

Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* – from Boccaccio to Heresy

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The *Knight's Tale*¹ is generally considered to be one of the most baffling of Chaucer's Tales.² The beauty of this on-going pageant is beyond dispute. However, Chaucer might have also intended the symmetry and spectacle to distract attention from controversial elements in the Tale.

Chaucer's main interest in the *Teseide* was undoubtedly Chivalry.³ Chaucer relates this more intimately to 14th century concerns. For although Chaucer makes Arcite on his death-bed trippingly recite the knightly qualities as idealised⁴ by the age (2789f.), Chaucer is more interested in giving a dispassionate picture of knighthood. Chaucer drastically prunes the love element in the original, excises the classical and the mythical, and tones down the effusions of

1. All quotations and line-references are from R. Morris and W.W. Skeat (eds): *The Knight's Tale*, Oxford, 1949; and Giuseppe Antonello (ed.) *La Teseida di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Venice, 1838.

2. See Charles Muscatine: "Form, Texture, and Meaning in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*". *PMLA*, lxxv, 1950, p. 711.

3. See Piero Boitani: *Chaucer and Boccaccio*, Oxford, 1977, p. 156. Chaucer seems to have taken Boccaccio's professed aim very literally.

Ma tu, O libro primo a lor cantare XI. lxxxiv
Di Marte fai gli affanni sostenuti . . .

The careyne in the busk, with throte y-corve: 2013
 A thousand slayn, and nat of qualm y-strove;
 The tiraunt, with the prey by force y-raft;
 The toun destroyed, ther was no-thing laft.

Chaucer's "yonge knightes proude"⁹ (2598) have murderous instincts.

It seems paradoxical that Chaucer should choose a story which depicts pagans as paragons of Chivalry for his Knight when Christianity was being threatened by Muslim predominance in Africa and causing considerable alarm in Europe. Moreover, this is a tale told by a non-pareille knight who would or should have dedicated the greater part of his active life to the service of the Cross. The Christian knight in the words of Isidore of Seville was "vivri caelo sapientiam et fortitudinem". Now, with Jerusalem in the hands of the Infidel was it not more appropriate for the Knight on the pilgrimage to tell a tale of Christian heroism and saintliness – presumed attributes of Christian Knighthood as understood by the Gregorian Reform? It seems to me that Chaucer's choice was conditioned by a sense of caution. He must certainly have felt freer to manipulate a pagan rather than a Christian cosmology.

This leads to the vital question – the metaphysics of the Tale. Even after one takes into account the pieties, superstitions, and

cxx). In Chaucer Palamon is unceremoniously bundled away when he was already engaged by Arcite, and Emetreus

made his swerd depe in his flesh to byte: 2640

And by the force of twenty is he take
 Unyolden, and ydrawe unto the stake.

Arcite's victory does not reflect the high ideals of Chivalry.

9. Boccaccio is more sentimental throughout. Chaucer has no place for

Eaco . . . VI. xv.

Bianco e vermiglio e chiaro nel visaggio
 Più che non fu giammai rosa di maggio.

or

Peritoo, che dalla madre VI. xli

Ancor le guance senza pelo avea . . .
 . . . nel viso splendea

Bianco, vermiglio, e con le luci ladre
 Chi rimirava con amor prendea.

popular attitudes¹⁰ shared by orthodox and heretic, one can still detect a strong element of Catharism in Chaucer's Tale. This heresy was by far the greatest and most persistent threat to the established Church in the Middle Ages. However, this Cathari element exists only in the main body of the Tale, that is that part which deals with Chivalry, and which comes to an end with the death of Arcite. A comparison with the *Teseide*, undoubtedly Chaucer's main source, and an appraisal of the deft changes, sly omissions, and unwarranted additions helps us to understand Chaucer's real intentions. It is not only the omissions which understandably are substantial, but even the additions are rather lengthy. These surely must have been of considerable importance to Chaucer, bent as he was to compress the voluminous *Teseide* into a tale which could be comfortably told by the Knight on a pilgrimage to Canterbury with "wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye" (Pro 24) all ready to tell their Tales of "sentence" or "solace" (Pro. 798).

Although in England practically all heresy derived from the native Lollardry, Chaucer must have certainly become acquainted with surviving pockets of die-hard Cathars especially on his visits to Italy. According to Raniero Sacconi, the more moderate sect of Concorezzo, "diffusi sunt fere totam Lombariam".¹¹ It is true that by the time of Chaucer's mission to Milan the heresy had been practically suffocated; but the heretics must have certainly gone underground since the last recorded case is in 1402.¹² The heresy had infiltrated the Church, the Courts, the monasteries, the Orders, and had spread among the common people for well over three centuries.

That Chaucer might have linked the heresy with Chivalry comes out from the fact that after the death of Arcite, which as we said before, concludes the tale of Chivalry proper, there is nothing that explicitly recalls the heresy. Moreover, Theseus's speech, in the latter part of the Tale which precludes Emily's marriage to Palamon, seems to be an attempt on the part of Chaucer to appease potential critics by realigning the metaphysics of the Tale with orthodox Christian thinking.

10. See R.I. Moore: "The Origins of Medieval Heresy", *History*, Vol. lv, No. 185, Feb 1970, p. 24.

11. Felice Tocco: *Storia dell'Eresia nel Medioevo*, Genoa, 1989, p. 75 note.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

See Gordon Leff: *Heresy in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1967, Vol. I, p. 30.

It is believed that the Cathari heresy originated in Bulgaria, and a Bulgari state was established in Thrace in the seventh century which practically dominated the area until the Ottoman Turks overran Thrace between 1361 and 1453. Way back in 869 the Council of Constantinople was constrained to interdict the Thracians (and Macedonians) for their attachment to their old cult. Schmidt thinks that the Thracians embracing montheism, converted their old gods into one potent devil, and arrived at the conclusion that two principles shared the government of the world.¹⁸ In the light of the events taking place in Thrace in the time of Chaucer, Thrace would have assumed much greater importance than ever before. From the literary point of view, Chaucer seems to have discovered Thrace in Boethius in connection with the wind Boreas (*Boece* I, m3, 11). Again, in his translation of Boethius's *De Consolatione* Chaucer reminds us that Orpheus is "the poete of Trace" (IV, m12, 4). In the *House of Fame*, Chaucer calls "Eolus the god of wynde" king of Thrace (3.699), undoubtedly influenced by the *Roman de la Rose* (18008) and Boethius's caves of wind.

In the *Knight's Tale* Chaucer seems to be using Thrace to give the Tale a heretical base. Certainly, Boccaccio relates Mars to Thrace, when he tells us that Mars incites Theseus to new exploits:

(Marte) In cotal guisa in Tracia ritornando I.xv
 Si fè sentire al cruciato Teseo,
 In lui di sè un fier caldo lasciando . . .

Surprisingly, Chaucer does not use this at all. However, he subsequently brings up Thrace with little if any textual justification. Arcita invokes his god Mars:

O forte Iddio, che ne' regni nevosi VII.xxiv
 Bistoni servi le tue sacre case . . .

Chaucer's Arcite forgets all about "bistoni" and instead inserts Thrace:

18. See Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 110-11.

O stronge god, that in the regne colde 2374
Of Trace honoured art and lord y-holde, . . .

Chaucer seems to exploit

Ne campi tracii sotto I cieli iberni VII. xxx

to justify his preference for the “gret temple of mars in Trace”¹⁹ (1973) to that of Athens which is found in Boccaccio. But it is rather difficult to understand why Chaucer should bring in Thrace when adapting Boccaccio’s beautiful simile:

Qual per lo bosco il cinghial rovinoso VII. cxix
Poi ch’ha di dietro a sè sentiti I cani,
Le setole levate . . .

In Chaucer this becomes:

Right as the hunter in the regne of Trace²⁰
That stondesth at the gappe with a spere,
Whan hunted is the leon or the bere . . .

This is particularly important because this refers to Palamon, while it is Arcite as the protégé of Mars who should have connections with Thrace. Also, “Il re Licurgo” who gets an honourable mention on Arcite’s side in Boccaccio (VI. xvi) is de-sentimentalised and recast by Chaucer, and surprisingly joins Palamon as his companion:

Ther maistow seen coming with Palamoun 2128
Licurge him-self, the grete king of Trace . . .

Chaucer seems bent on giving a fair distribution of Thrace to the two cousins.

19. See Piero Boitani: *op. cit.*, p. 82–3.

20. Bethel speaks of a possible partial influence of *Inferno* xiii 112. See Howard H. Schless: *Chaucer and Dante: A Reevaluation*, Oklahoma, 1984, p. 173.

There is no mention of Thrace in Dante either.

Catharism is dualistic in that it presupposes two Gods – the God of Light and the God of Darkness. The Cathars of the sect of Concorezzo maintained:

Deos ex nihilo creavit agnelos et quatuor elementa . . . diabolus
de licentia Dei formavit omnia visibilia.²¹

Chaucer adopts Boccaccio's Giove as the good God. Then he elects a bad God, an exceptional malefic to rule the physical world and the flesh. It is important to note that the Knight never relates evil or death, even remotely, to Jupiter in the Tale of Chivalry proper. For example Boccaccio explains Palamon's fall in terms of traditional, orthodox belief:

Signori, e' non è nuovo la credenza,	IX.lii
La quale alcuni afferman che sia vera,	
Cioè che la divina providenza	
Quando credè il mondo, con sincera	
Vista conobbe il fin d'ogni semenza	
Razionale e brutta che 'n quell'era;	
E con decreto eterno disse stesse	
Quel che di ciò in sè veduto avesse.	

Not so in Chaucer. The Knight exonorates the God of Light completely by making Theseus say with an apologetic shrug:

For falling nis nat but an aventure . . .	2722
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We are first alerted to the iniquity of Saturn when Palamon cries out early in the tale:

But I moot ben in prisoun through Saturne.	1328
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This is important because Boccaccio never brings Saturn in at all. It is true that Chaucer does not provide Saturn with a temple. But neither has Jupiter. Certainly, Chaucer accords more line to Saturn

21. Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 75 note.

than to Jupiter. Chaucer follows Boccaccio in making both Mars and Venus²² give favourable answers to the prayers of their protégés. When Arcite is victorious the situation in heaven becomes critical,²³ and with all the good will of Jupiter:²⁴

right anon swich strife ther is bigonne	2436
For thilke graunting in the hevene above,	
Betwixe Venus, the goddesse of Love,	
And Mars the strierne god armypotente,	
That Jupiter was bisy it to stente:	
Til that the pale Saturne the colde . . .	
Of al this strife he gan remedie fynde.	2453

In Boccaccio this “strife” does not really exist and the situation is amicably resolved without the intervention of a superior god. Now, that Mars has fulfilled his promise to Arcite and seeing Venus in a frenzy:

Alla quale Marte fatto grazioso,	IX. iii
Amica, disse, ciò che dice è 'l vero;	
Fà ormai il tuo piacere intero.	

And so Venus goes directly to Pluto:

Ed al re nero aveva palesato	IX. iv
I suoi disii, perchè da quelli uscite	
Eran più Furie con alti mandati.	

Chaucer translates:

22. As in Boccaccio, Chaucer describes the attributes of Venus and Mars which are typical of their planetary influence since the Fall. Mars is the same old malefic, and Venus the irrational love turning the mind to physical or worldly delights.

23. In Boccaccio the problem is solved before the tournament even takes place:
ma trovata VII lxxvii

Da lor (Venere e Marte) fu via con maestrevol arte
Di far contenti i preghi d'ogni parte.

24. Since the Fall “the benevolence of the Sun and Jupiter is now counteracted by the malevolence of Saturn and Mars”. B.G. Koonce: *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame*, Princeton, 1966 p. 60.

Out of the ground a furie infernal stente 2684
From Pluto sent at requeste of Saturne.

Saturn's request is obviously a command, since he had already assured Venus of his power and disposition to accommodate matters (2470 f.).

By subverting Mars's victory and coming to the succour of Venus,²⁵ enlisting the services of Mercury, and "requesting" Pluto,²⁶ Saturn places himself definitely above all these gods. He is, at least, on a par with Jupiter, since Saturn can resolve what Jupiter ineffectually "bisy it to stente" (2442). Besides reminding us of the seniority of Saturn as a god, Chaucer underlines the fact that Saturn has the largest orbit of all the planets including that of Jupiter himself. Chaucer rolls the god and the planet into one, and Saturn tells us that he "Hath more power than woot any man" (2455). Saturn substantiates his ascendancy with a dismal list of disasters which he provokes. He sums up by declaring that his "loking is the fader of pestilence" (2469) – pestilence being the plague against which medieval medicine was helpless, and which put the efficacy of penance and prayer²⁷ into serious doubt. Saturn conforms to the popular belief among the Cathars, that the God of Darkness was more powerful than the God of Light.

Never is Saturn portrayed as being in any way subordinate to Jupiter, and his evil procedes from himself alone, and it governs the evil of Pluto and the Fury.

25. Venus "floating naked in the sea brings to mind the ubiquitous medieval account of her libidinous origin from Saturn, whose genitals were cut off and cast into the sea by Jove". *ibid.*, p. 92.

26. Pluto was the son of Saturn and Ops. There was no love lost between Theseus and Pluto who had once tied Theseus to a huge stone when Theseus descended into the Infernal Regions to carry off Proserpine. Hercules later frees Theseus but not without painful consequences.

27. "Wherever we look in the Middle Ages in the period of the plagues, we see signs of (this) paradoxical doubt and over-heated faith". John Gardner: *The Life and Times of Chaucer*, 1977, London, p. 74.

"al dio del male si debba attribuire maggior potenza a quella del bene". Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 78.

"for sometimes the Devil has more power than God".

Le Roy Ladurie: *Montailou*, Penguin, 1980, p. 342.

If Theseus represents Jupiter, Aegeus somehow stands for Saturn. This reflects the son-father relationship and also satisfies Chaucer's endeavours towards artistic symmetry by making each of the major characters of the Tale relate to a major deity. Chaucer's Aegeus retains his wisdom, but is appropriately relieved of the role of officiating in Arcite's funeral. in the Italian:

(Egeo) . . . raccolse XI. lviii
 Le ceneri da capo prima spente,
 Con molto vino, e di terra tolse
 Ed in una urna d'oro umilmente
 Le mise, e quella in cari drappi involse
 E nel tempio di Marte fè guardare
 Fin ch'altro loco le potesse dare.

Neither is Chaucer's Aegeus as sorrowing as in the Teseide:

ed ancora d'Egeo XII.vi
 Il quale la bianca barba per dolore
 Tutta bagnata aveva per Arcita . . .

There is nothing white in Chaucer's Aegeus.

In Boccaccio it is Theseus who speaks of the inevitability of death and the determination of evil:

Così come nessun che mai non visse XII.vi
 Non morì mai, così si può vedere
 Che alcun non visse mai che non morisse:
 E noi ch'ora viviam, quando piacere
 Sarà di Quel che 'l mondo circoscrisse,
 Perciò morremo;

Chaucer gives this a more fatalistic resonance. And, what is more important, Chaucer transfers this stanza to Aegeus instead. In Chaucer's Tale of Chivalry, death is the province of Saturn and not of Him who circumscribes the world:

"Right as ther dyed nevere man" quod he (Aegeus) 2842
 "That he ne lyved in erthe in som degree", he seyde,
 "In al this world, that som tyme he ne dyde.
 This world nys but a throughfare ful of wo,
 And we ben pilgrimes, passynge to and fro,
 Deth is an ende to every worldly sore."

There is no reference in the Italian to our being "pilgrimes, passynge to and fro", which seems to imply that we take the road from birth to death more than once. If this is so, it certainly reinforces the Cathari thesis as the Cathars believed in re-incarnation, to which we shall return later.

Medicine in Boccaccio is represented by Epidauro who tells Teseo:

Arcita è morto veramente X. xii
 Nè luogo ci ha di medico valore,
 Giove potrebbe in vita solamente
 Servarlo, se volesse, ch'è maggiore
 Che la natura, e puote adoperare
 Assai più che la natura non può fare.

With Saturn's role in the Tale, Jupiter cannot intervene. So in Chaucer there is no reference to Jupiter, and much less to his overriding power on Nature. Chaucer reduces this passage to a simple matter-of-fact acceptance of the impotence of nature.²⁸

Nature hath no dominacioun 2758
 And certainly, ther Nature wol not wirche,
 Farewel physik! go ber the man to chirch!

Arcite's first agony, that is before he desperately leaves for Athens is rather strange. Boccaccio's Arcita has "la sua pelle . . . quasi nera"

28. In the *Parlement of Fouyls*, Nature comes very close to Theseus's "First Mover":
 Nature, (the) vicayre o the almyghty Lord, 379
 That hot, cold, heuy, lyght, moyst & dreye
 Hath knyt with euene noumeris of accord . . .
 D.S. Brewer (ed.) London, 1962, p. 82.

(IV. xxvii), while Chaucer's "His hewe falwe and pale and asshen colds" (1364) which obviously reflects "the paly Saturne the colde" (2441). Arcite seems to be persecuted by Saturn until Arcite's body is "brent to asshen colde" (2957). But when we realise that Chaucer deliberately changes Arcite's complexion to black during the second and final agony, we suspect that Chaucer's Arcite was resisting Saturn well, which might be the reason why Mercury, the messenger of the gods, visits Arcite, and in the same treacherous mood when he slew Argus (1390).

What might also be a clue is the word "endure" which Chaucer repeats twice (1382, 1404) in the space of twenty lines. Even though the Knight conveniently imputes Arcite's impending death to "the loveres maladye" (1373), it seems quite clear that Arcite is being starved out – "His slep, his mete, his drynke, is hym biraft" (1361) – as was not infrequent with the Cathars. For when a dying person would have achieved a state of justification to merit the eternal reward, if he happened to have a turn for the better, the Cathars would prefer death to recovery and practise the "endura". Mercury with sybillic ambiguity promises the English Arcite love and death:

To Athenes shaltow wende 1390
 Ther is thee shapen of thy wo an ende.

Aegeus, as we quoted above, later tells us "Deth is an ende to every worldly sore" (2847). This incidentally is also Chaucer's addition, and very much in line with Cathari thinking.

Arcite's second agony is quite different from the first. Saturn calls on his son Pluto. Although Chaucer had referred to Pluto's "derk regioune" on two previous occasions (2082, 2292), Chaucer plays down Boccaccio's "gli oscuri regni dell'ardente Dite" (IX. iv) and the "re nero", and he further lops off the theatrical description of Boccaccio's "furie infernal" (2684) which startles Arcite's horse and is the immediate cause of the tragedy. So, Chaucer sacrifices Erinia's description, even though he must have been surely attracted by the grim spectacle:

li qua' lambenti IX. v
 Le sulfuree fiamme, che uscita

Di bocca, cadeano puzzolenti
 Più fiera la facieno; e questa Dea
 Di serpi scuriata in man tenea.

Pluto was the father of the Eumenides who sat next to Prosperine on Pluto's throne of sulphur. Pluto's colour is black and only black animals were sacrificed to this god. Although Chaucer must have also thought of Pluto as the Devil who features in Dante²⁹ (I. vii. I), and the forces of evil are very well represented in the Tale, Hell or the idea of Hell in the Christian or pagan sense is totally suppressed. The Cathars believed in universal salvation through a process of re-incarnation.

When Arcite is as "black . . . as any cole or crowe" (2693) he is not only stricken by Saturn, but by the joint forces of darkness – Saturn, Pluto and the Fury – a most unholy trinity. All this is starkly in contrast with the Italian who like the English Arcite in his first agony, remains consistently "pallido" to the very end:

il pallido viso pienamente IX. xiii
 Con acqua fredda li gli fu bagnato,
 Onde sì risente subitamente.

And Arcita is still very pale in the following book when the end is imminent and Emilia

pose il viso suo su quel d'Arcita X. lxxxiii
 Pallido già per la morte vicina.

Chaucer's Theseus expresses great grief at Arcite's fall but it never occurs to him to visit Arcite on his death-bed. Neither does Arcite express any wish to see Theseus as in the original:

29. Chaucer would have remembered Pluto, Dante's devil-guardian of the fourth circle of the *Inferno* with his eloquent gibberish:

Papè Satan, Papè Satan aleppe . . . I. vii. i

Probably Chaucer was mystified with these words like anybody else. But he would have certainly detected a familiar heretical ring, which might have reminded him of the position of the Cathars regarding the Papacy. ROMA was the inversion of AMOR, the true Christ.

And, Chaucer's Arcite promises to serve his beloved even after death:

But I bequethe the service of my goost 2768
 To yow aboven every creature
 Sin that my lif ne may no longer dure.

This can be easily construed as lovers' hyperbole. However, it must be noted that Arcite pledges the service of his spirit not exclusively but especially to Emily. This seems to be an intimation on Arcite's part that his spirit was not meant to leave this world.

If Chaucer clinically describes the process of Arcite's death, Boccaccio seems to be more interested in the moment of death and beyond:

Quando verrà il doloroso caso X. xli
 Ch'io lascerò la vita e i tristi pianti
 Gli occhi, e la bocca e l'anelante naso,
 Pregoti che mi chiudi, e facci ch'io
 Tosto trapassi d'Acheronte il rio.

The English Arcite does not show any such concern, and there is no reference to "Acheronte", or anything that might refer us to the here-after, anywhere in the English Tale. Besides, the *Knight's Tale* completely lacks the religious intensity of Arcita's prayer:

Dunque trà neri spiriti non deggio X. xcvi
 Pietoso Iddio, a quel ch'io creda, andare,
 E del ciel non son degno, ed io non chiegio,
 . . . m'è sol caro in Eliso di stare:
 Di ciò ti prego, e di ciò ti richiegio,
 Se esser può che tu mel deggi fare:
 So che 'l farai, se così se' pio
 Come suogli esser, venerando Iddio.

Arcite's lack of concern for the after-life is further highlighted by Chaucer's deliberate suppression of Arcita's apotheosis in Boccaccio

Chaucer's pragmatic stance regarding the destiny of Arcite's spirit is in itself an affront to orthodox thinking, since Chaucer departs from Arcite's case to a more universal application (2814–2815). Chaucer must have been thinking of the Inquisition. The Knight says that he is not a "divynistre" which I understand Chaucer to mean prosecutor or accuser.³³ Chaucer is saying that he refuses to pronounce himself or even to inquire about Arcite's soul since the old story he relates does not deal with souls and their destiny as one might find in ecclesiastical registers.³⁴ And he further adds gratuitously that he has no faith in those who profess to know where souls dwell after death.

One cannot disregard the general sterility which pervades Chaucer's poem. Emily stands for sterility, and this is an important departure from the original. It is true that the Italian Emilia is a votary of Diana. One might even argue that when Teseo proposes that she should marry Palamone she replies:

Far' ormai del poter degl'Iddei,
 Che mi lasciassi a Diana pur servire,
 E ne' suoi templi vivere e morire.

XII. xlii

33. The Knight tells us that he is no "divynestre" (2810). This might mean that he cannot divine – he is no seer. One other possible interpretation is that he is no divine in the sense of priest. But it must also be noted that in all his extant works Chaucer uses "divynestre" this once only. In his *Boece* (V. Pr. iii) Chaucer says of the seer: "Devynygne of Tyresie the divynour". In the *Troilus*, Cassandra is referred to: "Thou wenest ben a gret divineresse!" (V. 1522). In the *Knight's Tale* itself, Palamon pondering about the "man after his deeth moot wepe and pleyne" (1319) leaves the solution to "divynis" – priests.

Cicero in his letter to Quintillian uses "divinitatio" in the sense of selecting a prosecutor (see *Cassell's New Latin Dictionary*: Norwich, 1959, p. 199). We come across "recusatione divinatricis" when the accused of heresy before the tribunal of the Inquisition, at his first examination, was asked for the names of any enemies of whom he might know the cause of the enmity (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Inquisition" vol. xii, 1937, p. 318).

34. Again, Chaucer uses "Registre" this once only. Dante uses it as a verb in *Inferno* xxix 5–7. In Dante the word seems to carry the connotation of awe and retribution: *Già per lo fondo, dove la ministra
 Dell'alto Sire, infallibil giustizia
 Punisce i falsatori che qui registra.*

But the English heroine is very different from the Italian. There is ample evidence of Emilia's zest for life, her awakening love, a touch of coquetry, and a general willingness to marry. She would, she says "a giunonica legge sottostare" (VII. lxxxiii), so long as "E quel ch'ei piace a me convien di fare". Nowhere does she demonstrate Emily's stubborn determination:

Noghte to be a wyf and be with childe	2310
Noghte wol I knowe compaigne of man . . .	
Syn thou (Diana) are mayde and keeper of us all	2328
My maydenhede thou kepe and wel conserve.	

Chaucer reduces Emily to an idea, a goal. However, he makes up for this by providing her goddess with a full description of her temple. By giving more prominence to Diana, Chaucer heightens the idea of sterility and, incidentally, sexual restraint.³⁵

One of the most serious charges against the Cathars was their resistance to procreation. Giving birth was considered by the heretics as promoting the world of the flesh and of the God of Darkness. In Chaucer we do not find the symbolic marriage of the moribund Arcita to Emilia (IX. lxxxii). Nor do we find Arcita's insistence on Emilia to marry Palamone for the sake of progeny:

35. Chaucer seems to extend this idea of sexual inhibition also to Theseus. The Italian

Teseo con Emilia d' Athene	V. lxxvii
Uscii con molti in compagnia di fuora	
E qual di loro uccello, e qual can tiene . . .	

becomes in Chaucer:

For in his (Theseus's) hunting he hath swich delit	1679
That it is al his loye and appetyt	
To ben hymself the grete hertes bane,	
For after Mars he serveth now Diane.	

Chaucer seems to imply that Theseus dedicates himself to hunting and fighting to the exclusion of all other passions.

In Chaucer, Theseus does not pass any sly remarks which are complementary to Emily and rather derogatory to the followers of Diana:

La forma tua (Emilia) non è atta a Diana	XII. xliiii
Servir nè templi nè 'n selva montana.	

It is true that at this stage all the gods with the exception of Jupiter had disappeared from the scene in the *Knight's Tale*.

A ricrear la nostra fama oscura
Per lo dolente seme ch'è già spento.

X. xliv

The most the English Arcite concedes:

And if ever ye shul been a wyf,
Forget nat Palamon, the gentel man.

2796

For the Cathars: "Matrimonium carnale fuit semper mortale peccatum".³⁶

Arcite's funeral rites are basically ceremonial and restore the natural and social order.³⁷ It is with the death of Arcite that the tale really comes to an end. Chaucer now turns to Jupiter³⁸ as the First Mover, and orthodoxy. Saturn and his forces disappear altogether and the vicissitudes of man on earth are explained in Boethian terms.³⁹

However, Chaucer could not ignore the fact that the *Teseide* was co-titled *Le Nozze di Emilia*. Chaucer introduces a conspicuous interval which breaks the natural flow of the narrative. The Knight tries to make up for this by artificially introducing the ending:

But shortly to the point than wol I wende,
And maken of my longe tale an ende.

2965

The marriage of Emily to Palamon is a political expedient. It is exactly as Palamon had earlier foreseen (1288–1289). Emily is to marry to consolidate "som tretee" (1287). Of course, the irony of the whole thing is that there is a reversal of Fortune, and it is Palamon she is now to marry for this purpose.

36. Felice Tocco: *op. cit.*, p. 90.

37. See Piero Boitani: *op. cit.*, p. 161.

38. "... Jupiter, the 'well-willing planet' whose attributes of love and benevolence identify him with the Christian deity". B.G. Koonce: *op. cit.*, p. 66.

39. It is "God in his wisdom (who) brings about things, even death; therefore the death of Arcite should not be lamented". Chaucer follows Boethius to whom Chaucer is indebted for the greater part of Theseus's final speech.

See Bernard L. Jefferson: *Chaucer and the Consolation of Boethius*, Princeton, 1917, p. 435.

The marriage⁴¹ of Palamon and Emily is to a large extent an appendage which also serves as a declaration of orthodoxy to ward off uncomfortable criticism.

It is not the aim of this paper to venture reasons for Chaucer's choices and changes. That Chaucer elected to be realistic regarding the actual state of Chivalry shows that he meant business. If Chaucer linked the Knight "of chivalry flour" (3059) with heresy,⁴² he was well within the bounds reality. It is also true that many English knights including Chaucer's own friend and patron, John of Gaunt, saw the Pope as a foreign prince with French sympathies and a threat to national aspirations.⁴³ Chaucer might have wanted to demonstrate that Christian heroism was not necessarily dependent on orthodoxy and Rome. Chaucer's concern with the realities of Knighthood might have disposed him to consider the paradoxical fate of the Knight Templars, and in his own times the open defiance of the Hooded Knights and their resistance to the Sacrament. Chaucer

sacrament of maryages of chaste looues . . ." Theseus proposes the marriage of Palamon and Emily as the highest manifestation of joy:

I (Theseus) rede that we make, of sorwes two, 3071

O parfyt, ioye, lasting evere-mo.

Although these changes do in no way constitute any form of unorthodoxy, they seem to be dictated by a desire not to turn from a heretical to a traditional Christian philosophy too abruptly, and therefore render the change more noticeable.

41. In Boccaccio the marriage of Palamone and Emilia is held in the Temple of Venus (XII. xlviiii). Boccaccio's suggestive lines regarding the consummation of the marriage:

Ver'è che per le offerte, che n'andaro XII. lxxvii

Poi la mattina à templi, s'argomenta

Che Venere, anzi che 'l di fosse chiaro,

Sette volte raccesa, e tante spenta

Fosse nel fonte amoroso, ove raro

Buon pescator non util si diventa . . .

is timidly rendered by Chaucer:

Palamon is alle wele, 3101

Living in blisse, in richesse, and in hele . . .

42. See Roger S. Loomis: "Was Chaucer a Laodician?" in Richard Schoek and Jerome Taylor (eds): *Chaucer Criticism*, vol. i, Notre Dame, 1970, p. 300.

43. Chaucer was of Gaunt's party and impatient with Church and Churchmen. With the Great Schism of 1378 the unhappiness regarding the Church becomes more widespread as the stringency of the 1390 and 1393 Statutes of Provisors and Paemunire evidence.

might have come to the conclusion that heresy was at least as compatible with Chivalry as orthodoxy itself. What is absolutely astonishing is that Chaucer managed to graft all this on to his original source without disturbing Boccaccio's plot in any way.