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Geoffrey Chaucer

THE CANTERBURY TALES:
NINE TALES AND THE
GENERAL PROLOGUE

AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
SOURCES AND BACKGROUNDS
CRITICISM

Selected and Edited by
V. A. KOLVE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT
LOS ANGELES

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The Knight's Tale

The *Knight's Tale* is an adaptation of Boccaccio's *Teseida* (written ca. 1339-41). At times Chaucer translated it closely; at times he condensed major sections into a few lines. The result is a narrative less than one-fourth as long as Boccaccio's that turns his lengthy story of war and love into a more ritualized, patterned, philosophical romance. The three selections from the *Teseida* printed here correspond to lines 175-328 (the young knights' reactions when they first see Emily), 1109-92 and 1509-79 (the temple of Mars and Arcite's prayer), and 2109-216 (Theseus's speech on Arcite's death). Boccaccio wrote a set of notes to the *Teseida*, mainly to explain his classical references and poetic locutions, but it is uncertain that Chaucer's manuscript included them. We have printed the notes to the section on the temple of Mars, however, since they furnish important evidence of medieval habits of allegorization with which Chaucer was familiar.

In certain speeches of the young knights, and in the final speech of Theseus, Chaucer used material from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. The passages we print here are from Chaucer's own translation of this immensely influential book; those phrases in italics represent places where he translated glosses to Boethius as well as the original text.

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

From *Il Teseida* †

From Book 3

1

When Juno's wrath against ravaged Thebes had somewhat abated, Mars returned with his Furies to the cold regions. Therefore, I shall now sing in gentler tones of Cupid and his battles. I entreat him to be present in what I set down about him.

2

May he imbue my verses with the potency which he instilled into the hearts of the imprisoned Thebans, so that my words may be a match for

† From *The Book of Theseus*, trans. Bernadette Marie McCoy (Sea Cliff: Teesdale Publishing Associates, 1974) 77-85, 171-74, 195-98, 313-16. For the Italian text, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida delle Nozze d'Emilia*, ed. Alberto Limentani (Verona: Mondadori, 1964).

acquire / revenues
linger
goods / they are
scarcely / once
reflect on
practice / weights / prosper
their

in
by
mad, angry

consent

winnings / prevent / from
preaching / lest

relics
giving
goods

aided / received by
glossing, distorting

subtle cavils / lest

bedridden

hereby
remain / think
give

following the advice

[On Pardoners and Priests]

ei [curates, clergymen in charge of a parish] ren° to pardoners disceyvyng the peple in feith harite and worldly goodis for to have part of here ynge,° and letten° prestis to preche° the gospel for laste° here synne and ypocrisie be knowen and id. For whanne there cometh a pardoner with n bullis and false relekis,° grauntyng mo yeris of n than comen bifore domes day for yevyng° of ly catel° to riche placis where is no nede, he schal ed° and receyved of° curatis for to have part of he getth. But a preste that wole telle the trowth e men withouten glosyng° and frely withouten nge of° the pore peple, he schal be lettid by sotil acions° of mannus lawe, for drede last° he touche ore of here conscience and cursed lif. And this ner schalle telle of more power than evere Crist tid to Petir or Poul or ony apostle, to drawe the i fro pore bedrede° neigheboris that ben knowen and pore, and to gete it to hem self and wasten it nfulli in ydelnesse and glotonye and lecherie, and n gold out ofoure lond to riche lordis and housis e is no nede, and makeoure lond pore by many weies. And here bi° the peple is more bold to stille in her synne, and weneth° not to have as e thank and reward of Crist for to do° here almes re feble men—as Crist biddith in the gospel—as ne thei don here almes to riche housis aftir graunt° ful foolis. And this is opyn errour ayenst Cristene

their mad deeds. They were far removed from salutary suffering, until at last Love made them come to blows and He became displeasing to both of them and for one of them the bitter cause of death.

3

Therefore, the two Thebans, imprisoned in this fashion, in utter sorrow and engaged in little else than weeping, had already despaired of ever having a happy future. They often cursed the evil of their misfortune, and cursed even more the hour when they came into the world.

4

Very often they called on death to slay them, if that might avail. Almost a year had passed in this unhappy state of affairs, when Venus in her bright heaven chose something else for them to sigh over. No sooner had she thought of it, than action followed on the intention.

First the season and then the manner in which Arcites and Palaemon fell in love with Emilia.

5

Phoebus sallying forth with his steeds was in that part of the heavens which belongs to the lowly beast that carried Europa without stopping to the place where her name still prevails. Venus stepped forth with him and climbed to those lovely mansions, and for this reason all the heaven of Ammon smiled, as he dallied for a time in Pisces.

6

Because of this fortunate position of the stars, the earth enjoyed charming vitality and clothed her lovely form anew with young grass and exquisite little flowers. The new shrubs adorned their limbs with boughs as the trees neared the time of their flowering and fruit-bearing to beautify the world.

7

And all the little birds began to sing about their loves, jubilant and merry among the leaves and the flowers. The animals could not conceal their love, but showed it, rather, in their outward behavior. And happy youths, ripe for love, felt passion glow hotter in their hearts than ever before.

8

Then beautiful young Emilia, as dawn broke each morning, entered alone into the garden which opened out from her room, drawn there by

her own nature, not because she was bound by any love. Barefoot and clad in her shift, she entertained herself by singing amorous songs.

9

She led this life for many days, that artless and beautiful maiden, from time to time gathering a new rose from its thorns with her white hand and joining it to other flowers to weave a little garland for her blond head, until a novelty occurred one morning because of the loveliness of this child.

10

One fine morning, after she had arisen and had wound her blond tresses about her head, she descended into the garden as was her custom. There, seated on the grass, singing and taking her delight, blithesome and deftly she wove her garland with many flowers, all the while lightheartedly singing charming love lyrics with her angelic voice.

11

At the sound of that pretty voice, Arcites arose, for he was in the prison adjacent to the amorous garden, without saying anything to Palaemon. Longingly he opened the window to hear that song better. Then to see more easily who was singing, he put his head out a little between the iron bars.

12

The daylight was still somewhat faint, since the horizon still hid part of the sun, but not enough to prevent him with his limited view from discovering to his supreme delight what the young maiden was doing, although he did not know her yet. Looking at her face intently he said to himself: "She is from paradise."

13

As he turned back in he said softly: "O Palaemon, come and see. Venus has truly come down here. Do you not hear her singing? O, if I mean anything to you, come here quickly. I believe for certain that it will please you to see the angelic beauty down there which has descended to us from the sovereign heights."

14

Palaemon arose, for he already heard her with more sweetness than he believed, and he went to the window together with Arcites, and both in silence, to watch the goddess. When he saw her, he said in a bright voice:

"Surely, this is Cytherea. I have never seen anything so beautiful, so charming and so lovely."

15

Meanwhile, they enjoyed themselves, breathless and attentive, keeping their eyes and ears fixed on her, and marveling much over her and over the time they had lost in their grieving, time which had passed before they saw her. Arcites said: "O Palaemon, do you see what I behold in those beautiful immortal eyes?"

16

"What?" answered Palaemon. Arcites said: "I see in them the one who wounded the father of Phacton because of Daphne, if I am not mistaken. In his hands he holds two golden arrows and now he is placing one on his bowstring as he looks at no one else but me. I do not know if it displeases him that I should look at what gives me so much pleasure."

17

"Indeed," answered Palaemon then, "I do see him. But I do not know if he has shot one arrow, for he does not have more than one in his hand now." Arcites said: "Yes, he has wounded me in such a way that pain will pierce my heart if I am not helped by that goddess." Then Palaemon, utterly astonished, cried out, "Alas, the other has wounded me."

18

At that "Alas!" the beautiful young lady turned around on her right breast and her eyes moved immediately to the little window. Then her face flushed for shame for she did not know who they were. Becoming bold, then, she rose to her feet with the flowers she had gathered and prepared to leave.

19

And as she turned away, she was not oblivious of that "Alas!" and although she was too young for mature love, still she understood what it meant. As it seemed to her that she knew that she was indeed liked, she took pleasure in it, and considered herself more beautiful, and now adorned herself the more every time she returned to the garden.

20

As soon as they saw Emilia leave, the two squires turned back in. They stood there for a while with their new thoughts, when Arcites began to speak first thus: "I do not know what cruel archer has shot an arrow into my heart,

for it has taken my life. I feel myself gradually failing, enkindled, alas! by I know not what fire.

21

"And the image of that child will not leave my mind and I have no thought of anything else. Her form is so embedded in my heart and gives so much pleasure to my soul, that I would deem it the greatest good fortune to please her as she pleases me. Without that I do not believe I shall ever have peace."

22

Palaemon said: "The same thing that you are saying has happened to me. I do not want to experience it again ever, for I feel new pangs in my heart such as I do not believe I have ever felt before. I truly believe that that lord holds us in his power, just as I have heard it said many times, and that he is Love, the subtle thief of every noble heart.

23

"I tell you His captivity already weighs on me more heavily than that of Theseus. I feel much more anguish in my mind than I believe this god could inflict. Our great folly made us look out that window when such a lovely creature was singing, for my heart already consumes itself over love for her.

24

"I feel myself seized and bound by her. I do not find any hope for myself. On the contrary, I see myself imprisoned here and stripped of all my strength. Therefore, what can I do to please her? Nothing. Yet I shall die of this without fail. Now would to God I were dead! This would be my dearest and best comfort.

25

"O how good and how soothing would be the Aesculapian treatments for such a wound! It is said that he can bring broken bodies back to life. But what am I saying, for Apollo, who knew all human remedies, could not find a medicine that could help him when he was pierced by just such an arrow."

26

So the two new lovers talked in this fashion and each spoke words of comfort to the other. They did not know if this girl was a goddess of the

holy kingdoms come to dwell on earth, or a lady of this world, for her singing and her beauty made them unable to decide. Because they were afflicted by pain and did not know who had taken hold of them, they grieved the more.

27

And the raging winds that pour out of the Siculan caves when Aeolus opens them and that are so furious as they explore now the lower, and now the higher regions, were nothing to the harmonious sighs that these two emitted from their inmost parts, but with small voices, because the wound that pierced them was still fresh.

28

And she continued her walks in the beautiful garden for her recreation, sometimes alone and sometimes in company. She always secretly turned her eyes toward the window from which she had first heard Palaemon's "alas." And she did not do this because she was urged on by love, but to see if others were looking at her.

29

If she saw that she was being observed, she began to sing and to entertain herself in her delightful and clear voice, almost as if she were unaware. She trod the grass among the shrubs with tiny, lady-like steps and clad in modesty, all the while contriving to give more pleasure to whoever was watching her.

30

She was not prompted by any thought or feeling of love, but by vanity, which women have innate in their hearts in making others see their beauty. Almost stripped of any other worth, they are satisfied to be praised for beauty, and by contriving to please by their charm, they enslave others while they keep themselves free.

31

Every morning with the first appearance of dawn, the two lovers arose and looked into the garden to see if she had come whose divine countenance filled them with immeasurable love. As long as she remained in the garden, they could not rise from their places.

32

They thought that if they gazed at her hard enough they would sate the ardent thirst of their yearning and soften their grievous pangs, but they were

held the more tightly in the chains of the strong god Cupid. Now they showed a happy countenance and now a pitiful one as they gazed at her, solely to give her as much pleasure as she gave them.

33

As they watched from day to day, the fire of love went on increasing, just as the serpent's tooth wounds someone with a small bite at first, and then the poison spreads rapidly, infecting one member, then another, and still another in succession, until it covers the whole body.

34

They were so completely absorbed that every other thought gave way, and now it began to show in their faces because of their long vigils and the scant food that they ate. They blamed their condition on the fact that they were accustomed to joyous activity and games, whereas now they were prisoners. Thus they concealed the real reasons.

35

Now from sighing they advanced to weeping, and if it were not for the fact that they did not want to reveal their love, they would have frequently cried out in their anguish. This is how Love treats those to whom He is most obliged for service. Whoever has been captured by Him at some time and afflicted with similar pangs knows this.

36

Ancient Thebes and their own high lineage had faded from their memory. Their unhappiness and the injury they had received were also gone; that their life was unpleasant, and that they possessed great heritage had faded. Where these things used to be, they held Emilia only.

37

And it was not at all their greatest desire that Theseus should release them from prison, since they thought that then they would have to go into exile in some other country and would not be able to see or hear the flower of all the Amazon women again. It is true that what they wanted most was to be released and yet remain in Athens.

38

Worn out by love, therefore, they bore their ardor more easily when they saw this lady. Then, when she left, they returned to their earlier madness and often composed measured verse to comfort themselves in singing of her high worth. In this way they took some delight in their misfortune.

Because they still did not know who she was, they summoned one of their pages to them one day and Arcites addressed these words to him: "O tell me, for love's sake, dear friend, do you know who she is who showed herself to us the other day as she sang so clearly in the garden? Have you ever seen her elsewhere, or has she come down from heaven?"

40

The valet answered promptly: "She is Emilia, sister of the queen, and more charming than anyone in the world. Because she is very young, she comes safely to the garden without fail every morning. She sings better than Apollo. I have heard her already, and so I know it."

41

They said to one another: "He is telling the truth. It is certainly she who has stolen our hearts and turned our every thought to her. She has made each of us the host of plaints and sighs and severe torment and every other woe, so compellingly does the beauty which shines in her make us desire her."

42

So the two lovers passed the day in sighing and discontent, and when morning came, their martyrdom abated, as long as they beheld the sparkling eyes of Emilia, which made their desires grow more fervent every hour. So they lived while it was summertime, as much in sweetness as in grief.

43

But when Libra stripped the world of the beauty that Aries had bestowed, the two lovers lost the sweetness that used to assuage their fiery thirst; that is, they lost the sight of the sublime splendor which held them in the net of Love. And so they were left in bitter sorrow as they called for death constantly day and night.

44

The weather altered its look and the dew-laden air wept. The grass dried, and the trees were stripped bare, and the stormy tribe of Aeolus raced about, wandering here and there through the unhappy world. And so Emilia with her loving looks left the garden and stayed in her room all the while and took no notice of the weather.

45

Then the martyrdoms and the lamentations, the harsh torments and the painful anguish returned twofold to each of the two lovers, and they did not see or hear anything that pleased them. Thus they were all consumed by grievous pangs. Each one wanted to despair, but then, at the last moment, checked himself.

46

The sighs and sufferings of each were very great. They reached such a point that their imprisonment made them even more unhappy. Every day seemed like a hundred days to them until they might either die or be free. And they called on Emilia for their sole and only comfort and delight.

* * *

From Book 7

* * *

How the Thebans went to temples to pray to the gods to help them in the forthcoming battle. And first, Arcites in the temple of Mars.

22

It was already the day before the one on which the battle was to be fought, when Palaemon and Arcites went humbly and with pious sentiments to pray to the gods. Placing bright fires on their altars, they offered incense, and with fervent desires they prayed that the gods would help each of them in their needs on the following day.

23

But after he had visited the others and placed fire and incense everywhere, Arcites also returned to the temple of Mars and illuminated it much more than any of the others, and having sprinkled the finest distillations with solemn skill, he offered this prayer to Mars with a devout heart and great devotion.

Arcites' prayer to Mars.

24

"O strong God, you maintain your sacred dwelling in the snowy Bistonian realms, in dark places unfriendly to the sun,¹ and brimful of the woes you devised to humble the proud² brows of Earth's haughty sons. For they

1. Since they do not see the sun.

2. The poets write that Earth gave birth to the giants. How they were conquered by love and by Mars through force of arms is described above.

were left on the ground, every one in mortal cold, under the attacks you and your father Jove made against them.

25

"If by the will of the Most High, my youth and my prowess merit my being called one of yours, by that compassion³ that Neptune had for you when you passionately enjoyed the beauty of Cytherea and were entrapped by Vulcan and made a spectacle to all the gods, I humbly pray you not to deny my requests.

26

"As you see, I am a young man, and mighty Love so binds me under His lordship for youthful beauty's sake, that I need all my strength and courage if I am to take delight in what my heart most desires. Without you I have little power. In fact, I can do nothing at all.

27

"Therefore, by that holy fire⁴ which once burned you as it burns me now, help me. Honor me with your might in this coming palestral game.⁵ Such a gift certainly would not seem slight to me, but the greatest good. Perform your task here, therefore. If I am the victor in this contest, I shall have the pleasure and you shall have the honor.

28

"Your everlasting temple will be decorated with the armor of my vanquished comrade and my own will hang there too and the reason for it will be inscribed there. Eternal fires will burn there always. I promise you my beard and those locks of my hair which remain unscathed⁶ by the sword, if you allow me to win as I have asked."

How Arcites' Prayer reached Mars, and how and where his temple is built.

3. The poets write that when Mars was lying with Venus, whom he loved above everything, the Sun saw them and told Vulcan, god of fire, who was the husband of Venus, about it. On this account Vulcan, who was a clever craftsman, made a very strong net of iron and made it so fine that it could hardly be seen. Then he stretched it around his bed, so that anyone who got into it would be held fast. So it happened that one day, when he was not at home, Venus and Mars, without seeing the net, got into the bed naked. Here Vulcan found them when he returned and so showed them to all the gods, who laughed when they saw this. When Mars wanted to

rise, he was not able to do so because of the net in which he found himself caught. Finally Neptune, god of the sea, felt sorry for them. He begged Vulcan so earnestly that Vulcan broke the net and let them go.

4. That is, the fire of love you bore to Venus.

5. What a palestral game is was explained above. Although this should not be done in this way, the author speaks in the poetic manner, for poets do not care if they call different things by the same name, only if they have some similarity in some respect, as they do in this.

6. That is, he had never shaved nor trimmed them.

29

Perhaps Mars was just then⁷ engaged in polishing the rusty places in his great and horrible dwelling place when the pious Prayer of Arcites⁸ arrived there, all tearful of countenance, to perform her assigned task. As soon as she saw the house of Mars, she became mute from fright.

30

For it is set in the Thracian fields,⁹ under wintry skies, storm-tossed by continuous tempest, with hosts of everlasting clouds which are changed,

7. By this the author wants to show that Mars was at his ease when the Prayer of Arcites reached him, since men of arms, when they do not have anything else to do, have their armor furnished, or saddles adjusted, and similar things.

8. When two lords are at a distance from one another, many times there are intermediary ambassadors to make the intention of one known to the other. Prayer between us and God is just like this. Here the author imagines that the Prayer has the shape of a person, so that by making it a person he takes the occasion, consequently, to describe the house of Mars, as something seen by this Prayer.

9. In this part the author describes the house of Mars, concerning which many things must be considered minutely by whoever wants to set them forth in order. However, since it is very superficially touched on hereafter, we shall go over it with a summary explanation. And so that the exposition might be more readily understood, the author says that he intends to show four things here: The first is the kind of place where the house of Mars is situated; the second is how the house of Mars is constructed; the third is who is in the house of Mars; the fourth is with what the house of Mars is adorned. I say, therefore, first of all, that the house of Mars is in Thrace, in cold and cloudy places, full of water and of wind and of ice, wild and thronged with fruitless trees; and in shady places, unfriendly to the sun and full of confusion.

For an understanding of this it should be remarked that in every man there are two principal appetites. One of these is called the concupiscible appetite, whereby man desires and rejoices to have the things which, according to his judgment—whether it be rational or corrupt—are delightful and pleasing. The other is called the irascible appetite, whereby a man is troubled if delightful things are taken away or appetited, or when they cannot be had. This irascible appetite is found very readily in men of much blood, because blood of its nature is hot, and hot things lightly burst into flame for any small provocation. So it happens that men of much blood become angry easily although some, by very strong effort of reason, restrain and conceal their anger.

Since, as we have stated in another place, men in cold regions have more blood than elsewhere, the author says here that the temple of Mars, that is, this irascible appetite, is in Thrace, which is a province situated toward the north and very cold, and in which there are very cruel and warlike men. And

they are irascible because they have much blood. He says that it is cloudy, to show that anger obscures the counsel of reason, which he signifies further on by the sun's rays, which he says the house of Mars thrusts away from it. By the ice, he means the coldness of the soul of the angry man, who, overcome by enkindling of his wrath, becomes cruel and intransigent and without any charity. By the water he means the tears which the enraged shed many times out of wrath. He says, likewise, that the house of Mars is in a forest. By this he means the secret schemings to do harm that angry men sometimes harbor. By the barrenness of the forest he means the effects of wrath, which are not only thieves of the fruits of men's labors, but their wasters as well. And that is why it is that in such a forest there is neither shepherd nor beast, since the angry man does not govern himself or others. And therefore the habitation of Mars in such a place has been shown, however briefly.

A look at the second matter, that is, how this habitation or house of Mars is constructed, follows. He says that it is all sparkling with steel, and has gates of diamond and columns of iron. By the steel, he means the hardness of the stubbornness of the angry man, and this shows that it is the covering of the house, because he says that the columns are of iron. And he says that when this steel reflects, it chases away from itself the light of the sun, and deservedly, because if this steel should soften so as to let the light of the sun pass through, that is, the sound advice of reason in the mind of the angry man, it would no longer be the house of Mars, that is of war and tribulation, but of peace.

Not only does this obstinacy make the divine grace which descends upon it fly away, that is, the salutary counsel of reason, but it has doors of diamond, so that no human persuasion may pass within to either bend or soften it. And it is sustained by columns of iron, that is, by unbreakable resolves. And there are many people in this house, which is the third matter that will be expounded.

He says, then, that in this house of Mars there are mad Impulses, which he says emerge through the gate, to show that the first act of the angry man is impulse, since, as we see, angry men quickly run to take up arms and go against others. He calls these impulses demerited, that is crazy, as we see they are. Next he says there is Blind Sin, which is the effect of impulse, because he who rushes to do something without reasonable deliberation sins blindly. He says

now here, now there, by various winds in various places into spring rain-storms, or are hurled down as globules of water merged together by the cold, as the snow keeps hardening little by little to form ice.

31

It is located in a barren forest of sturdy beech trees, thick-clustering and very tall, gnarled and harsh, unbending and ancient, which cover the face of the sad earth with an eternal shadow. And she heard there among the ancient trunks, a great noise muffled by a thousand Furies; and there was no beast or shepherd there.

32

In this forest she saw the house of the battle-strong god, built entirely of steel, splendid and clean, from which the light of the sun, which shunned that cruel place, was deflected. The narrow entrance¹ was all iron and the gates were re-enforced everywhere with eternal diamond.

that there is also every "Alas!" that is, every manner of woe. And that is very reasonable, since woes follow of necessity on things done insanely, either for whoever unjustly receives them or for whoever realizes that he has done them unjustly.

Next he states that there were Wrath, red as fire, whereby he expresses the appearance of the angry man, whom we see generally becomes flushed at first. And he says "Wraths," plural in number, to show that there are two kinds of wrath, and each one causes the angry man to become flushed: one is getting angry without reason, and this is vicious, and is that which is spoken of here. The other can be reasonable, such as becoming troubled when something is done unjustly, and this accepts the advice of reason in reprimanding or in bringing about amends to what has been ill done. And the author wants this Wrath to be in the house of Mars, because from this are born and can be born every day many just wars.

Similarly, he puts Fear there, which is accustomed to being under the limits of the wrathful since sometimes they grow cold; or let us say the wagers of war grow cold when they do not see things happening as they planned in their undertakings. And he says that this Fear was pale, because we see that the fearful are pale and the reason is that the blood has withdrawn into the heart which is afraid. He also says that there are Betrayals with hidden weapons and Intrigues, that is, ambushes, under a righteous appearance, which belong to the effects that are born of Wrath, that is, wars. And Discord was there, with bloody weapons. She is similar to the effect of Wrath, since many say that Wrath is born of Discord.

He says that there is every Difference, that is, every manner of quarrel and of riot. He also says that there is clamoring, that is, the echoing of harsh

33

And she saw the iron columns that upheld the building. It seemed to her that she saw mad Impulses coming forth proudly through the door; and Blind Sin and every Alas! appeared there too. Wrath, red as fire, and pale Fear were also to be seen in that place.

34

And she saw Betrayals with their secret weapons, and Intrigues with their fair appearance. Discord was seated there, holding bloody weapons and every Difference in her hand. All the rooms seemed clamorous with harsh Threats and Cruel Design. And in their midst sat unhappy Valor, the least to merit praise.

35

Merry Madness she saw there as well, and behind him, armed Death with his bloody looks, and Bewilderment. Every altar there was covered with blood that had been shed by human bodies only in battles. Every altar was luminous with the fire taken from flame-ravaged lands destroyed by wretched wars.

36

And the temple was all storied by a clever hand, above and roundabout. The first scenes pictured there were the depredations made day and night on ravished lands. And anyone ever subjected to violence was here in somber garb. Enchained peoples, iron gates, and demolished fortresses could be seen here.

37

She also saw warlike ships there, and empty wagons and ravaged² countenances, and weeping and unhappy wretches and all Coercions, each with arrogant mien. Every wound was visible there, and blood, mixed with clay. And turbulent, haughty Mars with his proud bearing appeared everywhere.

38

And subtle Mulciber³ had built that retreat with his skill before the sun had shown him by his rays that Cythera was with Mars. From afar Mars

2. That is, by wounds.

3. That is, Vulcan. The fable of Mars, of Venus, and of Vulcan, has been written down at length a little before this. He is called Vulcan Mulciber

because he melts iron, as we see. Vulcan, that is the fire, makes iron, which is hard, so soft by heating it that man can do what he wants with it.

knew what the Prayer wanted and whence she came to entreat him. So he received her and listened to her business.

39

When Mars heard that this Prayer had been sent humbly by Arcites from afar, without waiting for more, he went little by little to where he had been secretly summoned. As soon as the temple heard its sovereign god, it began to tremble and all at once the gates began to roar, so that Arcites was very much afraid.

40

The fires⁴ emitted a much brighter glow and the earth a marvelous aroma and the smoke of the incense drew near the image placed in honor of Mars, and the armor⁵ moved of its own accord and resounded with a sweet music, and signs were given to wondering Arcites that his prayer had been heard.

41

And so the young man rested content with the thought of achieving victory. He did not leave the temple that night, but instead spent the entire night in prayer. He received other signs that night that assured him of the truth of his experience. As soon as the new day appeared, the elegant youth had himself armed.

* * *

From Book 12

1

Let those who have ever felt sorrow reflect on what the life of Emilia was like while these things were being done in honor of Arcites. She was dressed in black and her cheeks were stained with tears, and refusing to take any comfort, she only wept for her dead Arcites.

2

And the rosy color was fled from her face, which became pale and thin, and the bright splendor of her eyes was clouded over. The cruel sorrow was so strong in her that she could scarcely be recognized, for night and day her only consolation was to call on Arcites in lamentation and tears.

How Theseus, after giving a long speech, commanded Palaemon to marry Emilia and all mourning garb to be laid aside.

4. Kindled by Arcites.

5. That is, the statue of Mars.

3

But after many days had passed since the unfortunate occurrence, when the Greeks gathered about Arcites, it seemed to be the consensus of opinion that sad lamentation should be set aside, and that the wish which Arcites had expressed should be carried out: that is, that his beloved Emilia should be wed to Palaemon.

4

For this reason, Theseus summoned Palaemon, and without knowing the reason for the summons, Palaemon obeyed, clad in black and downcast as he was, and accompanied by many kings. With as many as were with him he entered where Emilia, who was still weeping, was seated among many ladies.

5

When everyone had silently sat down there, Theseus stood for a long time without saying anything. When he saw that the ears of all were humbly attentive, he checked the tears of pity that threatened to come to his eyes, and began to speak thus:

6

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

7

“As we see, the oak trees that have such a growth span and such vitality also come to an end at some time. We see clearly that even the hard rocks we tread under foot come to fail, through various vicissitudes. We see rivers dry up through the years and other new ones spring forth.

8

“Needless to say, it is very clear that nature draws man to one of two ends: either to an obscure old age full of endless troubles, and this then most certainly ended by death, or else death in the midst of youth and a most joyful life.

9

“And, indeed, I believe that death is better when life is a joy. The valiant man ought not to care how or where it comes, for wherever he might be,

fame will preserve the honor he deserves. As for the body that is left behind, one place or another serves, and the soul has neither more nor less its fill of delight.

10

"I say the same for the manner of death. For while some drown in the sea, some die as they lie in their beds, some die with their blood shed in battle, and some for whatever you want to say of how many ways a man can die, yet it is still necessary for each one to come to Acheron, let him die as he will, well or badly.

11

"And it is wisdom, therefore, to make a virtue of necessity when one must. And the opposite is plain vanity, worse in the man who has had experience of this than in one who has never tried it. Certainly, this true maxim of mine can apply to us who live sorrowfully always in the midst of contingencies,

12

"and all the more so in the midst of necessities: such as in this case of the death of someone whose valor was so great and of such a nature, that its flower is followed by the graceful fruit of fame. If we thought deeply about this, we would set aside this wretched grief and turn our efforts toward a valiant life that would win us glorious fame.

13

"It is true that on such occasions sadness and lamentation cannot be kept sealed within us very well, so it ought to be allowed in some measure. But after that it ought to cease, because the desire to exceed the limits so much can hurt the one who indulges, and it is folly, and such a one does not get back what he desires.

14

"And certainly, if ever a brave man was mourned in Greece by many kings and a populous nation, Arcites was deservedly that man. He was also honored with magnificent glory on his splendid pyre, and every respectful office that a dead body could receive was rendered him.

15

"And besides, as we have seen, here in Athens the mourning has continued and everyone has gone on wearing mourning garb, as is especially proper for us who are here, from whom others should take example in every deed and whom they should follow, especially in doing good.

16

"Therefore, whatever is born to us, dies on us as well, no matter what our desire is. And we have paid proper honor to him whom we are mourning now, and with reason I think that it would be better to divest ourselves of this gloomy dress and set sorrow aside, for it is womanish behavior rather than virile.

17

"If I thought that we might have Arcites back by weeping for him, I would say that we should all weep and I would earnestly request it. But it would not avail. Therefore, from now on, let everyone be joyful and set aside the tears and sighs, if you want to please me, for in this great matter you ought to want to do so.

18

"And besides this, let thought be given to carry out his final request. Phoroneus, who first gave us laws, said that the last wish of a dying man with good reason ought to be faithfully carried out; and Arcites prayed that Emilia, whom he loved so much, should be given to Palaemon.

19

"Put aside these black garments, therefore, and when the sorrow and lamentation have ceased, the joyful and bright festivities will begin. Before any lord departs, we shall celebrate with proper splendor and openly the wedding of the couple we have named. So prepare yourselves to do what I want without refusal."

* * *

BOETHIUS

From *The Consolation of Philosophy* †

Book 2, Meter 8

"That the world with stable feith varieth^o acordable^o chaunginges; that the contrarious^o qualites of ele-

varies in / harmonious
contrary

† We print from Chaucer's own translation. The original, written in Latin in 524, was one of the books most central to his thought, as well as to that of the medieval period as a whole. For a lucid modern English translation, see that of Richard Green (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962). The influence of this work, both in general and in specific detail, is not limited to the passages we print here: they must serve as examples merely. It is customarily assumed that Chaucer translated Boe- thus during the same period in which he wrote the *Knight's Tale*—which existed as an independent narrative before the *Canterbury Tales* was begun—and the *Troilus and Criseyde*.

ments holden among hemself aliaunce perdurable; that Phebus the sonne with his goldene chariet bringeth forth the rosene^o day; that the moone hath commaundement^o over the nightes, which nightes Hesperus the eve-sterre^o hath brought; that the see, greedy to flower, constreyneth^o with a certain ende^o his floodes, so that it is nat lewful^o to strecche his brode termes^o or boundes upon the erthes, *that is to seyn, to covere al the erthe*—al this acordaunce of thinges is bounden with love, that governeth erthe and see, and hath also commaundement to the hevencne. And yif this love slakede the brydeles,^o alle thinges that now loven hem togederes wolden maken bataile continually^o and stryven to fordoon^o the fasoun^o of this worlde, the whiche they now leden^o in acordable feith by faire moevings. This love halt^o togideres poeples joyned with an holy bond, and knitteth sacrament of mariages of chaste loves; and love endy-teth^o lawes to trewe felawes.^o O weleful^o were man-kinde, yif thilke love that governeth hevencne governed youre corages!^{1o}

From Book 3, Prose 10

“For as moche thanne as thou hast seyn^o which is the forme of good that nis nat parfit, and which is the forme of good that is parfit, now trowe^o I that it were good to shewe in what this perfeccioun of blisfulnesse is set. And in^o this thing,^o I trowe that we sholden first enquire for to witen^o yif that any swiche maner good as thilke good that thou has diffmissed^o a litel heerbiforn, *that is to seyn, sovereign good*, may ben founde¹ in the nature of thinges, for^o that veyn imaginacioun of thought ne deceyve us nat and putte us out of the sothfastnesse^o of thilke thing that is summitted^o unto us. But it may nat ben denyed that thilke good ne is and that it nis right as a welle of alle goodes.² For al thing that is cleped^o inparfit is proeved^o inparfit by the amenusinge^o of perfeccioun or of thing that is parfit. And therof comth it, that in every thing general,^o yif that men sen any thing that is inparfit, certes^o in thilke general ther mot ben som thing that is parfit; for yif so be that perfeccioun is don away, men may nat thinke ne seye fro whennes^o thilke thing

1. I.e., exists.

2. But it cannot be denied that this (sovereign) good

exists and that it is exactly like a wellspring of all goodness.

is that is cleped inparfit. For the nature of thinges ne took nat hir beginninge of^o thinges amenused^o and inparfit, but it proceded of thinges that ben al hoole and absolut, and descendeth^o so doum into outterest^o thinges, and into thinges empty and withouten fruyt.^o But, as I have y-shewed^o a litel herbiforn, that yif ther be a blisfulnesse that be freele^o and veyn and inparfit, ther may no man doute that ther nis som blisfulnesse that is sad,^o stedefast, and parfit.”

Boece. “This is concluded,” quod I, “fermely^o and sothfastly.”

Philosophie. “But considere also,” quod she, “in whom this blisfulnesse enhabiteth. The comune acordaunce^o and conceite^o of the corages^o of men proeveth and graunteth that God, prince of alle thinges, is good. For, so as^o nothing may ben thought better than God, it may nat ben doubted^o thanne that he, that^o no thing nis better, that he nis^o good. Certes, resoun sheweth that God is so good, that it proveth by verray force^o that parfit good is in him. For yif God ne is swich, he ne may nat ben prince of alle thinges; for certes something possessing in itself parfit good sholde ben more worthy than God, and it sholde semen^o that thilke thing were first^o and elder than God. For we han shewed apertly^o that alle thinges that ben parfit ben first^o of thinges that ben inparfit. And forthy,^o for as moche as that^o my resoun or my proces^o ne go nat away withoute an ende,⁴ we owen^o to graunten that the sovereign God is right ful of sovereign parfit good. And we han establissed that the sovereign good is verray^o blisfulnesse. Thanne mot it nedes^o be that verray blisfulnesse is set in sovereign God.”

* * *

Book 4, Meter 6

“If thou, wys, wilt demen^o in thy pure thought the nightes^o or the lawes of the heye thonderer, *that is to seyn, of God*, loke thou and bihold the heightes of the sovereign hevencne. There kepen the sterres, by rightful aliaunce^o of thinges, hir olde pees.^o The sonne, y-moeved^o by his rody^o fyr, ne distorbeth nat that colde cercle of the mone. Ne the sterre y-cleped

from / deficient
falls, diffuses / farthest
fruitfulness
shown
frail

trustworthy
firmly

agreement / understanding /
minds, hearts

since
doubted
than whom

necessarily

seem / primary
clearly
before
thus / so that
argument / must

true
necessarily

consider
rules

harmony / peace
moved / ruddy

enduring

rosy

dominion

evening star

constrains / limit

lawful, permissible

boundaries

were to lose control

immediately / destroy / order

carry out

holds

prescribes / friends / happy

minds, spirits

seen

think

on / topic

know

defined

so

truth

submitted

called / proved, shown

lack

(of some) kind, species

certainly

whence

the Bere, that enclyneth his ravissinge^o courses aboute the soverain heighte of the worlde, ne the same sterre Ursa nis never mo wasshen in the depe westrene see, ne coveiteth^o nat to deyen^o his flaumbes^o in the see of the occian, although he see othre sterres y-plounged in the see. And Hesperus *the sterre bodeth^o* and telleth alwey the late nightes; and Lucifer *the sterre* bringeth ayein the clere day.

And thus maketh Love entrechaungeable the perdurable courses;⁵ and thus is discordable bataile y-pu^t out of the contree of the sterres. This acordaunce atempreth^o by evenelyk^o maneres the elements, that the moiste things, stryvinge with the drye things, yeven^o place by stoundes;^o and that the colde things joynen hem by feyth^o to the hote things; and that the lighte fyr aryseth into heighte, and the hevy erthes avalen^o by hir weightes. By these same causes the floury^o yeer yildeth^o swote smelles in the firste somer-^o sesoun^o warminge; and the hote somer dryeth the cornes;^o and autumpne comth ayein, hevye of apples; and the fleting^o reyn bideweth^o the winter. This atempraunce^o norissheth and bringeth forth al thing that bretheth^o lyf in this world; and thilke same atempraunce, ravissinge,^o hydeth and binimeth^o and drencheth^o under the laste deeth alle things y-born.

Amonges these things^o sitteth the heye maker, king and lord, welles^o and biginninge, lawe and wys juge, to don equitee;^o and governeth and enclyneth the byddes^o of things. And tho things that he stereth^o to gon by moevinge, he withdraweth^o and aresteth;^o and affermeth^o the moevable or wandringe things. For yif that he ne clepede ayein^o the righte goinge of things, and yif that he ne constreinede hem nat effsones^o into roundnesses enclynede,^o the things that ben now continued by stable ordinaunce,^o they sholden departen from hir welle, *that is to seyn, from hir bigimminge, and faylen, that is to seyn, torne into nought.*

This is the comune love to alle things; and alle things axen^o to ben holden^o by the fyn^o of good. For elles ne mighten they nat lasten, yif they ne come nat effsones ayein, by love returned, to the cause that hath yeven hem beinge, *that is to seyn, to God.*"

5. And thus Love makes harmonious the everlasting movements (of the stars). 6. I. e., did not control.

swirling

desires / dye, drench / flames

proclaims

regulates / even

give, yield / in time
in alliance

sink
flowering / yields

spring
crops, grains

flowing / bedews
moderated change

breathes
taking away / snatches off
drowns

During these changes

wellspring, source
justice, right

holds the reins, controls / stirs
draws back / restrains
steadies

again / circling orbits
regulation

demand / held / end, goal

The Miller's Prologue and Tale

Although there are a number of analogues to individual motifs in the *Miller's Tale*, only one story from Chaucer's age survives that contains all the major plot elements. It is a Flemish fabliau, titled *The Three Guests of Heile of Bersele* in Constance B. Hieatt's translation. Chaucer's source may well have been a French fabliau now lost, but the *Miller's Tale* is rich with detail and nuance usually lacking in the genre, of which *Heile* is a fairly typical representative. Chaucer's apology for the tale in the *Miller's Prologue* shares much of the tone and many of the gambits of Boccaccio's Introduction to the Fourth Day and his Conclusion to the *Decameron*. Whether or not Chaucer was remembering the *Decameron* precisely at this point, both passages offer insight into the defense of nondidactic literature in the later Middle Ages.

The Three Guests of Heile of Bersele †

You have often heard tales of all manner of things, told or sung to the tune of a fiddle or harp; but I think few will have heard of such a strange case as one which happened here in Antwerp some time ago. I will tell you about it at the request of a boon companion of mine; he wouldn't let me off.

Here in the market street in Antwerp, there lived, I recall, a fine wench, and she was called Heile of Bersele. She often made love, for a price, with good fellows to whom she displayed her arts. It fell out once, as I heard the story, that three such fellows came to her on the same day, one after the other, all three asking her that for the sake of friendship she would let them come where she lived: each wanted to speak to her alone, in secret. This was good business for Heile, who determined to satisfy all three.

The first one she made an appointment with was a miller called William Hoef. She told him to come as soon as evening fell. The second was a priest; she told him to come when the curfew-bell rang. She told the third, a smith who was a neighbor of hers, to come when the clock struck midnight. This satisfied all three, and they all went their way happily, awaiting the proper time.

At twilight, William came promptly. Heile received him graciously and made him quite at home. They played the game of love—she knew that

† From Constance B. Hieatt, ed., *The Miller's Tale, and Analogues*, pp. 112–18. It was written in the late fourteenth century, by Geoffrey Chaucer (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1970) 51–54. The Flemish text is printed in *Sources*