Mars and Venus: Symbols of the Chaotic and Conflicted Human Passions and the Reestablishment of Order in "The Knight's Tale."

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Abstract

During the Middle Ages, Europe experienced a period when philosophers attempted to separate and analyze the passionate and rational elements of the soul. Some supported strict reason as the sole moral basis for living, while others looked to the tempestuous passionate emotions. Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" portrays this conflict between reason and the passions through the depicted relationship between Mars and Venus and the uncontrolled passions of Arcite and Palamon.

Determining that a world controlled by passions results in chaos, Chaucer offers three different solutions—negating the passions, subjugating the passions to reason, and a balance between passion and reason. He ultimately determines that only the third option will result in true order within nature and the human soul.

Mars and Venus: Symbols of the Chaotic and Conflicted Human Passions and the Restablishment of Order in "The Knight's Tale."

Probably the most popular English medieval author, Geoffrey Chaucer wrote literary works reflecting a distinctly medieval style of writing, and his literature is to some readers the culmination of that period's most significant literary ideals. Chaucer's abilities as an author, philosopher, and communicator are visible particularly in "The Knight's Tale," a story that recounts the conflict between two passionate friends in love with the same woman. Through this story, Chaucer examines the dilemma humanity faces as individuals attempt to control the passionate emotions of the heart. In "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer uses the conflicted relationship between Venus and Mars to symbolize the chaotic nature of human passions, thus revealing humankind's need for a force that imposes order upon the emotions and allowing Chaucer to examine different ways of controlling the emotions and the risks posed by the different forces of order.

Medieval Philosophy in Regards to the Passions

During the Middle Ages, authors frequently examined the conflict of uncontrolled passions, a subject that set the emotions of the heart against the rationality of the mind. Many philosophers of the Middle Ages recognized that both passions and reason play distinctive roles in human nature, and questions arose as to how to reconcile the two powerful forces. According to historian Stephen Gaukroger, it commonly was believed that Adam's "fall from grace" was "the seduction of the will by the passions" and "Eve's temptation of Adam represented the triumph of the feminine passions over masculine rationality" (10). One of the most renowned authors of the High Antiquity was Saint Augustine, whose *City of God* served as a source for many of the theological ideals of the

populace during Chaucer's life. Augustine argues the fall of Adam and Eve resulted in the corruption of human will, so that human desires worked against the rational mind and "human nature, ever since, has been subject to death, to the great corruption which we can see and experience, and to so many and such opposing passions which disturb and disorder it" (27). Furthermore, many medieval theologians also believed that when humankind, through Adam's sin, ceased to control the passions, they also lost "dominion" over the natural world (Gaukroger 10). According to the Biblical Scriptures, when God created humankind, He commanded men and women to hold dominion over the animals and the earth (*King James Version*, Gen. 1:26-28). Therefore, losing control of one's emotional faculties became a moral and religious issue, and many medieval philosophers and authors began devoting literary works to the subject.

The literature of this period began to reflect a growing sense that there was a conflict between the passionate aspect of human nature and the rational element of the soul. C.S. Lewis writes, "Man is a rational animal, and therefore a composite being, partly akin to the angels who are rational but—on the later, scholastic view—not animal, and partly akin to the beasts which are animal but not rational" (*The Discarded Image*, 152). The rational part of human nature was called "reason," which many people believed was the foundation for human understanding of morality, while the animalistic nature of man refers to human passions or emotions (154, 158). Lewis goes on to note that for many philosophers, there was a "moral conflict . . . between Passion and Reason" (158). This conflict between rational thought and passionate emotions became the subject of several books and pieces of artwork. One famous painting, Baccio Bandinelli's *Combat of Ratio and Libido,* shows a battle pitting Venus, Cupid, and

Vulcan, each representing the passions, against the other gods, led by Apollo and Diana, who stand as "the champions of Virtue. In the sky above, Reason herself takes part in the battle, sheds light on her fellow combatants, and covers her adversaries with dense clouds" (Seznec 110). Medieval belief suggested that, to overcome the sinful nature of humankind that resulted from the fall from grace in Eden, humankind must use reason to conquer and control the passions; however, theologians disagreed over the extent to which individuals must suppress the passions. This will be the subject of Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," a story devoted to the theme of order versus chaos and reason versus the passions.

Chaucer's Medieval Conceptualization of the Passions

"The Knight's Tale" is the first in a series of tales told by pilgrims traveling to Canterbury during a holy pilgrimage, and it sets the tone for the rest of *The Canterbury Tales*. As with many other medieval authors, Chaucer blends the ideals of the Middle Ages into a story set against an ancient backdrop. Chaucer focuses on the ancient past of pagan myth when it was at its zenith (Kolve 86). Charles Muscatine notes that "[t]he history of Thebes had perpetual interest for Chaucer as an example of the struggle between noble designs and chaos," and, indeed, the setting is perfect for Chaucer's theme of order versus chaos (190). Chaucer was fascinated with the "human capacity to control and order life and the forces, internal and external, that resist or negate order" (Hanning 50). The story deals with two medieval values, "love and chivalry"; however, foundational to both of these themes is adherence to the natural order of life. As Muscatine notes, "Order, which characterizes the structure of the poem is also the heart of its meaning" (Muscatine 181). In order to portray clearly the significance of order in

the natural world, Chaucer contrasts it with complete disorder amongst those who should most clearly exemplify the structured, rational lifestyle. As members of the nobility and knights of chivalry, Arcite and Palamon should ideally reflect lives of restrained passions and deliberate thought; however, the opposite is true as Arcite and Palamon fall prey to their passions and chaos grows as their antagonist.

Chaucer demonstrates his skills as an author in "The Knight's Tale," where the entirety of the poem suggests a theme of order, including the highly organized structure of the story and the actions taking place within the tale itself. The tale reflects a deliberate structure, beginning with Theseus' wedding to Ypolita and the funeral of the widows' husbands and ending with Palamon's wedding to Emelye and Arcite's funeral (Cooper 94). Then, into this ordered structure, Chaucer introduces conflict and contrast, most significantly in the sub-theme of passions in contrast with reason.

Within "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer deliberately points to the wide range of human emotions or passions, combining several passages dedicated to "the mingled web of good and ill, joy and grief, in the world" (Cooper 93). The tale's introduction tells of people experiencing triumph, sorrow, wrath, and pity as the widowed women plead for vengeance against Creon, who desecrates their husband's bodies. From the very beginning, Theseus's mercy to the widows contrasts sharply with his refusal to accept a ransom for Arcite and Palamon's freedom (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A. 953, 1024). Cooper writes that within this story, "[T]he light and dark sides of life are inextricable," which is reflected in the dual nature of the passions—joy and rage stand as two effects of love's influence (96). Exemplifying this contrast of two opposing ideas is the fact that the story is both a romance and a tragedy; "[t]he poem is Palamon's

romance, in which his faithfulness and endurance at last win him his lady; but it is at the same time the tragedy of Arcite, whose equal mental suffering and greater physical pain are rewarded only by death" (93). As it works to balance both the emotional and physical elements of the human soul, this romantic tragedy takes the ancient setting and inserts into it the medieval values of order.

Ancient and Medieval Depictions of Mars and Venus

Historically, Mars and Venus have played a significant role in literature and myths as symbols of the two most passionate expressions of human emotions—love and war. The deities known to the Romans as Venus and Mars first appeared in popular myth through the Greek pantheon under the names Aphrodite and Ares respectively. According to legend, Aphrodite was the daughter of Uranus, or Saturne as the Romans named him, and was born from the foam of the sea (Breitenberger 12). Aphrodite was connected to fertility, nature's pattern of reproduction, and all other areas of sexuality and "physical attraction" (Willis 143). Aphrodite was "the embodiment of ideal female beauty, and the sphere of activity attributed to her is the 'joyous consummation of sexuality'" (Breitenberger 13, 21). Ares, the Greek god of war, was the son of Zeus and Hera, and typically appeared as a powerful, and often vicious, warrior (Willis 143). There are fewer myths about Ares than of Aphrodite. Ares is well-known for his war-prowess, but otherwise, he is most famous for his affair with Aphrodite (143). The medieval scholars typically assigned planets specific characteristics, and the planetary gods developed two natures—that of a god and that of a planet (Kelly 243-244). The Greek myths surrounding the two deities expanded and slowly changed as they were adopted and retold by the Romans.

The Romans began adopting the Hellenistic religion as their own, as fitting their eclectic nature; however, the Romans naturally modified the natures of the deities in certain ways. The Romans renamed Aphrodite as Venus, and Ares became Mars, while they also made the relationship between the two a more central aspect of the myths than had the Greeks. Caesar Augustus once designed coins depicting Venus clasping Mars in a manner referencing the erotic nature of their relationship, and, in one of Mars's famous temples, statues show Venus standing at his side (Zanker 195). One picture shows Mars standing next to Venus with their son Cupid holding Mars's sword out to his mother suggesting the close relationship between the three (195). Mars, the Roman god of war and agriculture, symbolized the destruction brought by winter months (Halverson 610). In fact, the name for Mars stems from a word meaning "devouring [m]ales" (Minnis 20). Despite his frosty nature, Cicero calls the planet Mars "that fiery and terrible planet" (461). Plutarch also pointed to Mars's fiery passion when he named the planet Pyroeis, which literally translated as "fiery" (Rosen 26). The reference to fire comes from his passionate nature in love and war, which conflicts with his cold appearance, attitude, and abode (Halverson 610). Venus adopted a more reserved nature in Roman myths, although the Romans still associated her with physical attraction and love (Fox 294). The differences between Aphrodite and Venus are never more obvious than when comparing Homer's *The Iliad* with Vergil's *Aeneid*. Although the medieval era adopted the Roman tendency to look at Mars mainly in his capacity as god of war or lover of Venus, they combined the Greco-Roman myths for their understanding of Venus.

The medieval authors maintained the traditional concept of the passionate, fiery, and yet cruel and brutal Mars; however, they developed a Venus who exemplified two

different aspects of love—one more Greek and the other more Roman. Medieval author, Giovanni Boccaccio offers the clearest depictions of the two deities as medieval thought saw them, and his work *Teseida* became one of Chaucer's primary sources for "The Knight's Tale."

According to Boccaccio, "[T]he house of Mars is in Thrace, in cold and cloudy places, full of water and of wind and of ice, wild and thronged with fruitless trees; and in shady places, unfriendly to the sun and full of confusion" ("The Temple of Mars," 334). Boccaccio goes on to explain that this description refers to the wrath that "obfuscates the counsel of reason" and the other negative effects of anger (334-335). It is worth noting that, in the Middle Ages, Mars was the god of uncontrolled anger. As Boccaccio writes, the steel house reflects away the sunlight, because if the light, or "the sound advice of reason in the mind of the angry man," were to shine into the home, the temple would cease to be "the house of Mars" (335). According to medieval philosophy, it was possible to control the passions with reason, and thus even angry men had the ability to control and hide their wrath, but they then did not fall under the power of Mars (334). Although Mars offered men the ability to fight with courage and strength, the cost was naturally the frequency of warfare (Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 106). Mars is rarely a positive character and symbolizes the negative emotions associated with anger and wrath; however, it is important to understand that all of warfare, including the heroic behavior of chivalric knights, fell under his domain.

Like Mars, Venus is frequently characterized as having developed two contrasting natures—one of good and pure love, the other a cold and cruel mistress of the heart (Kelly 242, 244). During the Middle Ages, the concept of love was frequently seen as a

"dichotomy" (Tinkle 11). Within the *Teseida*, Boccaccio explains the dual nature of Venus, but notes that the one he (and consequently later Chaucer) portrays in his literature is the seductive goddess of lust, instead of the gracious goddess of abiding love (qtd. in Thompson 248). Writing in the Middle Ages, French author Pierre Bersiure says Venus symbolizes "the voluptuous life or a certain luxurious person" (qtd. in Minnis 114). He goes on to explain that "just as roses blush and prick with their thorns, so sensual desire induces blushing because of the disgrace of shame, and pricks with the goad of sin" (114). In the Middle Ages, Venus, like Mars, frequently symbolizes the cruel and unsavory aspect of her power.

Chaucer's Portrayal of Mars and Venus

As a medieval author, Chaucer created a portrayal of Mars and Venus that reflects the medieval tradition, particularly in "The Knight's Tale," where his primary source for the descriptions of the deities was Boccaccio's *Teseida*. However, Chaucer does not merely repeat Boccaccio's story; he offers his own version of the events (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 177). In many ways, Chaucer uses his skills as an author to create "a distinct creation much more artistic and effective" than the primary resource (Curry 119). Adopting the medieval tradition of connecting the deities with their planetary counterparts, Chaucer introduces "a mysterious, impelling power, the force of the planets in the affairs of men; perhaps the fortunes of Palamon and Arcite were written at birth among the stars" (120-121). Chaucer speaks of the pagan deities in "The Knight's Tale" as though they were literally present: "These gods are not mythic fictions: as planetary influences, they represent the literal truth of life in the world" (Cooper 97). Chaucer's descriptions of the deities in their temples is exquisitely written and introduces an almost

"three dimensionality" to the figures (Stanbury 103). The realistic portrayal of the deities in the temple suggests that the deities themselves truly reside in the buildings, further supported by the miraculous events each visitor experiences. The classical tradition was still very popular in the Middle Ages, and Chaucer's readers would have understood that his message, as explained by the actions of the pagan gods, was a lesson honestly meant. The pagan nature of the work would not have hindered Chaucer from communicating the fact that he felt the battle between the passions and reason was a very real issue in the Middle Ages.

Chaucer's description of Venus in this tale is very similar to his depiction of her in *Parliament of Fowles.* In *Parliament of the Fowles*, Chaucer notes that her temple allowed in very little light, likely referencing the same concept as the reflective steel of Mars temple in Boccaccio's work (263-264). Chaucer then writes that she lay with her hair untamed on a golden bed, naked and covered only by a light cloth from the waist down (268-269, 273). Botticelli's famous depiction of "The Birth of Venus" fits Chaucer's description very well (Deimling 51). However, surrounding her are images of the many tragic lovers who suffered in the name of love over the centuries (Chaucer, *Parliament of the Fowles*, 288-294). This picture of Venus appears in several of Chaucer's stories, most significantly in "The Knight's Tale." Although Palamon calls her the "Faireste of faire /.… / thow blissful lady deere," her temple's walls once again depict the stories of tragic lovers seen throughout the history of literature (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.1941-1046, 2221, 2260). The temple shows other characters surrounding the goddess including "Plesaunce and Hope, Desir, Foolhardynesse, / Beautee and Youthe, Bauderie, Richesse, / Charmes and Force, Lesynges, Flaterye, /

Despense, Bisynesse, and Jalousye" (I.A.1925-1928). Not all of these are positive elements of love, but they are all "tumbled out in a single heap as morally indistinguishable attributes of Venus" (Cooper 97). Although most of "The Knight's Tale" deals with the negative side of Venus, one can also see that she also represents the purer side of love as with that initially existing between Arcite and Palamon. Chaucer points to this aspect of her authority in *Troilus and Criseyde* when he notes, "Ye holden regne and hous in unite; / Ye sothfast cause of friendship ben also / ….Ye folk a lawe han set in universe" (III.29-30, 36). Chaucer very carefully develops an image of Venus as the voluptuous, lustful, often careless woman of the Greek tradition as it contrasts with her more thoughtful, maternal nature as the Romans pictured her.

Chaucer's portrayal of Mars also reflects his medieval background. Mars's holy temple is in Thrace, "in thilke colde, frosty regioun," and Arcite begins his prayer with the benediction "O stronge god, that in the regnes colde" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.1972, 2373). Within all of Chaucer's works, Mars is "a violent lover and a ferocious fighter" (Gray, "Mars, Marte" 314). Mars is strongly associated with death; his temple walls have paintings of numerous grisly battle scenes, and he is the god of war, which naturally associates him with battle (Sullivan 295). Unsurprisingly, as the god of war, Mars's very personality induces discord and the chaotic life of warfare and destruction. In "The Knight's Tale," Mars "is the god not only of battle—that is mentioned surprisingly little—but of all irrational violence, of theft and conspiracy, suicide, and murder, human and animal blood-lust, fatal accidents" (Cooper 98). Mars, like Venus, also has a dual-aspect of his nature, as mentioned above. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, the narrator requests Venus' aid in overcoming a misfortune if he has been subject to

"Aspectes bade of Mars or of Saturne" and later speaks to "Mars, thow with thi blody cope" (Chaucer III.716, 724). However, Chaucer also acknowledges the "better" side of Mars, commenting that Troilus "was in Martes heigh servyse – / This is to seyn, in armes as a knyght" (III.437). Several of Chaucer's works and poems reflect this dual nature of the deities, and it plays an important role in setting up the deities' roles as symbols of the two-sided nature of human passions.

The Conflicted Relationship of the Two Gods

The relationship between Venus and Mars in "The Knight's Tale" is highly significant to understanding the underlying reason for the conflict of the passions. The two gods are both very similar and extremely different, and their relationship reflects this. Homer first suggested a bonding between the two in *The Odyssey* when he wrote of their adulterous affair as Venus cheated on her husband with Mars, and the Romans extended that idea by cementing the belief that the two were lovers even after they had a son, Cupid (VIII.267). Chaucer refers to this connection between the two in *Troilus and Criseyde*, when the narrator tells Venus, "Ye fierse Mars apaisen of his ire" (III.22). Both deities are very passionate figures and represent the extremes of two very strong expressions of emotions—love and war. In "The Knight's Tale," Chaucer never denies that there are good aspects to both passions; "the question of love is never in debate here" (Muscatine 185). Nor does Chaucer suggest that all warfare is wicked. Theseus orders and structures the battle between chivalric knights according to the laws of honor, and the fight does not show the same savage brutality that appears in the dual between Arcite and Palamon. The problem of "The Knight's Tale" is not that Mars and Venus exist, but that they are constantly in conflict with one another when their powers remain uncontrolled.

When Mars and Venus remain uncontrolled, they inevitably become intertwined irreversibly, and that connection between the two that results in the chaos within Chaucer's tale. In "The Knight's Tale," the two deities never appear unless they are dealing with issues that concern both gods. Of course, the characters pray to one or the other, but the gods themselves only appear together. Even in the temple, Palamon prays to Venus because he is going to war with Arcite, and Arcite prays to Mars because he is in love with Emelye. Although Mars is the god of suicides, Venus's wall depicts the images of those who committed suicide for love, demonstrating a connection between the two when lovers go to the extreme. Ultimately, the love sent by Venus and overwhelming the emotions of Arcite and Palamon is the reason behind the chaotic struggle between the two fallen knights and the battles that result.

Chaucer uses Mars and Venus in this tale precisely because love and wrath are the strongest of all passions and they incorporate most of the other individual passions. Joy, anger, pity, jealousy, and other such emotion are all part of love and war. Because love and war encompass so many minor passions, they lean towards the extreme. In his essay describing the problem of love, Andreas Capellanus, a medieval expert on love, writes that "Not every kind of meditation can be the cause of love, an excessive one is required; for a restrained thought does not, as a rule, return to the mind, and so love cannot arise from it" (293). As one author notes:

> Love can create dissension between sworn brothers; can make a man lament his release from prison; make him forsake safety and native land; and, after unending toll of time and strength, it can leave him bloody and desirous of death. Theseus' speech on love, as his speech on Arcite's

> death, is normative and judicial; and to the noble, the mature mind, the paradoxically impractical quality of love is both laughable and admirable. (Muscatine 185)

War is equally powerful in that it can destroy lives, nations, land, and even obliterate generations. When Chaucer was writing, England and France were still fighting The Hundred Years' War and the people of Europe knew how devastating the violence could become. Venus and Mars symbolize the two passions most likely to expand out of control, and they pose the greatest threat to the individual's control over his or her actions.

This concept that the two passions are inseparable reflects the medieval understanding of love. The emotions of love lead individuals to a certain point of vulnerability wherein they fear all things that might come between themselves and the object of their affection (Capellanus 292). Poet John Gower, a contemporary of Chaucer, writes, "Love . . . is conflicting within itself. . . . Love is an unjust judge; marry opposites, it makes the very nature of things deteriorate. In love, discord is harmonious, . . . anger makes jests, honor is base . . . despair hopes, hope is afraid, harms are helpful, assets are harmful" (195). Ovid, one of the primary sources for medieval authors, expressed this concept when he says, "Love is a kind of warfare" between the man and the woman ("Advice to Men," 280). The moment a man falls in love with a woman, he becomes a type of soldier (Ovid, "The Lover's Warfare," 287). "The age that is meet for the wars is also suited to Venus . . . The spirit that captains seek in the valiant soldier is the same the fair maid seeks in the man who mates with her. . . . The one is sent to scout the dangerous foe; the other keeps eyes upon his rival as on a foeman" (287). According

to Boccaccio, everyone who describes love says that it "is armed with arrows" ("The Temple of Venus," 338). It is significant to note that medieval legend suggested that love made its own arrows; lovers actively prepared for battle against both the threat of rejection and the threat of possible rivals. At one point, "Mars, too, was caught, and felt the bonds of the smith; no tale was better known in heaven" (Ovid, "The Lover's Warfare," 287). Chaucer tells of Mars's love for the unfaithful Venus in his "Complaint of Mars," where Mars describes the pain of lovers and warns humankind against falling in love at all.

Unfortunately, the similar passionate natures of Mars and Venus are what drive them into conflict with one another. Considering that the main theme of this story is the ordering of chaos, it is a little surprising that the relationships reflect order to begin with; however, they descend into chaos as love and war (Venus and Mars) begin to force their wills upon the world. The relationship between Venus and Mars does not begin with chaos either; that only happens after Arcite and Palamon's conflicting requests in the temples causes the deities' goals to start to conflict. Mars is passionate in war; Venus is passionate in love, and when the two are set up against one another, disorder quickly follows. Thus, Chaucer "presents the gods as emblematic of all the cosmic capriciousness and disorder the human characters have sensed" (Cooper 97). Venus and Mars agree to help Palamon and Arcite respectively in their struggle against one another over the love of Emelye. However, the cousins desire the same prize—marriage to Emelye, which only one can have. This sets Mars and Venus against one another, as each vies for the benefit of his or her petitioner. As deities, Mars and Venus embody their power, and naturally work to fulfill their duties as the deities of war and love.

However, this means neither will accept failure in regards to fulfilling Arcite and Palamon's prayers (Zanker 195). Thus a seeming paradox is introduced as Mars and Venus begin to quarrel, "And right anon swich sstrif ther is bigonne, / For thilke grautyng, in the hevene above, / Betwixe Venus, the goddesse of love, / And Mars, the stierne god armypotente" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.2438-2441). Until the situation is resolved, neither deity can fulfill his or her responsibility as the gods of love and war, and the natural order of life will be held in check for a time.

The Two Gods in Relation to Arcite and Palamon

One of Chaucer's messages within the tale is that the passions exist in every individual—each person has the capability to experience the overwhelming fierceness of love and the horrific determination to commit violence. Humanity's need for love and the emotional connection is ingrained into its psyche; it is part of the human soul, and "central to man's nature as it is conceived in this poem [is] . . . his need to seek love" (Kolve 90). The two gods and the two mortals are all similar in that each figure embodies contradiction (Baum 303). Just as Mars falls in love with Venus and Venus drives lovers to battle, both Palamon and Arcite fall in love with Emelye and both seriously consider war as recourse. Arcite and Palamon both exhibit passive and active responses to love. When Palamon claims that he deserves Emelye because he fell loved her first, Arcite tells him that, while Palamon loves Emelye like a worshipper of a deity, Arcite has the mortal, passionate love of a man for his woman. However, when Arcite has the chance to act on his feelings for Emelye while Palamon remains in prison, he is content to mourn from afar. He passively bemoans his inability to achieve Emelye's hand. Meanwhile, Palamon, upon leaving prison, swiftly prepares to fight for Emelye

(303). Later, their natures seem to alter as Palamon becomes more contemplative, praying for the chance to live with Emelye even if he cannot win the battle. On the other hand, Arcite adopts a more active stance, praying for victory in battle as the means of gaining Emelye's hand. By depicting the passions of love and war as conflicting elements of each person's character, Chaucer shows that he does not differentiate between the levels of danger both passions pose to nature's order. Muscatine explains, "As the whole background of the *Tale* shows, the worship of Mars is no less important an aspect of the noble life than the worship of Venus . . . . That the differentiation between the knights is ultimately a source of balance rather than of conflict can be seen even at the beginning of the poem" (186). With the conclusion of the battle and Arcite's death, Chaucer shows that neither extreme love, nor extreme violence won the hand of Emelye. Neither Palamon nor Arcite would have married Emelye had other, more rational forces not instigated the marriage.

The actions of the gods naturally affect the actions and experiences of mortals, and the battle between Arcite and Palamon is the human parallel of the war between the two gods. Initially, Mars and Venus are working together more or less peacefully. In battle, Theseus defeated Ypolita's army and thus was able to enter into a marriage with her, symbolizing a resolution to the war through marriage and love. This shows a peaceful coalition between the workings of Mars and those of Venus. The united front matches that of Arcite and Palamon who have sworn to be loyal brothers-in-arms (Zanker 195-196). However, Palamon and Arcite are symbols of Venus and Mars respectively, and the fates of the two cousins are linked to the natures of the two deities (Halverson 609-610). Interestingly, the events leading up to the fight between Arcite and Palamon

follow the pattern of events as influenced by the two gods. Creon defeated the widows' husbands in battle, but because they loved the dead men, the widows turn to Theseus for revenge. He uses war to defeat Creon and captures Arcite and Palamon in the process. Because Arcite and Palamon are locked in prison after their capture, they both espy Emelye and fall in love. Upon falling in love with the girl, they go their separate ways and eventually begin fighting as rivals for her hand. There is a constant movement from war to love repeatedly throughout the story. The movements of the gods reflect the movements of the mortals, until eventually the two men separate and each turns to a different god for assistance.

Arcite and Palamon recognize the forces working in their lives, and the night before entering the amphitheatre for the final combat, they approach the deities responsible for controlling those forces (Klitgard 88). Each makes one request of his patron deity, and "In the careful parallelism between the human and divine characters, Em[elye] is paired with Dyane, Palamon with Venus, Arcite with Mars (Cooper 100). In the name of love, Palamon turns to Venus and Arcite turns to Mars, which sets the cousins on two separate paths with the same destination. Palamon begins to carry a white banner (the color of Venus), but Arcite rides with a red banner (the color of Mars) (Turner 280). It is at this point that the two cousins become distinct in order to reflect the gods they parallel. Frederick Turner notes, "As soon as the human level is transcended, important distinctions appear" (280). Once the mortals choose which passion will dominate their actions and goals, their fates are decided; they will receive what they pray for. The battle between Palamon and Arcite is merely an extension of the battle between Mars and Venus, and the prayers of the characters reflect this.

The forces of love and war pushing the lives of Arcite and Palamon further into disorder drive the deities Venus and Mars into conflict as they attempt to resolve the situation. Ultimately, the chaos of the world climaxes "in the descriptions of the three temples. It is there, at the centre of the mirror patterning of the work, that the strongest statement of the disorder of the world is made" (Cooper 97). Muscatine agrees and notes, "The motive of misfortune and disorder is extended in ever-widening circles of reference in the descriptions of the three temples" (189). Although Theseus attempts to impose control by building the amphitheatre and arranging the temples within the confines of the theatre, the chaos grows within his sphere of control until it spills out into the world again with the death of Arcite.

Arcite is connected closely to Mars, and Mars's connection to death and destruction forebodes Arcite's dark fate. Arcite's prays for Mars's help in achieving victory over Palamon. He asks, "Thanne help me, lord, tomorwe in my batailed / …. / and do that I tomorwe have victorie" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.2402, 2405). Considering Mars's nature as the god of ruthless violence, it is unsurprising that Arcite, "who commits himself to this god of casualties, dies a victim of 'meschaune'" (Cooper 98).

Unlike Arcite, Palamon prays to Venus for her help in his attaining the ability to live his life out with his love, Emelye. Palamon plainly states his wishes, "I ne axe nat tomorwe to have victorie, / …. / But I wolde have fully possessioun / Of Emelye" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.2239, 2242-43). Palamon's "association with the forces of life" foretells that Palamon will receive victory (life) in the end (Halverson 610). Venus was closely involved in each step of the cycle of life as the goddess of love

and fertility. Upon hearing Palamon's prayer for life with the one he loves, Venus is quick to accept him as her petitioner and promises to give him what he asks for.

At this point, Palamon and Arcite settle into their established roles, whereas before their characters were still moving between thoughts of passive and active pursuit of Emelye. The battle between the two passions becomes distinctly human, and Chaucer pulls together the conflict to show that although he uses the deities to show the nature of the conflict, the conflict itself is very human and experienced by all mortals.

The Conflict that arises within Human Kind

Although Arcite and Palamon's struggle becomes an extension of the battle raging between Mars and Venus, their story reflects the human aspect of this conflict. Arcite and Palamon's relationship begins with a close friendship between two very similar young men. Indeed, initially, the verses introducing the characters Arcite and Palamon depict the two men in the same manner without offering a unique element to either's character. Chaucer's first description of the cousins depicts "Two yonge knyghtes liggynge by and by, / Bothe in oon armes, wroght ful richely, / … / They that were of the blood roial / Of Thebes, and of sustren two yborn" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.1011-1012, 1017-1018). The two cousins fought in the same army side by side and now lie next to one another upon the ground—a picture of unity, not conflict. Later they even call each other "brother" (I.A.1130, 1161). Chaucer very carefully maintains their characters on an equal standing; neither character ever takes center stage over the other (Frost 292). Both Arcite and Palamon are noble young men, who love passionately and truly, and who are "equally valorous" (292-293).

When they fall in love with Emelye, neither appears more worthy than the other of her love in return; "Between Palamon and Arcite there is very little to choose: both equally are equally 'deserving' of Emelye . . . in that they both come from the aristocracy and feel the right emotions" of love for Emelye (Thompson 77). However, the moment they fall in love, the two develop individual characteristics, beginning with the way in which they love Emelye (Baker 461). Arcite compares their love for Emelye saying, "Thyn is affeccioun of hoolynesse, / And myn is love as to a creature" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.1158-1159). Thus, as Capellanus forewarned for those who fall prey to their passions, the beginning of love sparked emotions traditionally found on the side of war: those of jealousy, fear, despair, and violent anger. Now the two men become "dogs fighting over a bone" (Turner 280). Their love for Emelye pushed Arcite and Palamon into conflict with one another, and the unity that readers saw earlier between the cousins vanishes and is replaced by war and anger.

"The Knight's Tale" begins with an ordered and peaceful world, but when the two men allow their passions to overcome their sense of reason and nobility, chaos descends. Thus, Chaucer connects the idea that the question of how well one controls the passions is closely connected with the existence of order in the world, and Chaucer and other people living in the Middle Ages upheld natural order as a moral necessity. Once the passions gain control through the actions of Mars, Venus, and their human counterparts, the natural order of society, morality, and even nature are disrupted.

The Consequences of the Conflict

According to the medieval concept of the knight's code of honor, knights were meant to fight out of necessity in defense of the oppressed. Knights, more than anyone,

had a responsibility to uphold the Christian virtues. Describing the knight's responsibility, one medieval author, Ramón Lull, warns, "For when you become a knight you will receive the honor and the service that must be accorded to the friends of chivalry. And insofar as you will have a more noble origin and more honor, so much more are you sworn and bound to be good and pleasing to God, and also to the people" (Lull 182). By allowing themselves to be caught up in a war over a woman, both Arcite and Palamon become guilty of abandoning the knight's code and lose their social respectability.

In the Middle Ages, duels traditionally occurred during jousts, and were structured according to the rules of knighthood. However, "the combat of Palamon and Arcite is not socially sanctioned and serves no human purpose: it is covert and irrational, and it destroys a sword bond of brotherhood" (Kolve 108). By fighting the duel in the forest without witnesses and without adherence to the laws of social order, the cousins become little better than the animals around them. Once again, Chaucer points to the medieval concept that to lose control of the passions is to lose dominion over the earth and animals. Instead, they demean themselves to the same level as the creatures they are meant to control; "[t]hey seek each other's death like savage beasts in a wooded grove symbolically appropriate to those passions" (108). Chaucer describes the events saying, "Ther nas no good day, ne no saluyng, / But straight, withouten word or rehersyng, / …/… And after that, with sharpe speres stronge / They foynen ech at oother wonder longe" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.1649-1650, 1653-1654). Because the fiery passions of both love and now war fuels the duel, the cousins shamelessly fight a disordered, ungoverned, and animalistic swordfight (Halverson 615). Although they take

the time to arm each other "as freendly as he were his owene brother," they are too caught up in their passion to remember the love they once bore for each other (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.1552). Signifying this collapse, the two men begin to "identify themselves with untamed nature, Arcite weaving a garland of woodbine and hawthorn in honor of the May, and Palamon crouching like an animal" (Kolve 108). "Palamon / In his fighting were a wood leon, / And as a crueel tigre was Arcite; / As wilde bores gonne they to smyte / That frothen whit as foom for ire wood" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.1655-1659). This battle between Arcite and Palamon forces figures of control to impose order upon the earth. Here in this forest is the climax of the disordered world. Man has become no better than a creature, wild and savage, going directly against both God's command and the natural order of the earth.

Socially, Arcite and Palamon have abandoned the rules of proper warfare, and have introduced chaos into the social order. Morally, they have left behind their chivalric values, and "When charity, loyalty, truth, justice, and verity failed in the world, then cruelty, injury, disloyalty and falseness arose. Therefore there was error and trouble in the world" (Lull 181). At this point, war, love, Arcite, and Palamon are tangled chaotically together in a knot of passionate emotions, and it is unlikely that they will be able to resolve the situation and re-establish order on their own (Fifield 99). Because of the violent and extreme nature of the passions when they are uncontrolled by reason or wisdom, chaos has enveloped both the physical and divine worlds. Having created a world of disorder, Chaucer now introduces figures who embody the three different ways that order can be imposed upon the passions, and he analyzes the weaknesses and successes of each attempt.

Three Types of Resolution

Saturne

The first mediator is Saturne, another planetary god, although his cold and emotionless nature stands in complete opposition to that of Mars and Venus. Saturne is less famous than Venus and Mars, partly because after the Golden age of mythology, his legends faded and he ceased to play a large role in Greek and Roman mythology (Sullivan 11). Within Chaucer, Saturne adopts his traditional planetary characteristics, apart from his parental relationship with Venus, which looks toward the mythical depiction of the deity himself (Curry 127). Medieval astrologer Alchabitius writes:

> Saturn[e] is masculine, evil, diurnal . . . He signifies darkness of counsel, profound silence, and ancient and precious things pertaining to judgments. He is deserving of mistrust and suspicion, moving men to complaints and mutterings. He is old, changeable, and of evil taste; he has power over dirty waters, long wanderings, prisons, chains, slowness of labors, afflictions, and *almauerith*, that is, the substance of dead men. (qtd. in Curry 129)

Saturne symbolizes a person whose inner mind is a war with itself. Saturne is remembered in legends for castrating his father and eating his children, he is viciously cruel, but in an impassioned manner. Whereas Mars feeds on the brutality of violent, fiery rage, Saturne is thoughtfully and deliberately savage. Curry connects the battle in the theatre to the "conflict between the planets, Saturn[e] and Mars; that the kings Lycurgus and Emetreus are, respectively, Saturnalian and Martian figures" (120). In the natural world, he supposedly created lead; in human nature, he is responsible for the

"melancholy complexion"; and in history, he is the cause of devastating events (Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, 105). Known as the *Greater Infortune,* Saturne is associated with illnesses and old age—"Our traditional picture of Father Time with the scythe is derived from earlier pictures of Saturn[e]" (105). In mythology, Saturne's nature is mainly sinister and vindictive (Kolve 123).

In "The Knight's Tale," Saturne symbolizes the need within the natural world for order above all things (Gaylord 174). Furthermore, Saturne stands as a more powerful deity than Mars or Venus, and he has the power to enforce his will upon them, unlike such humans as Theseus. Saturne has a "greet avantage; / In elde is bothe wysdom and usage" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.2443-2445). Saturne himself tells Venus:

> Myn is the drenching in the see so wan;
> Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
> Myn is the strangling and hangyng by the throte,
> The murmure and the cherles rebelling,
> The groynynge, and the prybee empoysonyng;
> I do vengeance and pleyn correccioun . . . .
> (I.A.2456-2461)

Saturne's speech sets the tone for his method of establishing order, he intends to strangle the passions and eradicate their existence completely.

It is important to understand that the very introduction of gods and goddesses into the story establishes a type of universal order. Since the universe naturally necessitates that humans live beneath the gods both physically and spiritually; therefore, the introduction of spiritual figures who command the powers of love and war is an

imposition of natural order in and of itself (Hanning 60). Saturne claims that the divine order of nature is stronger than the chaos of humankind, which is true. However, this imposition of order is a pagan concept wherein the pagan deities control human lives, and thus Saturne's plan is not entirely successful. Saturne ignores the existence of the passions, and each of his actions focuses on the rational outcome that resolves the conflict according to the letter of the prayers. However, in doing so, he does not acknowledge the emotions of the humans involved. He resolves the conflict between Mars and Venus by carefully analyzing the terminology of the prayers. Saturne determines that he can answer both prayers if Arcite wins the battle, but dies before he can claim Emelye, thus allowing Palamon to claim her as his bride. However, while this satisfies the gods Venus and Mars, it ignores Arcite's ultimate desire for the hand of Emelye, which he thought he could gain through victory. Saturne is successful in establishing order in the heavens, but the death of Arcite disrupts Theseus' plan to establish order and furthers the chaos on earth. When carried out to the fullest, Saturne's way of imposing order would ultimately result in a world on earth as harsh and cruel as the planet Saturne inhabits.

After Saturne kills Arcite, Mars and Venus vanish from the story and do not reappear. Although Saturne has resolved the conflict between the gods and established one method of eradicating the conflict between the passions and reason, the resulting abolishment of the passions is unnatural. While dying, Arcite reflects this need for the passions with his request "Foryet nat Palamon, the gentil man / … / Mercy Emelye!" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.2797, 2808). Arcite faces the consequences of Saturne's imposition of order and asks, "What is this world? What aketh men to have? /

Now with his love, now in his colde grave / Allone, withouten any compaignye" (I.A.2777-2779). Punished according to a judgment based strictly on reason, Arcite still longs for love and companionship. He recalls that which he is losing because of Saturne's decision. Saturne's imposition of order by relying upon reason to the abandonment of the passions leaves the humans unsatisfied. The passions are inseparable from the natural order of human life, just as love and hatred are always present (Boccaccio, "The Temple of Venus," 337). At this point in the story, Chaucer has shown that the goal is not to allow the passions uncontrolled dominance, nor to obliterate them. The goal is to control them.

Theseus

The second symbol of order in the chaotic world comes in the figure of the King of Thebes, Theseus. Theseus is an interesting character in that he embodies both the passions and the imposition of reason. Chaucer describes Theseus as "swich a conquerour / That gretter was there noon under the sonne" ("The Knight's Tale," I.A.862-863). Later, Chaucer will note, "In al his wele and in his mooste pride, / He was war" (I.A.895-986). As a servant of Mars, Theseus occasionally loses control of his temper, as with his initial reaction to the women in mourning at the beginning of the tale and to the ignoble duel between Arcite and Palamon. Theseus' first response to the weeping widows reveals his quick temper, and at that moment "[h]is demand for general order is stated so angrily that he becomes a bit intemperate. . . . [H]is passions have already prevailed" (Curtis 76-77). Like Arcite, Theseus stands as a servant of Mars and bears his banner; however, he also expresses the passions of love—"he has been a 'servant' of love in his youth" (Cooper 100). His marriage to Ypolita makes him a

significant symbol of love. In the fourteenth-century, marriage symbolized both order and stability. Marriage was "not only a symbol of spiritual order . . . but of political, moral and economic order as well. . . . More importantly, it was a reflection of the individual's moral life, of his reproduction capacity and, with the family unity, for produce itself" (Thompson 229). As the goddess of love and fertility, Venus was, in the purest and most virtuous form, the goddess of marriage, for that was the ultimate expression of love. However, throughout the poem, Theseus symbolizes a combination of both the passions and reason, and "[b]y the end of the tale, Theseus will have emerged as the figure of the wise and just ruler, the champion of right order and the advocate of marriage" (Curtis 78).

Theseus is unique because he symbolizes both the passionate and rational aspect of the soul, as seen through his service to Dyane, goddess of the chase. Dyane is a unique goddess in that, "[a] chaste virgin, she defies the power of love. . . . Yet, virgin as she is, Dyane presides over the birth of children" (Dwight 198). Thus, while standing against the lustful passions of love, Dyane upholds the virtue of proper love—that which leads to honorable reproduction. On the other hand, as the goddess of the chase, Dyane stands with her brother Apollo as a brilliant archer and aims her arrows at the "families of men, who, like withering leaves, are to make room for generations to come (196). However, she "is said to have prepared herself for this, by trying her arrows first on trees, then on animals, and lastly on a lawless city" (196). Dyane has the ability to fight a war, but instead she reserves her weapons for maintaining the natural order of life. Her careful practice with the bow and arrow ensures that she does not attack savagely, but in an ordered manner causing no more harm than necessary to the innocents and ensuring

defeat of those who must die by her hand. Dyane stands as an enforcer of the natural order of life, and yet embodies the necessary aspects of love and war.

Because Theseus comes across the duel of Arcite and Palamon while hunting, he enters as a figurative symbol of Dyane, which dominates his actions though he still acknowledges his service to Mars and Venus, thus offering a human who embodies both aspects of the soul with reason controlling the passions. Exhibiting his connection to Venus, Theseus arrives at the duel between Arcite and Palamon hunting a "hert in May" and riding with his wife Ypolita (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.1675, 1685). At the same time, Chaucer writes that Theseus' first response to the unchivalric duel is uncontrollable anger until the women beg for his mercy (I.A.1704-1766). However, Theseus returns to himself upon hearing the women's pleas and takes control of his temper. Proving himself the servant of Dyane, Theseus acts as the agent of justice to restore the "decencies of human order," and his success determines "the restoration of the proper ceremonial obsequies and a new triumphal entry" (Cooper 93). Upon discovering Palamon and Arcite in the inappropriate duel, Theseus instantly responds to the threat he sees to the "social order" (Kolve 109). He begins imposing order upon the two cousins' disordered battle, by forcing them to adhere to the laws of the chivalric code of battle (Hanning 60). Theseus intends to create an amphitheatre that is "measured and shaped by the human mind, within whose perfect forms he will ordain the most ceremonial and highly structured of all forms of human combat" (Kolve 112). Halverson claims, "The combat becomes rationalized; it is contained in the perfect circle of the stadium; it is bound by strict rules reducing potential violence; the opposing forces are carefully balanced. Everywhere…[c]rude and heedless passion submits to the formal containment

of rational law" (Halverson 615). Those who build the amphitheatre and three temples that are within come from both scientific and artistic areas of work, reflecting a combination of reason with the passions (Kolve 112). Chaucer structures the pattern in which they approach the temples geographically according to the reading of the four directions on a map starting with east, moving to the north, and stopping in the west (Lynch 111). It is significant that Mars and Venus' temples rest above two of the gates into the amphitheatre so that both armies must enter through the gate of a passion. However, Dyane's temple is not above a gate, and instead stands along a wall (Kolve 114). Furthermore, Theseus places the temples within the sphere of the amphitheatre; thus symbolically placing the worship of these deities within his control. This theatre stands as the symbol for order and rational design, and within it shall be a true contest between Arcite and Palamon. There it shall be determined who should win, and thereby establish the victory of Mars over Venus or vice versa. The amphitheatre serves as a symbol of reason and order, and within this place's influence Theseus sets the temples. He is subjugating the passions to the authority of reason.

To a certain extent, Theseus is successful. The battle is sanctioned officially, and he imposes a certain degree of order upon the armies. Theseus demands that no soldier "up peyne of los of lyf, / No maner shot, no polax, ne short knyf, / Into the lystes sende or thider brynge" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.2543-2547). Furthermore, according to Theseus' command, all men defeated leave the battle range instead of remaining behind to be killed (I.A.2551-2554). Theseus has shown that he will determine the conditions by which love and marriage will take place (the victor gets the hand of Emelye), while also imposing restrictions upon the use of war through his decrees.

Unfortunately, Theseus is not ultimately successful at imposing order upon the chaotic passions because he attempts to use order and structure to force the passions into submission without recognizing the strength of the passions in human nature. Chaucer still describes the actions of Palamon and Arcite in terms of the behavior of wild animals, noting that "[t]her nas no tygre in the vale of Galgopheye, / Whan that hir whelp is stoe whan it is lite, / So crueel on the hunte as is Arcite / For jelous herte upon this Palamon" ("The Knight's Tale," I.A.2626-2629). Furthermore, "[n]e in Belmarye ther nus so fell eon, / That hunted is, or for his hunger wood, / Ne of his praye desireth so the blood, / As Palamon to sleen his foo Arcite" (I.A.2630-2633). Theseus has established some degree of control over the actions of Palamon and Arcite, but their passions are so strong that even within this "civilized" battlefield, they behave like wild animals in their frenzy. Moreover, despite Theseus' declaration that the victor of the battle would win the hand of fair Emelye, Arcite dies due to Saturne's intercession in the events, something Theseus could neither have predicted nor controlled. Theseus fails to control elements of love as well, and despite his promise of a wedding at the end of the battle, Palamon does not immediately wed Emelye. "As a symbol of personal and social order, marriage succeeds or fails according to the order on which it is based" (Thompson 226). Instead, the entire town falls under the control of their excessive grief at Arcite's death. Chaucer describes the scene: "Infinite been the sorwes and the teeres / Of olde folk and folk of tender yeeres / In al the toun for deeth of this Theben / For hym ther wepeth bothe child and man" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale, I.A.2827-2830). The forest, which Theseus had tamed by building the amphitheatre, is already once again wild, and Theseus must re-tame the land before he can bury Arcite in the grove. Emelye weeps day and night, as though her

husband were dead, and even Theseus seems inconsolable. The situation remains dire until Theseus' father, Egeus, begins to speak.

Theseus has failed to control the passions by using reason as a cage in which to bind them. Theseus fails to recognize that the passions are an innate piece of human nature; they cannot be subdued and restrained through sheer human will. By building the amphitheatre, Theseus attempts to "translate human aggression, sexuality, and (finally) sorrow into forms that will allow civilized life to continue" (Kolve 131). However, he has also disrupted nature in the process. Chaucer refuses to speak of the event:

> How [the trees] weren feld shal nat be toold for me;
>
> goddes ronnen up and doun,
>
> Disherited of hire habiacious,
>
> In which they wonenden in reste and pees,
>
> Nymphes, fawnes and amadrides;
>
> Ne hou the beestes and the brides alle
>
> Fledden for fere, whan the wode was falle.
>
> (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.2924-2930)

Once again, nature has fallen prey to the destructive forces of a chaotic world.

Theseus has failed to control the passions by locking them away, as soon as the battle was over the people's sorrow overwhelms them, and Theseus must once again impose order by clearing the land for Arcite's burial. Saturne failed to implement order because he attempted to eradicate the passions completely; and that creates a cold, cruel world that also fails to appreciate that the passions are ingrained into nature. Theseus does not deny the existence of the passions as Saturne did, but his attempt to suppress the

emotions through order and reason fails all the same. Ultimately, "Theseus' attempts to impose order on the chaos of fortune are more persistent than successful" (Cooper 103). Now, Chaucer will attempt to introduce the concept of blending the passions with reason seamlessly so that the two form a balance of emotion with science.

Egeus & Theseus

Although Theseus has already failed to establish order in the chaotic world of "The Knight's Tale," he plays an important role in the final attempt to impose control over the passions successfully, but surprisingly the true voice of order is a minor character to whom Chaucer dedicated only one paragraph. This man, Egeus, is Theseus' father, and he has the age and wisdom of Saturne combined with the humanity and nobility of Theseus. Chaucer says that Egeus "knew this worlds transmutacioun, / As he hadde seyn it change bothe up and doun, / Joye after we, and we after glandesse, and shewed hem ensamples nand likenesse" ("The Knight's Tale," I.A.2639-2642). Egeus looks at his grieving son and begin to remind him of the natural order of life, and the reality that human nature involve both reason and the passions, neither of which are negate-able. Egeus tells his son that all men who die once lived, and those who live are destined to die. The world is merely a "thurghfare ful of wo, / And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro" (I.A.2847-2848). Then, when death does come, it is "an ende of every worldly soore" (I.A.2849). Life is a never-ending cycle of birth and death, and other, smaller, but still repetitive, processes bind these two events together.

Boethius describes this process beautifully, noting that without fail, "Phoebus in his golden chariot brings in the shining day, that the night, led by Hesperus, is ruled by Phoebe, that the greedy sea holds back his waves within lawful bounds, for they are not

permitted to push back the unsettled earth" (290). The human rational mind recognizes these processes, understands the logic behind the ordered world, and uses that knowledge to impart wisdom as a moderating influence. However, "all this harmonious order of things is achieved by love which rules the earth and the seas, and commands the heavens" (290). The passions are what keep humans moving in the natural flow of life. Love encourages people to seek out companionship, friendship, and leads them to marry, and then it holds the marriage together (290). Because of love, mothers continue to face childbirth for the simple joy of holding the newborn infant. Through righteous anger, humans find the strength to defend their homes and families against enemies from outside. Through love of the mystical and belief in the immaterial, people recognize the existence of a holy force moving and working in the world. The earth calls to both the rational and the passionate side of the soul. Watching the seasons change year after year, people find a pattern that allows them to live. They plant in the fall and harvest in the spring; they learn to work by day and sleep by night. However, as Egeus noted, there are other patterns in the world as well. Joy follows sadness, happiness will follow grief, and love brings comfort, peace, prosperity, and grace. Fortuna continues spinning her wheel as life spins past.

Just as Mars and Venus were interconnected inextricably, the passions and reason are inseparable. It is in understanding this connection that true wisdom and order can be found. After hearing his father's words, Theseus waits for the immediate grief to pass and then calls together Palamon and Emelye. He reminds them that the "Firste Moevere of the cause above" created the earth, binding together "the fyr, the eyr, the warer, and the lond / In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee" (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale,"

I.A.2987, 2992-2993). In creating this, the Firste Moevere set into place the patterns of the world, "'[t]hat same Prince and that Moevere,' quod he, 'Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun / Certeyne days and duracioun / To al that is engendred in this place" (I.A. 2994-2997). Theseus goes on to say that by seeing this order within the world, men know that the Firste Moevere is "stable … and eterne" (I.A.3004). He then notes that Nature requires a whole, not a part, "but of a thing that parfit is and stable" (I.A.3009). However, then Theseus pulls in the concept of the passions; having established that the world is rational and stable and that in order for nature to exist in harmony, it must involve the whole, Theseus then points to the passions as part of that whole. Theseus tells them, "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" (I.A.3041-3044). Theseus claims only fools rebel against nature, and nature means that man should pursue of a life of "honour / To dyen in his excellence and flour, / Whan he is siker of his goode name; / Thanne hath he doon his freend, ne hum, no shame" (I.A.3047-3050). The concept of honor, shame, and friendship all stem from the passionate side of the soul. As stated above, love is what brings about friendship, and without that passion, there would be no friend to mourn one's death. Pride in one's good name is also a passion; there is no rationality behind pride other than a love for upholding a virtuous character. Theseus ends by telling Palamon and Emelye to set aside their grief and rejoice in Jupiter's grace. Theseus combines the passions of joy with the rational wisdom that death is merely part of nature's process and one should not grieve for the dead too extensively. Theseus establishes a balance, and with this balance, he imposes order.

In the conclusion, Palamon and Emelye marry with the blessing of the king and council, demonstrating a restoration of the social order. Palamon is called "Palamon the knight" signifying the return of the moral order, as Palamon is once again adhering to the chivalric code of honor (Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," I.A.3090). Palamon lives "in alle wele, / Lyvnge in blisse, in richesse, and in helle, / And Emelye hum loveth so tenderly" (I.A.3101-3103). Moreover, although their love persists, "nevere was there no word hem bitwene / Of jalousie or any oother teene" (I.A.3105-3106). The passions are under control, order is restored, and peace reigns throughout the kingdom; but only by balancing reason with passion can that order be maintained. When one piece of the soul or the other is ignored or abandoned, chaos rules; it is only when the soul lives in harmony with nature and with God's creation that order descends.

Significance of this Interpretation To Medieval Readers

The natural world portrayed in "The Knight's Tale" is that which was considered ideal in the Middle Ages. There, "life is conducted at a dignified, processional pace, and in which life's pattern is itself a reflection, or better, a reproduction, of the order of the universe" (Muscatine 181). England was going through a time where many upheld logic and reason as the central means by which life was structured and decisions were made. Indeed, "[i]t led to the testing of many accepted assertions, and, in Ockham, to an almost complete separation of faith from reason" (Brewer 142). On the other hand, the seemingly overdramatic nature of Arcite and Palamon's love for Emelye was "in large part a genuine reflection on the way people behaved . . . . The lovers' madness of *heroes*, which the young men in 'The Knight's Tale' suffer, was something recognizable in life, even in medical handbooks" (163). Chaucer looks at both situations—a world

without reason and a world without the passions—and finds both lacking. He believes that to separate reason from the passions or passions from reason is to ignore one-half of the human soul. A world without faith in things only dreamed of, such as the attainment of love when one is still a prisoner is essential to maintaining the beauty and strength of the human heart. On the other hand, a world where the heart determines human actions without input from the mind leads to foolish decisions, impractical choices, and uncontrollable conflicts. This topic has plagued western theology for centuries, even as literature moved through the Victorian era, naturalism, realism, and other periods where one piece of the soul was treasured more highly than the other. One of the reasons Chaucer's work remains significant today is its ability to overcome the age gap and connect to situations of modern times. In a world where the abstract is a war with the realists, *The Canterbury Tales* is an important piece of literature even today.

Conclusion

"The Knight's Tale" deliberately compares the relationship between Arcite and Palamon with the relationship between Venus and Mars, and this comparison calls for a deeper examination. With this conclusion to the story, Chaucer communicates his message that no internal or external forces can completely eradicate or negate the natural order of life, nor can the passions be completely submissive to the rational soul. The passions and the rational pieces of human nature stand as equals, and the natural order would have them working together combining compassion with logic, mercy with discipline, love with virtue, and war with forgiveness. Critic Helen Cooper notes, "The Knight's Tale" is a dynamic introduction to the story-telling: it leads in many directions and opens out on to many of the problems and perspectives explored later in the work"

(91). The theme of order and chaos extends throughout *The Canterbury Tales* as with the theme of marital chaos and order in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and “The Miller’s Tale.” Throughout many of his works, Chaucer focuses on resolving the conflict of the passions versus the natural order of life, and logically he begins *The Canterbury Tales* with one of the clearest examples of order and chaos as it extended from the pagan legends of the classical age to the chivalric times of the Middle Ages.

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