that Palamoun himself says:

But I was hurt right throughout myn ye
Into myn herte, that wol my bane be.

(11. 1096-97.)

Dino has told us that love has no part in the intellect, but is part of the sensitive appetite and a passion related to fear and anger. It is interesting to note that the mediaeval doctors tell us that the heart is the site of the passions of anger, fear and of joy, which are all included in the virtue vitalis that has its seat in the heart. The apprehension then has been directed to the proper place, and there can be little doubt that Chaucer and Dino, as well as the other mediaeval authorities are all talking about the same thing.
It is of the utmost importance, however, to note that Dino is very careful to distinguish the different kinds of love and to indicate just what kind he is describing as he interprets the poem of Cavalcanti. In the beginning of his commentary, Dino carefully explains that the poem is concerned with a special kind of love, that is, the love of a man for a woman. He has excluded homosexual love, which he describes as bestial and against nature.\textsuperscript{15} The love described in Cavalcanti's poem is not an intellectual one but purely corporal, nor is it related to the healthy love that exists between friends, but is a heavy and passionate love, directed toward venereal acts with a great intensity and intemperance.\textsuperscript{16} With these facts in mind any attempt to define the affections of the two friends, or former friends, as a spiritual love or as Arcite's "Affeccioun of hoolyness" is rendered ludicrous. From the commentary and Chaucer's careful description of the incident it is evident that there is no difference between the affection of the two lovers, and that both are bent on loving Emily "as to a Creature." Arcite's confusion of this point is made even more obvious in his use of Boethius. As we have already stated, Arcite uses the quotation to relieve himself of any previous obligation to Palamoun. When the context of the quotation is considered, it is easy to see how humorously confused the thinking of Arcite has become.
The passage Arcite quotes is found in Book III, metrum 12, of Chaucer's translation of Boethius. In this instance Lady Philosophy is speaking of the legend of Orpheus and lamenting the fact that he looked back to see if his wife was really following him. The quote is a lament by Dame Philosophy that man can not be wise enough to follow the right course of action always and so find perfect happiness. The moral of the story, she explains, is that man, being unable to keep his desires fixed upon the eternal aspects of life, always turns to worldly delights as did Orpheus, and gains only disappointment and sorrow. \(^{17}\) Robertson develops this idea and shows the significance that the legend of Orpheus had for mediaeval thinkers. He shows that the tale is seen as the attempt of Orpheus to reject the concupiscent passions that are within him, represented by Euridice, by the use of wisdom and abstinence from temporal things. Orpheus can not maintain his thoughts on this high plane, however, and he looks back; hence the lament of Lady Philosophy that lovers are not able to follow even the best of laws. \(^{18}\)

The irony and humor are heightened when we see that if only poor Arcite had really understood the meaning of the passage he quotes, he could have spared himself all the pain and torment he suffers. The whole scene is an excellent and characteristic example of Chaucer's handling of the \textit{Teseida} material. His condensation has sifted out
most of the flowery and romantic aspects of Boccaccio's tale and emphasizes only the factors that will enable us to see the characters as clear and typical examples of the type of lover they are to represent.

The next incident of the Knight's Tale involves another adaptation of Boccaccio's material. It is not hard to see the same technique being used again. In the Teseida the two friends part, each thinking the other has the better fortune. Arcite says that Palamoun is better off, for in the spring Emily will return to the garden and Palamoun will be able to see her once more, which to Arcite is the greatest joy he can imagine. Palamoun, on the other hand, envies Arcite who is free to travel and enjoy diversions that will help alleviate his pain, while he is doomed to the confinement of his prison wall. The two brothers embrace and part weeping. As he rides off Arcite catches a last glimpse of Emily and sadly leaves Athens.

Chaucer follows the story to the extent that each of the friends is jealous of the other, but adds several passages that comment further upon the character of the two lovers and continues to poke fun at the pangs they endure. Chaucer has no sympathy whatsoever for the sorrows of the two. He depicts their plight with pointed sarcasm. Arcite weeps piteously over his banishment, claiming that now he is doomed to an even worse prison,
for he will never see his Emily again. He cries that were he allowed to remain in prison for ever;

Thanne hadde I been in blisse, and nat in wo,
Oonly the sighte of hire whom that I serve,
Though that I nevere hir grace may deserve,
Wolde han suffised right ynough for me.

(11. 1230-33.)

This proclamation is amusing when we remember that he has just said that his love is "love, as to a Creature" in contrast to Palamoun's "affecioun of holyness," and even more amusing in light of what Dino has told us about his kind of love being concerned only with venereal acts. Arcite seems to be fooling himself and his confusion becomes even funnier when he tries to console himself with the philosophy of Boethius. He waxes eloquent on the subject of happiness, lamenting what a fleeting and elusive thing it is. He uses his own state as an example, remembering that he once felt that no condition could possibly be any worse than his imprisonment, but now he feels that he has moved from purgatory into hell. A man does not really know when he is well off, he says, but must always pursue a greater happiness which is often the cause of a greater woe. When we turn to Boethius, Arcite's perversion of the text becomes obvious. Lady Philosophy is actually praising man's constant striving for a state of perfect felicity, which she says is one of the noblest attributes of man. Arcite fails to remember, however, that the greatest happiness possible is acting in accord
with God's will, which can be accomplished only by following the dictates of reason. Hence Philosophy concludes that a man who really wishes to be happy can find happiness only by listening to reason and allowing it to govern all his actions. 20 The contrast of Arcite's quotation with the true meaning of the passage establishes him as a foolish character in his pursuit of the lovers' life.

Palamoun is no better off, and receives the same treatment at Chaucer's hands. He also indulges in some philosophical discussion, crying out against the injustice of the world. He laments that often the best of men are subject to the worst blows of fortune, and suffer great and unjust adversity. Palamoun calls for justice, asking why such inequality should be allowed to exist. He cannot begin to understand the meaning of his sorrow. The irony of his situation is evident when we realize that this is the same lament uttered by Boethius from his prison cell. Boethius, unjustly imprisoned for political reasons, cries out like Palamoun against the injustice of the world that allows wicked men to live happily and subjects honest men to constant torment and pain. 21 The irony exists in the fact that Boethius is finally able to understand the true meaning of happiness, whereas poor Palamoun seems destined to languish forever in his ignorance. He is never able to distinguish between the transient gifts of fortune and the true happiness afforded to the man that follows the
dictates of reason. Both lovers have quoted from a work dealing specifically with problems such as theirs, but fail to take advantage of the book's solace and wisdom, which could relieve them of their pain as it did Boethius. Chaucer seems to delight in the use of this device, and we will see him use it again, though for different emphasis in the speeches of Theseus.

Following the departure of Arcite, Chaucer's Knight breaks in to ask a rather pointed question concerning the circumstances of the two lovers. In his note the editor informs us that many other works have posed similar questions of love for the instruction and entertainment of the audience. The knight however fails to answer the question leaving it to us, as lovers, to answer for ourselves. The question asks which of the lovers should be happier, the one who is able to see his love every day or the one that must only think upon her. It is interesting, and I think very pertinent, to note here that Boccaccio in the Filocolo has the very same question posed to Fiametta. Chaucer was undoubtedly familiar with this work and it seems reasonable that he may have had it in mind when he presented the question, since it was apparently a familiar one.

In the Filocolo Florio, surmaned Philocopo, in his search for his beloved Biancofore happens upon a group of nobles who invite him to join their company. They decide to elect a king and pose to him certain questions of love
for the entertainment and instruction of all. Fiametta is chosen as the most worthy of the entire group and is crowned as their queen. She is acclaimed as a very model of virtue, and when Philocopo asks Galeon about her, he replies "that there is none publicly talking of her which does not vouchsafe to publish the renown of so worthy a lady, . . . She is a lady unto us all. And briefly, there is no virtue that ought to be in a noble heart that is not in hers."22 With this sort of introduction there can be little doubt as to Fiametta's ability to answer the questions with wisdom and charity.

The eleventh question is proposed to Fiametta by a lady named Grace, who asks, as does the knight, "Whether is it greater delight to the lover to see his love present, or not seeing her to think amoursly on her?"23 To this question Fiametta answers; "My gracious Grace, we believe that much more delight is taken in thinking than in beholding, because in thinking of the thing loved all the sensitive spirits do then graciously feel a marvelous joy and as it were to content inflamed desires with the delight only of the thought. But this happens not in the beholding because then only the visible spirit feels joy and the others are kindled with such a desire that they are not able to endure, and so remain vanquished. And that visible spirit sometimes takes so great pleasure that of force is constrained to with draw himself back remaining vile and
altogether vanquished. Then do we rather hereof that
greater delight is to think than to behold." She also
adds that "it is well known that the things which serve
to delight a person the most are those that approach
nearest to the mind. And no one can doubt that thought
abides in the mind while sight never approaches the mind
and hence could not afford as great delight," and finally
concludes; "And that whereof we may have spoken come to
pass through the thought, it is manifest; yea that and
much more. For we do find that men with thought have
passed the heavens and tested of the eternal peace. Then
more delights the thoughts than the sight." 24 Unfortunately,
however, Arcite is not capable of such sublime thought. As
Dino has told us, the kind of love that Arcite and Palamoun
feel abides wholly within the sensitive appetite and never
enters the mind. Fiametta is talking about the kind of
love that is called charity. This is a worthy and spiritual
love that does not dote on the worldly or transient qualities
of a thing, but finds its greatest joy in the mind rather
than in the flesh. Arcite, however, does not have this
kind of love in mind, and instead of being the happier of
the two because of his exile he is tormented and racked
with pain. The irony of the question and the answer given
by Fiametta magnifies the folly of the two lovers. We see
how very simple it would be for the young men to rid them-
selves of all their torment and to be glad and happy in
their love, if only they could learn to love in the right way.

Chaucer continues to follow the story outline of Boccaccio's poem, as the Knight narrates Arcite's wanderings and the great physical changes that come over him. Chaucer has changed the outline of these incidents very little. Since he and Boccaccio describe the changes wrought upon Arcite, it may be valuable to take a closer look at just what is happening to the young man. In his travels Arcite is often heard to cry "Alas;" he wails and moans with a pain that seems greater than any creature has ever endured. He can neither eat nor sleep and grows lean and begins to dry up. He becomes pale and his eyes lose their luster, as he wanders always alone. Chaucer describes his illness.

Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye
Of Heroes, but rather lyk manye,
Engendred of humor malencolik,
Biforn, in his celle fantastik. (11. 1373-76.)

Not only does he have lover's sickness, but he seems also to suffer from what is called Melancholia. In Mediaeval science these were two easily recognized and common illnesses.

Lowes traces the use of Chaucer's word "Heroes" back to several treatises on medicine, where he finds it listed under lover's sickness. He also makes a connection between heroes and the word eroes, which he believes was often used to mean the same thing. Dino del Garbo describes
this same type of illness under the name of amor eroes in
the commentary to which we have already referred. Lowes
uses many other works of mediaeval scientists, all of whom
seem to describe the same onset and progression of symptoms.
Bernard of Gordon in his well-known work, Lilium Medicinae,
describes the wasting and sighing and rapid changes of
the emotions from joy to despair which are similar to the
transformations that Arcite undergoes. Bernard also notes
an increased pulse rate that seems to fluctuate with the
rising and falling of the passions, and observes that the
mental processes become impaired. The etiology of this
condition is discussed by Bernard, who explains that the
thinking is clouded because the faculty of reason has
become impaired and corrupted due to the excess of the
passions that are raging out of control. He adds that
since there is a continual preoccupation with the object
of love, it leads to a loneliness and melancholy resulting
from excessive meditation on the object desired. Their
mistake is that they believe that the object of their
desire is perfect felicity, which it is not. These
thoughts work upon the imagination which arouses the con-
cupiscent passion which in turn controls the erasible
passions that govern the movements of the body, resulting
in a loss of muscular control and balance. The only
possible cure for such an affliction is to divert the
lover from his object, for he believes it to be perfect
only because of his impaired reason. Dino gives us essentially the same account. He explains that love is a type of great intemperance that can do great harm to the body if it is allowed to gain control over the other powers. Those that are excessively in love, he explains, allow love to dominate all the other faculties which are prevented from carrying out their normal functions. The passion rages so strongly that the nutritive powers are impeded and the body withers and dies. He comments also on the radical changes that take place and the extremes of passion from great joy to despair. All these are brought about by the overwork of the imagination of the lover. Chaucer describes these extremes in the case of Arcite along with the melancholy resulting from excessive contemplation.

Into a studie he fil sodeynly,  
As soon thise loveres in hir queyntes geres;  
Now in the crope now doun in the breres,  
Now up, now doun, as boket in a welle.  
(11. 1530-33.)

Arcite is not the only one that exhibits symptoms of this malady. Palamoun too is shown with many of the same reactions. Chaucer describes him languishing in prison.

Who feeleth double soor and hevynesse  
But Palamoun, that love destreyneth so  
That wood out of wit he goth for wo?  
And eek therto he is a prisoner  
Perpetually, nought oonly for a yer.  
(11. 1455-59.)
It is interesting that Dino describes being in love as a great loss of liberty, from which the lover can never gain freedom unless he turn his thought to other things. This is what Chaucer may have been referring to as the perpetual imprisonment of Palamoun.

Palamoun also falls into a trance of excessive contemplation.

And with that woud he fil doun in a traunce
A longe tyme, and after he up sterte
This Palamoun, that thoughte that thurgh his herte
He felt a coold swerd sodeynlich glyde
For ire he quood, no lenger wolde he byde.

(11. 1572-76.)

The image of the man with a sword through his heart was not an unfamiliar one to the mediaeval observer; it appeared in many paintings and statues representing despair. This icon is described in many cathedrals throughout Europe. Palamoun seems to be suffering from the state of despair that results from the excessive contemplation of the lover on his beloved as has already been mentioned above. It seems that Palamoun also is taken with the malady though not so sadly as Arcite. This fact is not surprising, however, when we read that often the condition affects some men more strongly than others. Dino tells that this is due primarily to the position of the stars at the time of the lover’s birth. This could explain the greater effect the malady seems to have upon Arcite, though they may be equally infected.
It seems strange, that though many critics have rec-
ognized the reality of this affliction to the mediaeval 
reader, they have completely overlooked the moral signifi-
cance that is implied. Dino tells us that it is foolish 
to adhere to such a passion for there is neither solace 
nor wisdom nor virtue to be found in it. One should avoid 
such passions, for only apprehensions ruled by reason and 
founded in the intellect are as pleasing as they seem to 
be.\textsuperscript{30} St Augustine explains that the only right way is 
to allow the spirit to dominate over the fleshly desires, 
for only then can one attain the peace of right love.\textsuperscript{31} 
Boethius tells us that the only good life is that which is 
in accord with the will of God; this can be found only in 
following right reason, which is always in accord with 
God's will. The life of wordliness will bring only the 
gifts of fortune and the things of the world.\textsuperscript{32} It is 
also important to remember what Dino says about the nature 
of this passion of love. He states that love, being a 
passion of the sensitive appetite, is therefore under the 
control of the will, and man can choose whether or not he 
will submit to its raging desires. He reminds us that 
though some, by the circumstances of their birth, may be 
more disposed to love than others, yet they are free to 
choose to follow reason or allow themselves to be fooled 
into desiring that which only seems to be pleasant and 
desirable.\textsuperscript{33}
It seems fairly evident in Chaucer's rather satirical and unsympathetic treatment of the pains that the lovers endure, and in what has been said about their kind of love in the commentaries, that a man is not to be admired or praised for becoming sick with love. He is foolish and deviates from the path of right reason and the will of God. Chaucer has too carefully presented and emphasized the qualities of the young men that point to their stupidity and lack of understanding, in the contrasts he so carefully makes, not to have in mind some moral lesson involving the folly of loving a person in the wrong way and for the wrong reason. As I have tried to point out, all of Chaucer's alterations and additions to the story of the Teseida have been in the direction of emphasizing these aspects and contrasting them with what is right. They are too obvious to the careful reader or the man of understanding, to whom the knight dedicates the story, to be missed or passed by. Just as Dino in his commentary says that it is dedicated only to men of understanding and of refined intellect, for only men of this type could hope to understand what he is about to say, so the knight in describing the toilet of Emily, says that to men of such a disposition that mean well this will not seem bad.

And yet it were a game to heeren al.
To hym that meneth wel it were no charge;
But it is good a man been at large.

(11. 2285-87.)
If Chaucer really intended a moral, one would suppose that he would provide some justification for the ending of the story, by showing Palamoun to be more deserving of Emily than Arcite. This has become one of the most popular themes for critics of the *Knight's Tale* and one upon which there is almost universal disagreement. Opinions vary on this subject from those that maintain that Chaucer has very carefully distinguished between the two, and characterized two definite kinds of life and attitudes, to those that believe that there is no attempt to distinguish at all, and maintain that the story has no moral implications but is merely a romance telling of the fortunes of two men in love with the same lady. I would like to review and summarize most of these opinions and show that none of them is really totally accurate. I think Chaucer viewed the lovers as two variations of the same infirmity and solved the problem at last with the intervention of wisdom in the form of Theseus.

J.S. Tatlock, in his article on the *Knight's Tale*, believes that Chaucer, unlike Boccaccio, has taken great pains to draw sharp distinctions between the two lovers. He shows that Chaucer has given Palamoun a much larger part in his story in order to present a contrast to Arcite. He states that Chaucer's treatment of Arcite is sympathetic and generous, while Palamoun shows few good qualities. Palamoun's winning of Emily is part of the great irony of
the story and is poetically just because in the **Knight's Tale**, unlike the **Teseida**, it is Palamoun who saw Emily first; upon examination, however, this doesn't seem very convincing. First of all, he says that Chaucer praises Arcite's cheerfulness and the exuberance of his youth, and that he pities the poor fellow as he falls into the "lover's dumps," which Tatlock seems to feel shows a rather sympathetic characterization of the typical problems of a nice young man who is very much in love.

And Arcite, that in the court roial
With Theseus is squier principal,
Is risen and looketh on the myrie say,
And for to doon his observaunce to May,
Remembry on the poyn of his desir,
He on a courser, startlynge as the fir,
Is riden into the feeldes hym to pleye,
(11. 1497-1503.)

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Whan that Arcite hadde romed al his fille,
And longen as the roundel lustily,
Into a studie he fil sodeynly,
As doon thise lovers in her queynte geres,
Now in the crope, now doun in the breres.
(11. 1528-32.)

This is the very passage that we have used before to show how badly and characteristically poor Arcite is afflicted with the lover's malady, and from what we have seen this state is a condition far from exciting any admiration. Tatlock goes on to quote lines 1608-16 as presenting Arcite as honorable and generous. The incident involves the confrontation of Palamoun, who has just escaped from prison. Since Arcite makes a point of attempting to make the fight equal, Tatlock believes he is being most generous
and honorable. He seems to forget, however, that previous to this statement Chaucer has just described honorable, generous Arcite:

As fiers as leon pulled out hes swerd,  
And seyde thus, . . . (11. 1596-99.)  
"For I defye the seurte and the bond  
Which that thou seist that I have maak to thee." (11. 1604-05.)

Arcite is a raging animal who in his passion denies the promise of friendship which he swore to Palamoun long ago. Though he agrees to fight Palamoun fairly, the point still remains that he should not fight at all. This incident seems to illustrate more the effect of the concupiscent passions on the irascible ones than the generosity of a nobleman. 34 Lastly Tatlock sees Arcite as modest and manly in his prayer to Mars lines (2393-9.) Yet all Arcite is saying is how stupidly and blindly he is in love, as he reminds Mars of the way he once felt toward Venus. This sort of comparison is even more damaging to Arcite's character, for it emphasizes only the bad aspects of his love.

Palamoun is dealt with a little more reasonably by Tatlock, when he says that he is jealous and ungenerous toward Arcite. These passages are fairly evident and seem to show Palamoun in a bad light, but he is made so by love and is no worse than Arcite, who is equally jealous of Palamoun (lines 1235-1250), and cruel and ungenerous (lines 1608-16.) It seems that there is essentially no difference between the actions of the two friends in the incidents
Tatlock has shown us; they are equally corrupted by the force of the passions raging within them, and neither can feel any generosity for the other while they are so inflamed.  

H.N. Fairchild proposes that the distinction Chaucer was trying to make between the two lovers was that they represented different ways of life. He feels Arcite represents the life of physical activity, while Palamoun stands for the life of contemplation and reason, and maintains that this idea is realized in their prayers before the tournament. Both Palamoun and Emily, he says, address their prayers to Mary, one in the form of the goddess of love, and the other in that of the Virgin. Arcite, on the other hand, can only think of the physical aspect of gaining victory. Since Arcite's prayer depends upon Fortune, who is known to be fickle and changeable, his victory soon turns hollow, while Palamoun, who never takes his eyes from the vision of his love, attains his higher goal of Emily over the more material desires of Arcite.  

This kind of argument has a great deal of support among critics.  

In short, although Chaucer made no attempt at distinct portrayal of the two men, he did distinguish between their motives and attitudes, making it clear that love was the more deserving, as 'affection of Hoolyness' as contrasted with Arcite's passion and selfish desire for gratification.
A.J. Marckwardt follows this same line of reasoning regarding the characterization of the two lovers, but arrives at an entirely different conclusion. He finds Palamoun to be the example of the active physical life, since he is impulsive and less intellectual than Arcite, who represents a profound thinker, less ready to act, even when he has the chance. It is poetic irony that allows Palamoun to finally triumph, for he is the one that saw Emily first.\(^{38}\)

Among those that find no difference in the characterization of the two friends there remains the belief that Palamoun deserves the hand of Emily because he loves her more.

Palamoun is like Theseus in that he is able to act more wisely in the worship of Venus as opposed to the rashness of Arcite, who thinks only of the practical solution. Hence the ending is justified, as Arcite and Palamoun are finally reconciled.\(^{39}\)

French says essentially the same thing. He finds Arcite favoring more the feats of arms that betray his fierce temperament, while Palamoun cares less for the glory of battle and more for the possession of the lady, and this is exactly the way the problem was settled with each gaining what they most desired.\(^{40}\) In contrast W.C. Curry maintains that the real essence and deciding factor is found in astrology, and that mention of the gods is made only to define their planetary influences. He believes that the elements of love and philosophy are introduced
by Chaucer only to make the story a little more human and appealing to the audience, whereas the real determining factors are the movements of the heavenly bodies. 41

Nowhere in the Knight's Tale is Chaucer greatly concerned with the moral or religious aspect of the situation. This is a romantic and pagan story, representing the good and bad fortunes of two lovers who strive for the hand of one woman. 42

A great deal of weight has been placed upon the significance of the prayers of the two lovers, who seem therein to express their individual desires. Many of the critics find these prayers and the nature of the deity prayed to to be of major significance in determining the outcome of the story. For a fuller understanding of the meaning of the Gods and their temples, it may be helpful to turn to Boccaccio's notes on the subject, where he explains exactly what he had in mind when he included them in the story. Since the description of the temples is one of the most closely paraphrased portions of the Teseida, it may be safe to assume that Chaucer had Boccaccio's note in mind in the Knight's Tale.

In the Teseida the prayers are personified and journey to the lands in which the major temples of the deities are to be found. It is to this description of the temples that Boccaccio attaches his notes.

The personified prayer of Palamoun journeys to Mount Citherone which is just outside Thebes. Around the
temple itself there is a beautiful garden. The temperature is warm and pleasant, the trees and shrubbery are filled with luxuriant foliage that provides a pleasant cool shade. There is also a beautiful stream that makes the flowers bloom magnificently. In all the trees the birds are singing with as pleasant sound as ears have ever heard. Many figures are present in the garden, lounging around the prominent figure of Cupid. Among those present are Volutta (Lust), Orzio (Idleness), Memorie (Memory), Cortesia (Courtesy), Gentilezza (Gentleness), Van Diletto (Vain Delight) and many more. On the temple are figures of Promise and Art. There are murals of figures who have burned and died for love, many of them of classical origin. Venus is found in an inner temple, guarded by Richess. She is reclining on a couch, clothed from the waist down. The room is filled with pleasant odors and on either side of Venus are the figures of Ceres and Bacchus.\textsuperscript{43} Boccaccio's note on the temple gives an explanation of these figures, what they represent, and how they function in relation to the goddess.

In the beginning of the note Boccaccio states very simply that Mars is supposed to represent the passions of wrath and ire, while Venus stands for the concupiscent passions. He explains, however, that Venus has two quite different meanings. Venus can often represent good passions; that is, desires directed toward having children
and raising a family. He makes it quite clear however, that he is not referring to this concept of Venus, but to the other image that represents concupiscence and illicit desires. This is the Venus commonly referred to as the goddess of love, and it is this second Venus he is speaking of. After this careful and explicit distinction between the two faces of Venus, Boccaccio proceeds to explain the meaning of the temple. He has chosen the location of Mount Citherone for two reasons. The first is that there was actually a temple near Thebes where the people would hold solemn sacrifices once a year in honor of the goddess; hence, the place is valid historically. The second reason is that the climate of that area is most pleasant, neither hot or cold. Boccaccio finds this factor very important for Venus, in that just the right temperature is vital to her worship. If it were too cold one would not be as inclined to take part in the rites of Venus, and it might render him impotent. On the other hand, if it is too hot one feels as if he is flushed with the heat of wine and might become debilitated and not be able to perform the act of love. In this same vein, Boccaccio explains that Ceres and Bacchus represent the appetites of man as they extend to gluttony for food and overindulgence in wine. These appetites are of the same nature as the appetites of love and hence they are aroused by the same means; that is, by the senses through suggestion. He demonstrates
this point, when he speaks of the figure of Venus herself as intended to excite the appetites through the senses.

The figures of Beauty, Youth, Charm, Flattery and the rest are all intended to excite in the same fashion. All the graces are under the influence and guidance of Cupid, whom we vulgarly call Love. Volutta (Pleasure, delight or voluptuousness) is the first to affect us; she moves the bestial part that craves comfort and pleasure. She begins the conquest of love; she tempers the arrows of Cupid, particularly helping to overthrow or subdue the good passions of the heart, and causes us to more ardently respond and to be led by false ideas. Hence we are forced to make a decision between the two types of pleasure, either the temporal or the divine. To help Pleasure in her task, Memory and Ease or Sloth are called into play.

Memory and Ease are the iron arrows of love, made of the fervor of love, and tempered with the sweet attractive graces of feminine charm and the folly of hope and promise. But alas, who when presented with these aspects, when allowed to contemplate a pleasant memory in an attitude of ease, would not fall in love? Hence Memory and Ease make the damage of such love complete and the cause is almost hopeless. When the other seductive attributes are then called into play, the victory is secure.

Palamoun's prayer meets with these temptations, and the question is raised whether that which appears good and
pleasant is indeed really good at all or is really lustful and lascivious. The personified prayer proceeds to the inner temple of Venus where she is found in all her splendor. Venus' reclining attitude, we are told, is meant to convey a feeling of ease and idleness and a pleasant feminine spirit. Her beauty, which is only fleeting and transient represents the false impressions presented to our senses, which at first seem good and reasonable, but later prove to be empty and vain. The nude part of Venus is intended to be attractive and to arouse the bestial part of man. The draped half demonstrates the hidden idea of the beautiful vision of a lady who teaches us to use beauty and pleasure in moderation and to treat them equally with the other desires. Beauty and pleasure are like wine, if you take too much or drink for the wrong reason you begin to think like a jackass. The whole representation of the temple of the goddess is to demonstrate the working of lust, not only through desire for wealth and riches but through the senses as well. Even sweet odors are used, for these sensations work through the whole system of man to effect every part. Boccaccio proceeded to illustrate this idea by reference to the downfall of Paris, who ignorantly chose Venus over Minerva.44

It is obvious from this note that Boccaccio is presenting us not only with an explanation of the allegorical meaning of the figures represented, but also with
a general concept of the way in which one becomes a slave
to what we vulgarly call love.

It is in this note that Boccaccio refers readers
who would like to know more about this subject to the
poetry of Cavalcanti and the commentary on this poem by
Dino del Garbo. We have already made extensive use of this
source in describing the lover's malady that afflicts both
Arcite and Palamoun. Dino was a doctor teaching in the
school at Siena, where he was one of the heads of the staff.
He was also an almost exact contemporary of Cavalcanti's,
which means that he has probably given us the current
opinion of the poem.45 There has been a great deal of
criticism of Dino's interpretation of the poem. Many
critics feel that his commentary is a complete perversion
of the work, due to his limited understanding of literature.
These factors are unimportant, however, for Dino's comment-
ary was considered by Boccaccio as an accurate and just
reading of the poem, and it agreed with what Boccaccio
was trying to do in his description of the temple of Venus.

The temple of Mars is handled in almost the same
way. The features of the building as well as the geography
of the location are explained in connection with the pas-
sions of wrath and ire which Mars represents. Boccaccio
begins by saying he has described the temple in orderly
fashion so that we can understand the attitude of the suitor.
The temple is located in Thrace, a land of violent storms,
ice and snow; it is constantly surrounded by clouds and
wind in a rough and barren landscape. Men of intelligence
know that there are two principle appetites, the concupis-
cent and the irascible. The concupiscent takes great
delight in most things, judging many material things to
be of great worth when they are really not. This is due
mainly to the corruption of the reason. The irascible
appetite is of such force that it impedes the enjoyment
of such longed-for desires. It is of such a nature that
it quickly raises the blood of men to great wrath and
anger for petty reasons.

The temple has been located in Thrace because it is
the land of the northwind, in which men are of the highest
fury and belligerent attitudes because of their coursing
blood. The cloudiness is said to represent the fury of
anger found in the absence of reason, for clouds cover
the sun, the symbol of the light reason. The cold and
ice symbolize the coldness of the anger that dissuades men
from charity. The slush and ice stands for the tears of
a lonely state of mind, which banishes a wrathful man
from the company of others. The steel represents the
hardness and coldness of anger, which banishes the light
of divine grace, the sign of reason. In many cases the
actions of the servants of Mars are demented. The figures
outside the door of the temple demonstrate the corrosion
of the body that is often the consequence of uncontrolled
anger. Our sight is also often affected, for wrath is a kind of madness that blinds our actions without the guiding light of reason. Next comes the figure of Ire whose red color expresses the appearance of anger. There are many aspects of anger; sometimes it may rise without reason and corrupt the ability to speak. Fear may also enter, which turns the complexion pale, for blood then flows less rapidly. Boccaccio also describes the appearance and workings of Fear of Betrayal, Discord and Tristidia, along with Furore and all those effects that appear on the temple.  

Since the two lovers have shown themselves to be the servants and followers of their dieties, they have identified themselves with the respective passions. Chaucer has made use of these passages. His only alteration seem to be in depersonifying the prayers and placing the temples in Athens rather than in other countries. These alterations seem to be in line with Chaucer's interest in condensing action and detail while still maintaining the sense of the Teseida. It seems then that the difference to be found between the two lovers is merely the way in which they express the dominance of their sensitive appetites and the corruption of their reason and understanding. We have already shown this in the description of the lover's malady, and should be reminded what Bernard of Gordon said of the relation of these passions. That it is the
imagination of a corrupted mind that excites the concupiscent and finally the irascible passions. It seems reasonable to conclude that Arcite and Palamoun are equally unworthy of the love of Emily and that they have strayed from the good life that always follows right reason. This seem to be the significance of the temples and the prayers of the lovers; there is little condensation of the Teseida's material because all of the details were important for Chaucer to define the kind of love shared by the two lovers.

There still remains the question which of the lovers should gain the hand of Emily, and what sort of justification is given by Chaucer for the way in which the ending is handled. We are once again presented with a question of love. There is a choice to be made between two ardent lovers who seem to be equal in their capabilities and virtues. A similar question is addressed to Fiametta in the Filocolo. A young lady asks Fiametta who is the most worthy to be loved, a great warrior, vigorous and strong in arms, a man skilled in all arts of courtesy and liberality of love, or the man exceedingly wise and reasonable. To this question Fiametta answers without hesitating that by far the wise man is the best choice. "There is never a one of the three that does not worthily merit the love of a fair and gracious lady. But because in this case I am not to fight against castles or give away the kingdoms of great Alexander or the treasures of Ptolomy, but only that
love and honor are with discretion a long time to be kept, the which are maintained neither by force nor courtesy, but only may say that both you and every other woman ought rather to give her love to a wise man than any of the rest." I hope to be able to show that this is the answer that Chaucer had in mind in the Knight's Tale, and that it is only through the use of reason that a satisfactory solution is found.

Before we turn to the ending of the story, let us look at one more character in the tale. The figure of Emily demonstrates once again that Chaucer was interested mainly in defining his characters in the Knight's Tale as moral attitudes in order to make a definite statement on the subject of worldly love.

Most of the critics seem to feel that Chaucer might have added to the appeal and color of the story if he had made Emily the charming little coquet they feel she is in the Teseida. Emily is almost wholly neglected in the Knight's Tale compared to the space devoted to her in the Teseida, and yet Chaucer has shown enough of her to establish the kind of girl she is and her place in the story. He has condensed the first glimpses of Emily that we have in the Teseida to a mere walk on part, and never mentions her again until she appears at the fight between the two lovers. It is in her prayer to Diana that we first get some insight into her nature. She prays that she may
always be a maiden, for she never wants to be married or to have to bear children. This is significant, when we remember that Emily is the daughter of an Amazon who Theseus had to battle to make her obedient to the authority of man. Emily is not so much interested in living a life of chastity as she is in avoiding the masculine bridle. The next scene shows Emily at the tournament where she awaits her destiny. Chaucer makes use of Boccaccio's description of her fickleness in following the tide of the contest as he has her smile sweetly at Arcite after he has been named the victor, but follows with this rather cryptic remark:

And she agayn hym caste a freendlich ye
(For wommen, as to spoken in comune,
Thei folwen alle the favor of fortune.)

(11. 2680-82.)

Emily is pictured as a strong-willed opportunist who does not wish to submit to the restraint and toil of marriage, but who, if she must wishes to be on the winning side. Hardly a very complimentary portrait, yet Chaucer has drawn it with a succinct and pointed stroke that seems to agree consistently with his approach to the characterization of Arcite and Palamoun.

It is in the figure of Theseus, however, that the Knight's Tale finds its conclusion and strongest statement. Chaucer has developed the character much more extensively than did Boccaccio. In the Teseida Theseus has little part after the first three books, and even then is given no definite characterization, but merely presides over the
action with kingly splendor. In the *Knight's Tale* he plays
a much more important part. Here Theseus is characterized
in his action and speech as the ideal of justice and
wisdom. All of his decisions are marked by reason and
charity, and it is he that finally brings the story to a
reasonable conclusion. We have already mentioned the war
that Theseus fought to subdue the "reyne of Femine," and the
mercy he showed to the women of Athens. Theseus is the king
of Athens, the city whose patron saint is Minerva, the
goddess of wisdom. Theseus as king shows himself to be a
disciple of wisdom and reason.

The next example of Theseus's judgment is shown in
his handling of the fight between the two lovers. His
first reaction is to have them executed for breaking his
command, but the pleas of the women have their effect upon
him; he pardons them and reproaches himself for acting
without mercy and love, even when the case is clear cut
and the parties obviously guilty.

For lитеe reneth soone in gentil herte.
And though he first for ire quook and sterte,
He hath considered shortly, in a clause,
The trespass of hem bothe, and eek the cause,
And although that his ire hir gilt accused,
Yet in his resoun he hem bothe excused,

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . (11. 1761-66.)

Fy
Upon a lord that wol have no mercy,
But been a leon, bothe in word and dede,

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . (11. 1773-75.)
And shortly when his ire is thus agcon,
He gan to looken up with eyen lighte,
And spak thise same wordes as on highte:

(11. 1782-84.)
Theseus is a man whose reason governs his passions. He can deliberate and act according to reason and mercy rather that the raging of anger. He remembers that he too was once caught in loves snare, and speaks to the two lovers with a touch of ridicule, as he condescends to forgive their lack of judgment. He understands the folly of their plight, and wryly says with tongue in cheek:

Now looketh, is nat that an heigh folye?
Who may been a fool, but if he love?
Bihold, for Goddes sake that sit above,
Se how they blede! be they noght wel arayed?
Thus hath hir lord, the god of love, ypayed
Hir wages and hir fees for hir servyse!

(11. 1798-1803.)

He chides them with the fact that the object of their desires cares nothing at all for their great travail, and wisely decides to leave the solution of this affair in the hands of Fortune, the ruler of all temporal considerations.

When the day of the tournament arrives Theseus demands that no short swords be allowed, and instead of killing their opponents the combatants should merely bring them to the stake. He realizes the worth of the cause for which the men are fighting and deems it unworthy of the price of a human life.

In the final scene of the story, Theseus enters once more to alleviate the sorrow and misery that has transpired. Arcite in his dying speech finally realizes that it is the permanent things of this world that man should strive for. He sees the foolishness of his own
pain and torment, and pledges Emily the service of his soul, which he should have done in the first place.

To yow my lady, that I love moost;
But I bequeth the servyce of my goost
To yow aboven every creature,
Syn that my lyf may no lenger dure.
Allas, the wo! alas, the peynes stronge,
That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!
Allas, the deeth! alas, myn Emelye.

.......

What is this world? what asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, withouten any compaignye.
Fare wel, my sweete foo, myn Emelye!

.......

And Jupiter so wys my soule gye,
To spoken of a servouht properly,
With all circumstance trewly,
That is to seyen, trouth, honour, knyghthede,
Wysdom, humblese, estaat and heigh kynrede,
Fredom, and al that longeth to that art.

(ll. 2767-73.)

(ll. 2777-80.)

(ll. 2786-91.)

In the last scene of the tale Theseus calls together Palamoun and Emily. He addresses them with a long sermon from Boethius on the transient nature of material things and the great chain of love which binds this world together. He says that since all things of the world must pass away it is foolish to spend too much time mourning over their loss, and since God's actions ultimately govern everything all things will eventually be seen as good. He tells them Arcite has finally been released from the great prison in which he dwelt so long.

We have seen Chaucer call upon the ideas of Boethius before to point out the confused understandings of Arcite and Palamoun. Here, however, he is in earnest as Theseus allows reason to be the governing factor in the union of
Palamoun and Emily. The union is decided, not by Fortune, but in a "Parlement" the seat of reason and deliberation. The outcome of the marriage is the establishment of a permanent peace between the cities of Athens and Thebes. Athens is the city of wisdom, while Thebes is the city of Venus and Bacchus. (We have already seen in Boccaccio's note that Citheron where Venus's temple stands is near Thebes and the people worship there faithfully.) Here at last the two are joined in a just and reasonable union, for Thebes is brought to "obeisance" to Athens. Emily is finally in her proper state, under the masculine control of Palamoun, and Palamoun, finally relieved from the prison of his lust, is able to serve and love Emily in peace and felicity.

That ye shul of youre grace upon hym rewe,
And take hym for housbond and for lord.
.......
For now is Palamoun in alle wele,
Lyvynge in blisse in richesse, and in heele.
And Emelye hym loveth so tenderly,
And he hire serveth al so gentily. (ll. 3080-81.)

The scene echoes the words of Flaminetta in her answer to the second question of love.

but that only that love and honour are with discretion a long time to be kept, the which are maintained neither by force nor courtesy, but only by wisdom.

The story has come full circle, then, with Theseus directing the action of the beginning and realizing a conclusion in the end. It is through his understanding and wisdom that final resolution is reached. The tale presents
us with a moral lesson, clothed in a fitting garment of fiction. The pagentry and grandeur of the Teseida have been condensed to pointed characterization in an attempt to present as clearly as possible the opposition of forces and ideas operating within the tale. We are left with a promise of happiness for the two lovers who have finally been united in wisdom and charity, the only true foundation for marriage.
FOOTNOTES


4Boccaccio, Teseida, p. 28.


8Boccaccio, Genealogia, trans. Osgood, p. 49.


10These facts seem to be generally agreed upon by most scholars. Articles on the subject can be found in the following:


Robert A. Pratt, "Chaucer's Use of Teseida," PMLA, 62, (September, 1947), 598.

Charles S. Singleton, "Reviews," Speculum, 14, (July, 1939), 373-76.

Germaine Dempster, "Review Article," MP, 38, (November, 1940), 375-76.

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12Bird, p. 162.

13Bird, p. 173.


15Bird, p. 160.

16Bird, p. 169.


19Chaucer, ed. Robinson, pp. 341-42.


27Bird, p. 172.


29Bird, pp. 162-63.

30Bird, p. 168.


33 Bird, p. 167.


41 W. C. Curry, *Medieval Sciences*, pp. 128-34.


45 Bird, pp. 150-53.


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