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Paul Olson

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CHAUCER'S EPIC STATEMENT AND THE POLITICAL MILIEU OF THE LATE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Paul A. Olson

Several critics, both neoclassic and modern, have observed that, as to kind, the *Knight's Tale* is an epic fiction.¹ Characteristically, the poems we call medieval epics are what Ezra Pound also says an epic must be in modern times: "a long poem about history." Though the term epic was used little in medieval times, a *carmen heroicum* or work in the mode of the *Aeneid* was recognized by a style: a use of heroic meters or their vernacular equivalent; certain sorts of figurative language and diction; and, most of all, a peculiar kind of fiction. Mode or kind was, in medieval literature (as in the literature of England generally up through the eighteenth century), a means of signalling rhetorical intention. In the case of the *Knight's Tale*, kind taken together with the context of the tale in the *Canterbury Tales*, and in history, tells us what the story means. I wish first to look at that mode and at what it says about the tale's meaning taken by itself and then at what it says in relation to the fictional history which constitutes its context within the *Tales* and the real history which constituted its context outside.

When the *Knight's Tale* uses the high style and the fictive devices of poems like the *Aeneid*, *Thebiad*, *Achilleid*, *De Raptu Proserpina*, and *Teseida*, a medieval audience would have understood its grand language and action in a rather precise way. The way in which it would have understood these is suggested by Robin's comment on the completed tale when he proposes to tell a tale to equal the Knight's: "By armes and by blood and bones, / I kan a noble tale. . ." (I, 3125-26). Here Robin sees *The Knight's Tale* as a

noble tale, a tale of arms; and he proposes to equal it and Virgil: "By armes and by blood and bones, / I kan. . . ." "*Arma virumque cano. . .*" In emphasizing his grand intention, the Miller provides the exordium for the *Knight's Tale* after it is over, an *exordium* which the Knight who began with a "humanistic" tag from the *Thebiad* did not deign to give. Because the tale is a noble tale of arms, it is fitting that a Knight should tell it and in its peculiar style. Dante, in the *Convivio*, notes that there are three subjects, corresponding to man's physical, emotional, and rational nature, which are the proper subjects for the highest style in poetry: that prowess in arms which maintains the safety of the body, the fire of love which fills the emotions, and the direction of the will toward virtue which the reason seeks (*Convivio*, II, ii). To these three, the highest, or tragic style is appropriate. Moreover, Dante says that, while love and virtue have been treated in their appropriate style in the vernacular, arms have not. Boccaccio, following up on Dante, says of his *Teseida* that it is the first of vernacular poems to treat of arms (Book XII, stanza 84); Chaucer follows him in the Miller's remark. The tragic style, which is equated with the high style, is, following Cicero, the style in which tragedies were ordinarily written, but it is a style usable in other genres which deal with great subjects. It has to do with a mode of writing, of using figures, and not necessarily with a kind of conclusion.

As Benvenuto observes,

It should be noted that there are three styles, that is the tragic, the satiric, and the comic. The tragic style is a high and proud style, for it treats of memorable and horrible deeds such as the vicissitudes of kingdoms, the overthrowings of cities, the conflicts of wars, the ruin of kings, the overthrow and falls of men, and other great calamities, and such, when they are described, are called tragedies or tragic such as Homer, Virgil, Erysis, Statius, Simonides, Ennius, and many others.²

Later Benvenuto notes that both Homer and Virgil had for their subject deeds of arms,³ and that the deeds of such poems must be memorable.

Servius had told medieval readers of Virgil that the *Aeneid* was written in the high or magnificent style and that the Virgilian circumlocutions and so forth were part of that style. Since a good portion of Virgil's poem was concerned with arms, it is not surprising that the subject of the defense and safety of the nation as treated in comparable narrative poems should have been regarded as worthy of the high style.⁴

In the later Middle Ages, style came to be regarded as "playing a role" analogous to the roles which men assume in society. Thus, Geoffrey of Vinsauf says that the styles "receive their names according to the persons or things of which they treat" so that the low style he regards as belonging with shepherds and bucolic subjects, the middle with farmers and georgic subjects, and the high with poems written in the mode of the *Aeneid*.⁵ This schematization John of Garland carried further, asserting that the high style is used by the conquering soldier such as Hector surrounded by his horse, his sword, his cities and camps, and the laurel which crowns his conquests.⁶ Style thus came to be one of the ways through which a poet set forth his sense of the role of his subject. In the *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer writes, in the high style, in Benvenuto's phrase, of arms, conquering heroes, the fall of cities, and the vicissitudes of great nations because he wishes to set forth the functions of Knighthood.

Though medieval critics do not commonly speak of the epic, they speak of the *carmen heroicum*. Then they often have in mind primarily a kind of meter. When they analyze such poems as the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* (which they knew by repute), the *Aeneid*, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, or Statius's *Thebiad* in a category, they treat them as poems displaying not only a certain style but also a kind of fiction. The high style with its full comparisons and sonorous prosody is used in the heroic poem to convey a mixed fiction combining history and allegory. The critics are not so much concerned that the narrative should begin in the middle of things or that the story be of a certain length as later critics are likely to be. But when they speak of the fiction, they are quite particular. They almost invariably observe that such poems combine human histories with fabulous divine events. Servius at the time that he defines the level of style in the *Aeneid*, also asserts that the poem "contains divine and human persons,

encompassing the true with the fictional; for that Aeneas came to Italy is evident, but that Venus spoke with Jove or that Mercury was sent is invented.”⁷ In the Servian commentary, Aeneas is treated as an exemplary but historical person while the gods are treated characteristically as fictional or fabled. For instance, the council between Venus and Jupiter is said to be an allegory which through its astrological configuration foreshadows the episode where happiness and mercy come to Aeneas through a woman, Dido.⁸

The medieval *accessus* to Lucan’s *Pharsalia* introduces the poem as containing the same mixture of human and divine, true and fictional; those critics who did not wish to rank Lucan with heroic poets did so because they regarded him as entirely historical in his concerns.⁹ Bernard Sylvestris implies that Aeneas is a historical character exemplifying patience, piety, and religious devotion, a man whose life Virgil embroidered with fictions to gain the favor of Augustus.¹⁰ Speaking of the forms of fiction, Boccaccio says:

The third kind is more like history than fiction, and famous poets have employed it in a variety of ways. For however much the heroic poets seem to be writing history — as Virgil in his descriptions of Aeneas tossed by the storm, as Homer in his account of Ulysses bound to the mast to escape the lure of the siren’s songs — yet the hidden meaning is far other than appears on the surface.¹¹

Assuming that the story of Aeneas has a historical core, the critic treats much of the life of Aeneas as a historical exemplum, but where he sees the tale as fabling, he treats it as allegorical: Dido appears to him as figure for the attractive power of passion; Aeneas abandoning Dido glances at the honor of the *gens Julia* and its love of purity; and the Carthaginian setting for the conflict between Dido and Aeneas looks to the future conflict between their two nations. When Boccaccio writes of his own *Teseida*, he speaks of his poem as an ancient history and glosses the temples of Mars and Venus and the myths portrayed in them as fictions or fables displaying the effects of the passions of rage and lust which go with the planets Mars and Venus.¹² That the gods are reduced to fable-allegories is not

surprising: in late Roman and in Christian epics, it is clear that one God reigns, Destiny or Providence, and that the many gods have to be taken as aspects of the One, or as other *forces* in history. The actions of the phantasmagoric creatures on the hero's journey through wonderland were also read as fables in the sense that the marvellous tales in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were fables.¹³

The concepts of "fable" and "history" central to the heroic mode are not exactly our concepts of these words. The common medieval notion was that here are three kinds of plots: history which tells what actually happened (in the *Canterbury Tales* "storie," VII, 1973; I, 311; or "historial thing," VI, 156); argument which approximates our realistic mode, telling what could plausibly have happened (I, 4329); and fable, regarded neither as history nor as probable but as a sort of allegorical lie through which poets told transcendent truths about the things of time (X, 31; VII, 3438-40; VI, 155), giving a local habitation and a name to those ideas which have no form and being in present circumstances.¹⁴ Tragedy and the central plots of epics were history, comedy was argument, and the beast fable, the Ovidian fable and the machinery of the epic were all fable-allegories. The "fable" part of the epic, by which critics commonly meant the councils of the Gods (generally thought to represent actions of the planets or of the virtues and vices for which they might stand), and the phantasmagoric elements in the hero's journey were not only treated as allegory but as a kind of allegorical running commentary or marginal painting explaining and embroidering the meaning of the central exemplary-historical action.

The history in the ancient epic is also of a sort peculiarly congenial to medieval people. Histories are not told either in classical epic or in medieval chronicle to give mankind a tunnel to the past. They are told rather to give men a mirror for the present: in Hamlet's words "to hold the mirror up to nature, to show virtue its own feature, the face of scorn and the very form and pressure of the time."¹⁵ Thus, Aeneas' life story is also a comment on the destiny and role of the Julian line in the first century. The *Knight's Tale* both in its historical and in its fabulous dimensions has meaning as a mirror and *mythos* for men, particularly knights, acting to create history.

The *Knight's Tale's* meaning set forth through ancient history is

brought home to fourteenth-century history in a rather complicated and indirect way, one that requires an examination of two sets of circumstances: the circumstances of the *Canterbury Tales* and those of the remarkably tenuous times in which Chaucer wrote, the late 1380s and 90s. The circumstances of the *Tales* particularly important to understanding include the *Knight's Tale's* being told first in the series — by a knight who is the embodied idea of second estate perfection and at the same time has fought in battles held up to admiration by various political factions of the time, particularly by those who favored the political strategy of the Order of the Passion of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ They also include its being followed by the *Miller's Tale*, a comic *argumentum* which lays claim to epic dignity with its councils of the tubs in the heavens and its histories of St. Nicholas, Absalom, and “Noah” in the mundane sphere.

The second set of circumstances of the *Tale*, the circumstances of the history which surrounds it, include the salient events of the historically troubled 1380s and 90s; the kinds of events for which the *Tale* may provide a mirror and *mythos* are the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and the continuing later unrest in the countryside, the continuing war between England and France halted by a tenuous peace in 1396, the efforts after the dissolution of the Templars to find a substitute for the celibate ethic of former chivalric orders in a chaste marriage ethic, and the general efforts to find an appropriate discipline for chivalric groups gone amuck in the war. Finally, the constitutional crises of the 1380s and 90s (which required a clarification of the place of the ruler, of parliament, and of natural and customary law in the governance of England) may have something to do with the work. In the early tales' imaging of the outline of these kinds of events, the form and pressure of the time find their mirror.

With regard to this second set of circumstances, it may be appropriate to ask how Chaucer was positioned. Chaucer's biographical circumstances do not make the meaning of his poem, but they may suggest what parts of contemporary history he had access to, what sorts of interpretations he was likely to make, and what sorts of rhetorical appeals were possible to him, given his audience and social context. Neither Chaucer's biography nor his poetry suggest that he was a narrowly partisan poet; he worked for many masters and was in a position to write poems of counsel to both

Richard II and Henry IV, his deposer. However, Chaucer appears to have been pretty consistently on the outs with the warhawk party and to have suffered when they were powerful in the late 80s; his opposition to their position seems to have been indirectly adumbrated in *Troilus and Criseyde*. In the 1390s the connections seem to place him among those who promoted an alternative to the warhawk group's strategy, and he seems to have developed in his poetry a *mythos* rather like that developed by the most articulate proponents of the alternative to continued war with France, the members and patrons of the Order of the Passion of Jesus Christ.¹⁷ The Order's goals were the creation of peace between England and France (and the resolution of the papal question), the establishment of estate order in Christendom in the wake of the social disorders accompanying the Hundred Years War, the developing of a morally disciplined crusading knightly class which respected marriage chastity to replace the discredited older orders, and the mounting of a new crusade like those led by Peter of Lusignan, one designed to stop the onrush of Turkish power in the eastern Mediterranean.

Chaucer's connections with the peace-with-France movement go back to the 1370s. He was part of the 1377 peace negotiations with France with Guichard d'Angle, the Earl of Salisbury and others; in 1381 he, with Sir Richard Stury and Guichard d'Angle, attempted to negotiate the marriage between Richard and France.¹⁸ His employers in the 1390s were Roger Mortimer, the Earl of March, and Sir Peter Courtenay, loyalists to the Ricardian cause of a detente with France, the development of a strong monarchic centralization of government and attention to domestic unrest and the subduing of the Irish clans. Courtenay was also the friend and tournament opponent of Jean le Meingre Boucicaut, the Marshall of France, and friend and imitator in lifestyle and poetry of Otto of Graunson; Graunson, who moved back and forth between France and England in the period and was attached to John of Gaunt's household, was one of the four evangelists of the Order of the Passion and, in Chaucer's view, the "flour of hem that made in Fraunce"¹⁹ (*Complaint of Venus*, 82). Chaucer's close associates in the period include other persons active in the Order of the Passion of Jesus Christ and in the efforts to achieve reconciliation between England and France: Sir John Clanvowe, the Earl of Salisbury, Sir Richard Stury, Sir Lewis

Clifford, and possibly Eustache Deschamps.²⁰ Robert the Hermit, one of the four evangelists, was the primary negotiator of the mid-1390s peace with England, but Sir Lewis Clifford and Sir John Clanvowe, long associates of Chaucer, were two of the English legates who arranged the marriage and peace; and Philippe de la Vache of the ballade "Truth" and Sir Thomas Clanvowe brought the girl queen to Calais.²¹

Only the diplomatic mission to Bernabo Visconti and Sir John Hawkwood in 1378 is an exception to the pattern of friendships, patronages and responsibilities related to the party wishing peace with France. This mission suggests that Chaucer was also entrusted at least once with work involving England's alternative strategy of maintaining strong ties with the Empire, Rome, and Milan to keep France in its place.

By the early to mid-1390s, the period in which disciplined speculation asserts that the *Knight's Tale* was written, the favoring of a peace with France required no great courage. The incompetence of English arms after the death of the Black Prince and world-weariness with what must have seemed an infinitely long and disastrously expensive war had turned the climate of opinion toward peace with France and a settlement of the papal question.²² More important matters including the Turkish incursion, domestic uneasiness, and the succession to the empire were pending.²³ No particular political confrontiveness led to the mythos for political social direction which Chaucer created in the *Knight's Tale* and its sequence as I read these two. On the other hand, it is fairly clear that neither Chaucer nor his patrons were so closely identified with the Ricardian as opposed to the Lancastrian party when the split between the two occurred to make any gap with Henry unbridgeable. Chaucer carefully presents the *perfect Knight* as fighting in crusades which Richard favored and in those Henry and Gloucester favored. And he rather consistently presents the notion of a king and state limited by moral and natural law, an ideal of governance as far from the royal voluntarism which Richard's opponents attributed to him in the later period of his regime as that of any English poet in the period.²⁴ What we know of Chaucer's life then suggests that he was positioned to make an interpretation of history consonant with that of the peace party in his exemplary ancient history and the epic machine fables which gloss it.

Given the times, Theseus, the peacemaker, is an ideal historical exemplar. Current opinion held that he was the founder of knighthood, the first to bring philosophy to Athens, and the founder of political councils for reasoning together.²⁵ Chaucer makes his hero all of these. That he was a historical and not a mythic figure was held by the fourteenth-century chroniclers of the history of the world.²⁶ His first epic celebrator, Statius, was a man whom Dante made the spokesman for ethical philosophy leading from the encyclopedic lore of the pagans and Virgil to the single truth centered in Christian charity of Beatrice (or theology). Dante has Statius appear as a convert who moves from pagan natural truth to Christian truth as he is in the very process of writing the *Thebiad* episodes which are also the beginning episodes of the *Knight's Tale*, episodes in which Theseus approaches the land of Thebes to succor the widows and uphold both "Christian" principles of mercy to the weak and customary principles of the burial rights of the dead: "And ere in my poem I brought the Greeks to Thebes' rivers, I received baptism, but through fear I was a secret Christian. . ." (Canto XXII, Carlyle Wicksteed).

When Chaucer's Theseus in his exemplary role acts as a philosopher king who speaks the truths of natural law as it moves men toward a community of interest which is as close as natural man can come to charity, he fulfills the role that Nature fulfills in the *Parlement*.²⁷ A medieval king was thought to be *rex imago Christi* in that he mediated between natural law and positive law in the way that Christ mediated between eternal law and divine law, the work of God as announced in history. Theseus most clearly announces natural law in telling of nature's cycles and how they apply to man at the end of the work (I, 2977 ff.), but he also applies aspects of natural law in enforcing the customary law or *lex gentium* in the matter of the burial of the Theban princes (I, 993), in placing the Theban fratricidal conflict under the community's and providence's control by sponsoring the judicial tournament (I, 1845 ff.), and in using "parlements" of rational human beings to arrive at community direction (I, 2970-74). Finally, he appears to respect that portion of natural law which calls for free assent of the partners in choosing sexual mates by encouraging a political marriage for Emelye under what appear to be conditions of free assent for both of the parties (I, 3076 ff.). The problems which Theseus faces are those which

ancient history attributed to Athens in its conflict with Thebes, but they are enough like those which the monarchies of Northern Europe had to confront during and after their very long war to have exemplary force: the existence of routiers and tyrants who beshadow the image and power of the good king (I, 941, 960); civil strife among the princes of the blood (I, 1649-1747); complaints by the weak and lowly that they are unprotected (I, 912 ff.); and world embroilment in the rival claims of lust and rage to rule over the commonwealth of men (I, 2127-89).²⁸ Theseus essentially disposes of these problems by making rational and fair judgments which attend to the nature and status of the people whom he is judging: in his world, tyrants deserve death, tyrants' supporters imprisonment; widows deserve protection, and rival claimants adjudication by the sword.

But the problem of the poem, of the society over which Theseus governs, is selfish human passion; and it is here that the fable of the story comes into play to heighten the exemplary effect of Theseus' actions. For the fable of the poem, the machinery of the gods and temples, is a depiction, under metaphor, of how the planets, and the instincts associated with them, operate to promote man's selfish, anti-social instincts. As an ample body of scholarship has shown, Venus is a fable allegory for lust, Palamon's emotional inclination, and Mars for rage, Arcita's bent; Saturn is a complex allegory partly related to the concept of Time and partly to the notion of melancholy, particularly the melancholy that afflicts Arcita. Finally, Diana is chastity, the hunt, childbirth, instability.

The characters whom Theseus rules are under the force of these planets and their passions in their malevolent antisocial forms. He creates the social in the poem by being the "Wise man who rules the stars," converting in his own life — service to the unchaste Venus to service to the Venus of chaste marriage (i.e., marriage to an Amazonian votaress of Diana), pursuing Diana's hunt as part of his marriage, serving Mars as the just warrior who conquers the beastly Minotaur, and making his final appeal to Jupiter (I, 3035-62), the highest reason and first cause of all things natural. He knows "Nature" when he assigns a *warrior* to a death which he sees as having served society and asks that a *lover* convert his lover's inclinations to an inclination to marriage which will serve peace and the commonwealth: Theseus

is repeatedly called “pitous” in the sense the *pius Aeneas* is “pitous,” for to rule over the bloody city of Thebes, he has to do more than exercise the sword so as to preserve a cold law and order. As the epic hero of the book, he combines the two Aeneases of the *House of Fame*, the Aeneas of the House of Venus and the Aeneas enshrined on Mars’ iron pillar (HF, I, 143-382; III, 1446-84), and uses both passions to give him insight into the passions of others (e.g., 1785 ff.) and to convert those passions to the service of that natural sociability which makes man a companionable animal.

Chaucer’s fiction about Theseus is organized both in its superficialities and in its depths to call attention to its epic quality; it begins with the quote from Statius and with Theseus acting at the beginning of the work as he acts at the end of the *Thebiad*. Palamon mistakes Emelye, Diana’s votaress, for Venus — in a comic epic reversal of the scene in the *Aeneid* where Aeneas mistakes Venus, his mother, for one of Diana’s nymphs until she reveals herself by disappearing in her usual roseate glow (I, 1104 ff.; compare *Aeneid*, I, 314-414). Mercury’s visit to call men to their quests (I, 1381-92), the bleeding tree (I, 2334-40), the epic descent (I, 2684), the funeral, battles, and games (or battle games), and councils of the gods are all there (I, 2438-78; I, 2661-70).²⁹ Dido in the *House of Fame* says of heroes that they appear to require three women (I, 300-10): one for friendship, one for delight, and one for fame (Creusa, Dido, and Lavinia); Chaucer combines these three in both Hypolita and Emelye. But the epic quality of the *Knight’s Tale* does not rest primarily in its epic devices or prosody. Chaucer’s epic metaphors (e.g., I, 2626 ff.; I, 1491 ff., etc.) and devices, together with his thunderous battle scene prosody (e.g., I, 2559-2611) must have made people feel that he had made English do things they had not thought it possible for the vernacular to do; however, given the accomplishments of Spenser and Milton and Joyce these may now seem a little thin. The epic quality of the *Knight’s Tale*’s fiction worth attending to consists in the process whereby, through fusing fable and history, it presents the events of history as both existing in time and leading one to another and simultaneously existing as a design *known before* as a pattern in the mind of God. It is in such a world that the hero’s freedom in history is defined.

The “historical” events of the tale are seen, *sub specie aeterni-*

tatis, as in a time exposure or as the events in a tapestry like the Angers Apocalypse series where the end of history is a set of sculptured and artistic designs laid out without temporal regard. Arcita's victory, Palamon's possession of Emelye, and Emelye's attachment first to one and then to the other Theban as well as many events to come in Greek, Roman and Hebrew history are portrayed on the walls of the temple (I, 1940-46; I, 2031-35; see I, 2465).³⁰ This sense of time as somehow sculpted is strengthened in the scenes prior to the temple scene by Chaucer's consistent use of settings which are capable of being taken as real settings in the fiction or as transcendent philosophical emblems; Theseus returning from Femenye and descending from his horse becomes the Trajan, emblem of humility, whom Dante sculpts in his *Purgatorio* (I, 953-64; compare *Purgatorio*, X); the Athenian prison for Thebans becomes the Boethian philosophic prison of bad fortune set beside Emelye's garden of good fortune; throughout the early part of the work episodes standing for good fortune are juxtaposed against episodes representing bad as if history were an idea in the mind of Lady Philosophy.³¹ Yet, the fundamental actions of Theseus strike us as free. His genius is to act as a free man himself and to produce the capacity for freedom in others. To see how this is possible requires some look at the presentation of time, the oracles, and human will in the work. Chaucer's myth requires both that history be seen as in the hands of God and that men be seen as responsible.

The events in the work open out from a local political marriage to even larger and larger areas of space and time until eternity is called to witness. Moreover, the human actors in the drama are sorted out in terms of their capacity to see what history and the providence which governs history are saying to men through the events which they encounter. The theme of the relationship between destiny and history, which is consistently presented in the classical epic through the revelations of oracles and temple figures telling the wise hero what he is to do next to fulfill destiny's design, is rather drastically altered in this poem. In fact the temple figures speak only to the poem's naive and misled figures; and when they speak, they both speak the truth and mislead. That is, none of the visitors to the temples understands correctly what the oracles tell. Theseus, on the other hand, visits no oracles, appears to receive supernatural di-

rection only once in the work when the hart leads him to the fighting Thebans in the woods, and derives his wisdom from attending to the patterning of events. History is what he reads and what must be read in this work.

The clearest instance of Theseus's capacity to give a correct reading of history and also clearest evidence that history is providential connects with Arcita's death. Arcita's death, as Michael Boccia has demonstrated, follows perfectly the pattern that Aries finds to be characteristic of the death of the good man. He recalls his past, admits his faults, reconciles himself with his enemies and reconciles them with his friends, and commits himself to God (I, 2765-2808).³² No other character in the work, not even old Egeus, who is a kind of Anchises, seems to notice that in death Arcita frees himself from Mars' iron passion and the fury which has killed him and for a moment "takes on himself the mystery of things as if he were God's spy." Arcita becomes in death the eidolon of the death of the good knight, but that death is seen by Emelye, by Palamon, and by the women of Thebes as the absolute loss of one who has made the things of time ("gold enough and Emelye") his fixed haven. Theseus respects their sorrow enough to arrange a conventional epic funeral; but he and he alone recognizes what the events of the *Tale* tell us, that Arcita's suffering and dying perfected him as nothing else in the story had done or could have done. The cycles of time have in them this goodness, that time's losses may create memory's exempla:

Thanne is it wisdom, as it thynketh me,
To maken vertu of necessitee. . . .
And certainly a man hath most honour
To dyen in his excellence and flour
When he is siker of his goode name;
Than hath he doon his freend, ne hym, no shame.
And gladder oghte his freend been of his deeth,
Whan with honour up yolden is his breeth,
Than when his name appalled is for age
For al forgotten is his vasselage.
Than is it best, as for a worthy fame,
To dyen when that he is best of name.

The contrarie of al this is wilfulnesse.
Why grucchen we, why have we hevynesse,
That goode Arcite, of chivalrie the flour,
Departed is *with duetee and honour*
Out of this foule prisoun of this lyf? (I, 3041-61)

Hamlet and Lear are gay if, in their suffering, they create exempla of human nobility that, like the figures in an epic, are outside of what is past or passing.

In the early parts of the plot, the juxtaposing of woe and joy is consistently presented in such a way as to raise the question of the meaning of human happiness and sorrow. Theseus' marriage and conquest set against Creon's denial of the widows and defeat seem to suggest that the good rejoice and the wicked suffer in time. The succeeding trials of Palamon and Arcita in prison suggest a further complexity in that the pair, guilty for their support of a tyrant, see themselves as guiltless and further define their punishment as produced by the malice of the gods. Later, after both have seen Emelye, joy and sorrow receive further subjective definitions calculated from the perspective of seeing Emelye as the final good: joy for Palamon is to be Arcita at home in Thebes with the opportunity to get to Emelye, and joy for Arcita is to be Palamon in prison near Emelye's presence. To be at home in Thebes is, for him, exile. Palamon's philosophy comes from his liver and Arcita's from his choler, and it is not surprising that their philosophizing is full of comic *non-sequiturs*.³³

The beginning assumptions of the poem, that the wicked suffer and the good prosper, appear to be reasserted in the scene in the wood where destiny leads Theseus through the epic device of the hart to the place where the rebels fight and where the rebels themselves appear to be about to be executed.

And Theseus, in committing himself to a judicial tournament, both game and epic war, also seems to trust history to give justice. In the temple, the former subjective definitions of joy and sorrow are reasserted; Palamon and Arcita regard the temples as giving them joy because they promise them what they want, but the macabre, apparently accidental death of Arcita takes all meaning away from the subjective thrill of "Victory," separating it from the possession of Emelye, and also cools Palamon's passion, destroying all subjective

definitions of joy and sorrow. Finally, Theseus restores the subjective definition in another key, by asserting that what makes human dignity is not the justice which man receives from time or man's control of the cycles of Nature but how these cycles are taken: Arcita made his death into an *eidolon* of perfect dying. So Emelye and Palamon should make their living and attraction an opportunity for love and for a marriage union of Athens and Thebes, completing in the commonwealth the cosmic chain of love.

Theseus knows that there is a necessity in the world; after all the fiction has him building the temples whose portraiture contains events which are to happen long after his time (I, 1881-1965 and ff.), but he also knows that that destiny is neither deterministic as Palamon sees it nor does it allow to man a capricious and useless free will as Arcita avers.

Theseus is never controlled by the inclinations of the stars which are his because he is a rational man; the Thebans are controlled because they refuse to assert their rationality, even their elementary logical sense; when Theseus is controlled, in the hart episode, it is a special destiny willed, I think, by God himself who sends the hart to control the anointed ruler and lead him to dissidents in the realm (I, 1663-82; see *Aeneid*, I). Only when Theseus judges do we have a sense of reason acting in this work, a letting go of comic philosophic self-deception — first consistent and rational and then gentle — in returning from Femenye, in acting to depose the tyrant who defies customary law in Thebes; in the woods, judging; in ordering the tournament and forbidding the use of deadly weapons at it; in deliberating in his *parlement*, judging how Arcita died and how Palamon should marry.³⁴ In the case of one other character, we have the sense of a man for the moment above the events: Arcita in his death. The rest is the liver or the heart, Venus or the moon.

Theseus' philosophic, carefully reasoned judgments which interpret man's freedom exactly as history evidences it are what make a *communitas* amid the necessities of living in Athens. The difference between the ruler and the knight lies in the organization of the self: in the case of the knights, joy and sorrow, good and evil are calculated exclusively in terms of the passions of a self placed under time and the stars, under history. In Theseus' case, joy and sorrow are

calculated from the perspective of the search for the ways in which men can freely will to carry out a providential design above history and the stars. The fiction, in a sense, says what it takes to be a *Rex Imago Christi* or mediator of natural law, a peacemaker, above the insults of time and “necessity” as corporate Kingship is.³⁵

The context in which this *Tale* is set in the *Canterbury Tales* makes it one told by a Knight who has fought in the battles which were being held up to admiration by an agency which was the prime force in promoting the peace with France. The Knight has also fought in the battles “of the Prussian way.” The rehearsal of the perfect knight’s battles is followed by the rehearsal of an imperfect squire’s battles in the most disastrous episode that the English endured in the French war, the 1383 Despenser mock crusade in the Low Countries. The *Knight’s Tale’s* mythos as to how peace is created by wise rulers working with providence can hardly be separated from the *ideas* represented in its teller, whose battle program represents the kind of program which European peace was to create for every knight who followed the Order of the Passion.

Nor can the effect of the *Tale* be separated from that of the tale which follows it in setting forth the need for peace, for there is strife enough at home in the Miller’s England. The *Miller’s Tale* is clearly a sort of anti-*Knight’s Tale*: as such it makes both a political and an epistemological commentary. Diana-Emelye is cast out by Mary-Alysoun; a loving Palamon is replaced by a loving St. Nicholas with his tubs, protected women and mastery of storms, and a frustrated angry Arcita finds image in a frustrated, and then angry, Absolon who has the hair and worldly skills of the Biblical Absalom and the language of the spouse in the *Song of Songs*.³⁶ The *Knight’s Tale’s* complex picture of planetary influence and human freedom to rise above planetary influence is interpreted by the Miller as an espousal of judicial astrology and, hence, he replaces the dialogue of the gods in the heavens with purely human talk in a hanging tub, the talk of fools and knaves waiting for the stars to produce an apocalyptic flood who, while looking at the stars, fall into their own “marlepit.”³⁷ The battles of “arms and bones” are fought with plowshares, tubs, and household knives. And there is no Theseus to guide the action. John’s judgment doesn’t exist; and as befits the incontinent Miller, Nicholas, his pet lecher, guides the plots. Finally the justice of

the poem is a justice which gives to each knave his due: to the *avare* the loss of his possessions; to the lecher, a burn where he burns, and to the proud man the stench of his humiliation (see X, 185-210). In the *Miller's Tale*, "all that is in the world" in St. John's phrase is shown to be nothing and there is nothing beyond the world.³⁸ The Knight's domestic epic opening upon the history, the heavens, and eternity becomes a domestic mock-epic opening upon human spite and retribution. The Miller draws on the Christ-Mary relation in describing Absolon's hymn to Alysoun even as Palamon appeals to Emelye in the language of Aeneas' appeal to Venus; Nicholas, with his interest in chastity and storms and tubs, emulates St. Nicholas in a comic reflection of Theseus' imitation of Trajan or Palamon's and Arcita's sometimes comic, and sometimes serious, imitation of their epic predecessors. Nothing in the Knight's world is sacred to the Miller. The *Miller's Tale* from Robin's first interruption of the Monk is a usurping tale stylistically and conventionally even as the Miller is a usurper of his lord's functions on the estate and of the prerogatives of the second estate in carrying weapons. But Millers are only possible if perfect knights are not ruling them: if the "Theseuses" of England are not led by a special providence to the places where Robins fight and by their general wisdom to an understanding and transformation of their passion.

The fourteenth-century history outside the Canterbury fiction on which all of this bears is not too difficult to imagine (though, of course, any historical mirror can be applied to a range of situations). The first problem of the period was the problem of peace. One can only guess how Chaucer's audience took this fiction of the household opening on eternity where the vast machinery of destiny and perfect rulership conspire for peace. At least one of the great courtiers who patronized Chaucer in the period and who also in this period cast himself as an enthusiastic member of the peace party, Henry of Derby, bothered to visit Italy to go to the tombs of two philosophers who had expressed a view of history like that in the *Knight's Tale*: ". . . in Italy (1393) he paid homage at the tombs of St. Augustine, which he clasped with enthusiastic reverence, and Boethius."³⁹ If Chaucer is in part creating the mythos of the peace party, he does this by making a speaking picture for the notion argued didactically by Philippe de Mézières that divine providence itself wants a peace, a

reconciliation with France, and a marriage. It is not accidental that John Lydgate, repeating the plot of the conclusion to the *Knight's Tale* in his equivalent of that tale and the first of the tales of returning pilgrims, *The Siege of Thebes*, quotes the Treaty of Troyes as if it were the agreement between Athens and Thebes, thereby making Athens the mirror of England in its strife with France.⁴⁰

A second problem of the period was the problem of what was perceived to be vindictiveness among the great lords of the realm, a commitment to continued Arcita-like smouldering. The warhawk's killing of associates of Chaucer's such as Brembre and Sir Simon Burley and their banishment of De Vere were seen as purely vindictive actions by the Ricardian chroniclers; the actions were justified by the warhawk interpretation of the late 80s peace moves of the Ricardian party as treason. The Lancastrian chronicles, on the other hand, see the King's arrest and execution of Gloucester and his exiling of Arundel as equally vindictive. Whatever the truth of these allegations, it is clear that recrimination led to grave constitutional crises in the late 80s when the King was reduced to a token and in the late 90s when he appeared to the Lancastrians to be a tyrant, placing himself above all law by insisting that "the king wears the law in his own breast," and alienating his subject's property without due process.⁴¹ However much we may regard the trial allegations against Richard as Lancastrian propaganda, it is clear that personalistic, arbitrary rule from the warhawks and possibly from the King was a threat throughout the period. The interest, in this area, of Chaucer's *Tale* is that he represents his ideal leader driving toward reconciliation of home and abroad through constitutional means.

A third crisis so perceived in the period had to do with chivalric discipline, one partly connected with the dissolution of the Templars early in the century but more clearly connected with the appearance of all sorts of ruffians, *roustiers*, and mercenary soldiers in the guise of knighthood in the Hundred Years War. That Chaucer spends so much time depicting the avatars of lust and rage, the Theban twins, in his story, has led many critics to see it as really more romance than epic. But the theme of Theban love and Theseus' married continence and service to Diana would have had some meaning to those who in the nineties tried to encourage knights to marry and firm up conventional sexual morality after a period of wartime laxity. The

Order of the Passion, Boucicaut's Order of the White Lady on the Green Shield, and other chivalric orders appear to have participated in this movement. Richard himself seems to have been attracted and even John of Gaunt.⁴² The times required the man of self-control, the domesticator and tamer. A court torn between the harsh war-hawks such as Thomas of Gloucester and the young duketti, "servants more of Venus than of Mars" in one chronicler's phrase, had nothing to learn from an Achilles storming outside of Troy or from the hedonist who commonly begins the journey epic. What the court could learn from was the old Odysseus who returns home to cleanse the household and make peace, and that is the function that Theseus fulfills.

The *Knight's Tale* may also suggest a solution to the problem of Millers — or rebelling peasants — and to the problem of irresponsible lords. Lords must come home from the wars and place themselves under the authority of natural law, custom, and parliamentary consent. Millers governed by lust and Reeves by rage will be tamed as Palamon and Arcita are if their Theseus is at home to find them out. The return to constitutional order and provincial responsibility which I see as mythologized in the *Knight's Tale* and its sequels may be at partial odds with the picture of a crusading knightly class held up by the Order of the Passion. Chaucer's knight has, after all, come back from his crusades. Philippe tried to solve the problem of the tension between local responsibility and responsibility to meet the Turk by suggesting a small crusading class which would form a model three- or four-estate society in the eastern Mediterranean, perhaps comparable to the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem but perfected in discipline. This emblematic society would in turn educate Europe and refeudalize it.⁴³ Chaucer was possibly aware of the limitations of the view which required such a further dispersal of England's resources; only Theseus' crusade against Creon reflects anything like the Knight's crusading temper, and the weight of the tale is on the restoration of peace and domestic order.

Chaucer's quest in the *Knight's Tale*, if I have represented it correctly, was partly vain as the trial of Richard in the late 1390s and the reopening of hostilities with France in the early fifteenth century seem to demonstrate. But perhaps it was not entirely so. In the period, the manor house replaces the castle in architecture; the

administrative constitutional monarchy asserts itself. Even for a time, between 1396 and 1399, peace was restored and a royal marriage with France made. In the search for peace, all devices had to be tried. As Jean Courtecuisse, humanist and legate for France in the 1390s' negotiations put it, "The name of that Knight [who makes peace in Christendom] ought well to be inscribed in letters of gold not only on the gates of towers and above the portals of churches throughout Christendom, but before God and on the portals of Paradise as a 'Knight of God'."⁴⁴ It may well be, as Auden argues, that poetry makes nothing happen; it is equally clear that people in Chaucer's time thought that poetry and allegories and mirrors of history did make things happen when they were made by persons who also held major civic responsibility and were presented as models to like persons.

NOTES

1. Dryden's remark is "I prefer in our countryman [i.e., Chaucer], far above his other stories, the noble poem of *Palamon and Arcite*, which is of the epic kind, and perhaps not much inferior to the *Ilias* or the *Aeneis*: the story is more pleasing than either of them, the manners as perfect, the diction as poetical, the learning as deep and various, and the disposition full as artful: only it includes a greater length of time, as taking up seven years at least; but Aristotle has left undecided the duration of the action. . . ." (*Literary Criticism of John Dryden*, ed. Arthur C. Kirsch [Lincoln, Neb., 1966], p. 167). Pope sees Chaucer as an epic writer and allegorist who successfully avoids too wooden an allegory: "Chaucer had the Discernment to avoid it [too nice and exact a Pursuit of Allegory] in his *Knight's Tale*, which was an Attempt towards an Epick Poem" (Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson [New Haven, 1962], pp. 251-52). For modern citations, see Robert S. Haller, "The Knight's Tale and the Epic Tradition," *The Chaucer Review*, 1 (1966), 67-84 and n. 2. All quotations and citations from Chaucer are from the edition of F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Boston, Mass., 1957).
2. Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum Super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam* (Florence, 1887), I, 18.
3. Benvenuto, I, 150-51.

4. Servius, *Servianorum in Vergiliū Carmina Commentariorum Editionis Harvardianae Volumen*, ed. E. K. Rand et al., Special Publications of the American Philological Association, No. 1 (Lancaster, Pa., 1946), II, 4.
5. Edmund Faral, *Les Arts poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1912), p. 312.
6. John of Garland, "Poetria," ed. G. Mari, *Romanische Forschungen*, 13 (1902), 920.
7. Servius, II, 4.
8. Servius, I, 223.
9. R. B. C. Huygens, "Accessus ad Auctores," *Latomus*, 12 (1953), 474; Benvenuto, I, 153; Giovanni Boccaccio, *On Poetry*, trans. C. C. Osgood (New York, 1956), pp. 173-74.
10. Bernard Sylvestris, *Commentum Super Sex Libros Eneidos Virgiliū*, ed. William Reidel (Greifswald, 1924), pp. 1-3.
11. Boccaccio, *On Poetry*, pp. 48-49, 74-75, 68-69. Chaucer's English contemporary, Thomas Walsingham, also sees the *Aeneid* as a heroic song having a mixed fiction: "Prohemia Poetarum, BL MS. Harley 2693, fols. 131^v-132^f.
12. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia*, ed. A. Roncaglia (Bari, 1941), pp. 417 ff.; see Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York, 1977), pp. 53-65.
13. R. L. Hoffman, *Ovid and the Canterbury Tales* (Philadelphia, 1967), *passim*.
14. These definitions and distinctions are standard. See Boccaccio, *On Poetry*, pp. 48-49, 165. For comedy as *argumentum*, see Cicero (*Ad Heren.* 1.8.13) and common medieval remarks on comedy such as those by Giacomino da Mantova in Ezio Franceschini, "Il commento di Giacomino da Mantova al prologo dell'*Andria* di Terenzio," *Studi e note di filologia latina medievale* (Milan, 1938), p. 165, or in the very widely used *Catholicon* (Giovanni of Genoa, "Catholicon," BL MS. Stowe 981, fol. 72^v). From the time of Lydgate to Sir Francis Beaumont, Chaucer is treated not as a writer of fabliaux, whatever they are, but as a maker of comedies in the Terentian mode with all its moral implications. An "argument of herbergage" (I, 4329) is probably not a verbal quarrel in the modern sense but an *argumentum* (a pun is possible also); the *argumentum* mode dealing

with common people and vulgar practices is one of the sources of medieval realism so-called (along with changes in the conventions of the visual arts).

15. Exemplary history depends on the medieval notion of time as constructed of static, dependent successions ordained by "a determination direct from God" and on the notion that the static ideas are actualized in human history with the redirection of the human will towards eidola of perfection for a king, a knight, a plowman or whatever. See George Poulet, *Studies of Human Time* (Baltimore, 1956), pp. 1-25. Historicism is possible if time produces changes absolute in kind and irreversible.
16. The battles held up as model by both the Order and Chaucer are "Satalye" (I, 58), "Lyeyes" (I, 58), "Alisaundre" (I, 51), and several other battles against "hethen in Turkye" (I, 66), probably the battles of Myra, Anamoir, and Anthiocete. Since these battles were not primarily fought by British knights, they do not reflect a British past so much as a British future proposed by Leo of Lusignan and the Order of the Passion in the late 80s and the early 90s. For the Order of the Passion, see Muriel Brown, "Philippe de Mézières' Order of the Passion," Diss. Nebraska 1971, pp. v, 35. This edition stresses the Chaucer connection and literary background more than does the Hamdy edition. See Thomas J. Hatton, "Chaucer's Crusading Knight: A Slanted Ideal," *The Chaucer Review*, 3 (1968), 77-87, based on the Brown materials and unpublished work of mine from 1963. Chaucer's inclusion of some Prussian crusading references in the catalogue of the Knight's battles suggests that he did not wish to offend those who favored the "Way of Prussia" such as Gloucester and also suggests an early-1390s date for the work when both the "Way of Prussia" and the "Way of Jerusalem" seemed viable crusading alternatives. However, Chaucer's strong peace emphasis in the tale separates him from the Gloucester party; see Anthony Goodman, *The Loyal Conspiracy* (London, 1971), pp. 60, 174, 133-34 and *passim*.
17. See Brown, *passim*, for the program of the Order; see J. J. N. Palmer, *England, France, and Christendom: 1377-99* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), pp. 180-210, for its effects.
18. Martin M. Crow, *Chaucer Life Records* (Austin, Texas, 1965), pp. 44-53.
19. Crow, pp. 496-99; see May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century: 1307-1399* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 470-74, 484; for Roger Mortimer, the fourth Earl of March and possible heir to the British throne, see the DNB entry and Anthony Tuck, *Richard II and the English Nobility* (London, 1973), pp. 171-72, 205-07. Courtenay was the King's chamberlain and one of his last supporters, and his tourneys with the French marshal, Boucicaut, were part of the detente movement; see Thomas Rymer, *Foedera*

- (London, 1704-32), VII, 663, and the anonymous early-fifteenth-century life of Boucicaut, *Histoire de mre. Iean de Boucicaut*, ed. Théodore Godefroy (Paris, 1620), *passim*. For Boucicaut and the Order of the Passion, see Brown, p. 260. For Otto of Graunson and the Order, see Arthur Piaget, *Oton de Grandson: Sa Vie et ses poésies* (Lausanne, 1941), pp. 76-77, and Brown, p. 260.
20. However, Deschamps' association with Orleans makes me doubt the closeness of his asserted association with the Order or the seriousness of his poems for longing for peace.
 21. For Robert the Hermit's role in organizing the peace between England and France, see Maude Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies* (Oxford, 1937), pp. 287-88; also Brown, p. 259. The persons closely connected to Chaucer who are mentioned by Philippe as members or patrons of the Order in the 90s are, in addition to the king, John of Gaunt, Sir Lewis Clifford (who brought Chaucer's poetry to Deschamps), and Edmund Langley, the Duke of York; in addition, three lesser names from the *Life Records* appear also in Philippe's list: Thomas West, John Harlaston, and Sir John de Rochford. In addition, other friends of Chaucer and Sir Lewis Clifford, Sir John Clanvowe, Philippe de la Vache, and Sir Thomas Clanvowe participated in the French negotiation and marriage activity essentially developed through the Order's channels.
 22. Even Gloucester was claimed as a member of the Order by the mid-90s (Brown, p. 267), but for Gloucester's covert resistance to peace moves, see Goodman, pp. 60, 174, 133-34.
 23. Palmer, pp. 142-226; John H. Harvey, "Richard II and York," in *The Reign of Richard II*, ed. F. H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron (London, 1971), pp. 202-17. No shadow of Richard's interest in the imperial throne appears in the *Knight's Tale* save perhaps the world tournament over which Theseus presides and the establishment of Athenian hegemony over Thebes at the end of the work.
 24. For Chaucer's conception of a limited state, see Paul A. Olson, "The Parlement of Foules: Aristotle's *Politics* and the Foundations of Human Society," in press; for charges of royal voluntarism, see B. Wilkinson, "The Deposition of Richard II and the Accession of Henry IV," *English Historical Review*, 54 (1939), 213-39. Voluntarism and neglect of natural law were said by Richard's enemies to have been what defined him as a tyrant.
 25. Giovanni Boccaccio, *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum* (Augsburg [Augustae Vindelicorum], 1544), pp. 15-16; Laurence of Premierfait, "Les Cas des nobles hommes et femmes," BN MS. fr. 226, fol. 17^v; John Lydgate, *The*

- Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS, ES 121 (London, 1924), I, ll. 4394 ff. See Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, VII, lvi, 200-05. The figurative interpretation of Theseus as Christ liberating the human soul does not operate here as in Dante because epic history is exemplary — not allegory; see Georgio Padoan, “Il Mito di Teseo e il cristianesimo di Stazio,” *Lettere italiane*, 11 (1959), 532-57.
26. In John Trevisa’s translation of Ranulph of Higden’s *Polychronicon* . . . (ed. C. Babington and J. R. Lumby, 9 vols., Rolls Series [No. 41] [London, 1865-1886], II, 381-95), Theseus is described as a historical personage who lived at the time of Israel’s subjection of Midian. He slew in a tournament a butcher and wrestler, Minotaur, who worked for King Minos. Chaucer leaves out such *Polychronicon* episodes as the ravishing of Helen (save for a humorous indirection at I, 1799-1825), because these do not fit his exemplary purposes with regard to chivalric discipline.
 27. See “*The Parlement of Foules*, Aristotle’s *Politics* and the Foundations of Human Society” for the *Parlement’s* construal of natural law. Boethius’ providence, the infinite design of God, is equivalent to the legal concept of eternal law; and his destiny, the unrolling of God’s design in history, is equivalent to natural law; hence, the appropriateness of Boethian thought in a poem dealing with concepts of statecraft.
 28. Philippe de Mézières speaks of the melons, hot garlic, and onions of Egypt (compare Chaucer’s “garleek, oynons, and eek leeks,” I, 634) as like the avarice, cruelty and tyranny “des royaumes d’occident” (Brown, p. 13) and constantly describes hedonism and tyranny to be concerns “de toutes nacions” (i.e., the West). Chaucer’s world tournament in behalf of lust (Venus) and rage (Mars) makes the point metaphorically.
 29. See Robert S. Haller, “The *Knight’s Tale* and the Epic Tradition,” *passim*, for an exploration of Chaucer’s use of *Thebiad* conventions; I stress *Aeneid* conventions because the *Aeneid* was somewhat more commonplace in Chaucer’s time and Chaucer gives us more clues as to how he read it, in the *House of Fame* and the Miller’s interruption (I, 3125-26). However I completely subscribe to Haller’s general analysis of the Theban dimension and political terminology of the poem.
 30. Chaucer reflects Boccaccio’s original scene more closely (*Anelida and Arcita*, I, 22-35); the substitution of the Trajan-and-the-widow icon from the *Legenda Aurea* may suggest that Chaucer’s Theseus with his temple of clemency (I, 928) is like Dante’s Statius, a pagan soul already inclined toward charity.

31. For logical difficulties in the view of time, eternity, and foreknowledge expressed in Boethius and, I think, in Chaucer, see Robert Herbert, "Free Will and God's Foreknowledge," in *Paradox and Identity in Theology* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979), pp. 102-26; A. N. Prior, *Papers on Time and Tense* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 31 ff.; and recent articles by Anthony Kenny. Chaucer's fiction makes logical impossibility artistic possibility. When the idea of temporal events as ideas known beforehand is spelled out by Saturn (I, 2454-78), he speaks as Time (as in the common mythographic glosses) – as the temporal unrolling of eternal law which is general destiny or natural law – and gives his "humor's" (i.e., melancholy's) interpretation to the things of time. The disasters which Saturn describes are products of the same cycles which Theseus sees as providential, products of the great chain of love. But see Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars* (Princeton, N.J., 1970), pp. 44-50.

32. Michael Boccia has an article on this subject in process; for Aries on correct dying, see Philippe Aries, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 7 ff.

33. If Chaucer studied Strode's *Obligationes*, he would have been particularly sensitive to problems of logical entailment; for a discussion of these problems in the speeches of Palamon and Arcita, see Haller, 68-74. Rage and frustration determine Arcita's position first that man is persecuted by the deterministic gods (I, 1080 ff.) and second that free will is worthless to man ignorant of his good (I, 1235-74); lust dictates Palamon's position envying the beasts their bondage to instinct (man's life is determined like that of a beast which may "all his lust fulfill") and decrying God's holding instinct-bound man responsible for his actions (I, 1303-33).

34. Linian argues that the duel is introduced by natural law in that hatred, an instinct of nature, grows from sensuality directed toward a desired object, but it occurs when men are controlled by sensuality without an element of reason (Giovanni da Legnano, *De Bello* [Oxford, 1917], pp. 177-78). Theseus probably introduces a prohibition on the use of mortal weapons because canon law prohibited tournaments because of the loss of life. See John Bromyard, *Summa Praedicatorum* (Venice, 1583), I, 454^v.

35. For the king as *Rex Imago Christi* in English thought, see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, N.J., 1957), pp. 24-42 and 143-93. The king as *imago Christi* is the interpreter of natural law and above time and its *necessitas* by virtue both of his understanding of natural law (which as mediator he interprets into positive law) and by virtue of his public body which makes of him a corporation having perpetuity like the angels (for Theseus on *necessitas* see 2955 ff., esp. 3041-46; see Kantor-

- owicz, pp. 273-91, on kingship and *necessitas*). In the sense that Theseus is above time and *necessitas* in his public body, he can build temples whose murals appear to know events before they happen (I, 2031-351, 1941-46).
36. Nicholas in standard saint's lives is the protector of chastity in the "St. Nicholas gift" episode, the protector of good innkeepers and their guests in the episode of the raising of the three young men butchered by the innkeeper from their pickling tub graves (Nicholas puts these in the ceiling), and after Simeon Metaphraste's life began to circulate in the West (late 13th to early 14th century), the patron of the storm-tossed and predictor of storms. For Absolon, see Paul A. Olson, "Poetic Justice in the *Miller's Tale*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 24 (1963), 227-36; the *Song of Songs* imagery used by Absolon (I, 3698-3707) comes from IV, 14, and V, 2 (where Absolon's comic situation has its serious sources). Carpenter John may be a kind of mock-epic St. Joseph as well as village Noah; Paul A. Olson, "The *Reeve's Tale*: Chaucer's *Measure for Measure*," *Studies in Philology*, 59 (1962), 4-5.
 37. The apocalyptic comedy may glance at the apocalyptic view of history in *Piers Plowman* or the *Vox Clamantis*.
 38. For the *Miller's Tale* and three temptations, see Olson, "Poetic Justice," *passim*; for the general iconological tradition of the three temptations as all that is in the world, see Paul A. Olson, "Vaughan's *The World*: The Pattern of Meaning and the Tradition," *Comparative Literature*, 13 (1961), 26-32.
 39. Anthony Goodman, p. 156.
 40. John Lydgate, *The Siege of Thebes*, ed. Axel Erdmann and Eilert Ekwall (London, 1911), I, 8-9. The Athens-Thebes metaphor for England-France was complemented by the Troy-Greece and Gentiles-Jews metaphors; e.g., see the letter attributed to Charles VI (to Richard II) in Oudart Feudrix de Brequigny and M. Champollion Figeac, *Lettres des rois* (Paris, 1847), II, 255-56. The notion of providence as requiring the peace runs all through Mézières' writing; see Brown, pp. 16-56, especially pp. 52-56, where the providential uses of suffering in history are stressed as they are in Arcita's death. See Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, ed. G. W. Coopland (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 89-94, 505-12.
 41. Shirley indicates that the ballade "Lak of Stedfastnesse" addressed to Richard II was written in the last years of Richard's reign. In view of Chaucer's distaste for flattering counsellors, it seems unlikely that the poem is entirely flattering to Richard in its suggestion that he hate extortion, cherish his people, and wed them to steadfastness. Extortion and failure to

cherish and protect subjects in their rights were common charges against Richard in his late reign; for the concept of the king's marriage to his people, see Ernst Kantorowicz, pp. 214-32. The ballade is friendly but stern if Shirley's date is correct.

42. For the Order of the Passion on conjugal chastity, see Brown, pp. 176-77; Philippe de Mézières, *Letter to King Richard II*, ed. G. W. Coopland (Liverpool, 1975), *passim*. For the purposes of Boucicaut's "Ordre de la Dame Blanche à l'Escu Verd," see the anonymous fifteenth-century *Histoire de mre. Iean de Boucicaut*, ed. Godefroy, p. 143 and *passim* for moral conditions in France. John of Gaunt as late as 1398 expressed the Order's notion that stopping the Turkish invasion of Europe depended on a French peace, and it has been suggested that his 1396 marriage to Katherine Swynford, his mistress of long standing, had something to do with the ideals of the order; we are on surer ground in suspecting that Richard's espousal of married chastity as an ideal in connection with the peace plan had something to do with the Order; see Richard II's letter to Charles VI on peace and a royal marriage, *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions*, ed. M. D. Legge (Oxford, 1941), pp. 159-60.
43. Brown, pp. 160-84.
44. A. Coville, "Recherches sur Jean Courtecuisse," *Bibliothèque de l'École de Chartres*, 65 (1904), 52.

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