

## The Knight: his Portrait and his Tale

## Here is the portrait of the Knight from the General Prologue

*The Knight is the person of highest social standing on the pilgrimage though you would never know it from his modest manner or his clothes. He keeps his ferocity for crusaders' battlefields where he has distinguished himself over many years and over a wide geographical area. As the text says, he is not "gay", that is, he is not showily dressed, but is still wearing the military padded coat stained by the armor he has only recently taken off.*

A KNIGHT there was and that a worthy man  
 That from the timè that he first began  
 45 To riden out, he lovèd chivalry,  
 Truth and honóur, freedom and courtesy.<sup>1</sup>  
 Full worthy was he in his lordè's war, *lorde's = king's or God's*  
 And thereto had he ridden--no man farre *farther*  
 As well in Christendom as Heatheness *heathendom*  
 50 And ever honoured for his worthiness.

### *His campaigns*

At Alexandria he was when it was won. *captured*  
 Full often times he had the board begun *table*  
 Aboven allè natiõns in Prussia.<sup>2</sup>  
 In Lithow had he reisèd and in Russia *Lithuania / fought*  
 55 No Christian man so oft of his degree. *rank*  
 In Gránad' at the siege eke had he be *Granada / also*  
 Of Algesir and ridden in Belmarie.  
 At Leyès was he and at Satalie  
 When they were won, and in the Greatè Sea *Mediterranean*  
 60 At many a noble army had he be.  
 At mortal battles had he been fifteen  
 And foughten for our faith at Tramissene  
 In listès thricè, and ay slain his foe.<sup>3</sup> *combat 3 times & always*  
 This ilkè worthy knight had been also *same*

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<sup>1</sup> 45-6: "He loved everything that pertained to knighthood: truth (to one's word), honor, magnanimity (freedom), courtesy."

<sup>2</sup> 52-3: He had often occupied the seat of honor at the table of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia, where badges awarded to distinguished crusaders read "Honneur vainc tout: Honor conquers all." Though the campaigns listed below were real, and though it was perhaps just possible for one man to have been in them all, the list is probably idealized. The exact geographical locations are of little interest today. This portrait is generally thought to show a man of unsullied ideals; Terry Jones insists that the knight was a mere mercenary.

<sup>3</sup> 63: "In single combat (*listes*) three times, and always (*ay*) killed his opponent."

65     Sometimè with the lord of Palatie  
        Against another heathen in Turkey,  
        And ever more he had a sovereign prize,<sup>1</sup> always

*His modest demeanor*

       And though that he was worthy he was wise, valiant / sensible  
        And of his port as meek as is a maid. deportment  
 70     Ne never yet no villainy he said rudeness  
        In all his life unto no manner wight.<sup>2</sup> no kind of person  
        He was a very perfect gentle knight.  
        But for to tellen you of his array:  
        His horse was good; but **he** was not gay.<sup>3</sup> well dressed  
 75     Of fustian he wearèd a gipoun coarse cloth / tunic  
        All besmotered with his habergeon, stained / mail  
        For he was late y-come from his voyáge, just come / journey  
        And wentè for to do his pilgrimáge.<sup>4</sup>

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*To recapitulate what was said at the end of the General Prologue:*

*After serving dinner, Harry Bailly, the fictional Host, owner of the Tabard Inn, originates the idea for the Tales: to pass the time pleasantly, every one will tell a couple of tales on the way out and a couple on the way back. The teller of the best tale will get a dinner paid for by all the others at Harry's inn, The Tabard, on the way back from Canterbury. He offers to go with them as a guide. They all accept, agreeing that the Host be MC. The next morning they set out and draw lots to see who shall tell the first tale.*

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<sup>1</sup> 64-67: The knight had fought for one Saracen or pagan leader against another, a common, if dubious, practice. *And ever more ...* may mean he always kept the highest reputation or that he always came away with a splendid reward or booty (*prize*).

<sup>2</sup> 70-71: Notice quadruple negative: "ne, never, no ... no" used for emphasis, perhaps deliberately excessive emphasis. It is not bad grammar. The four negatives remain in Ellesmer's slightly different version: "He never yet no villainy ne said ... unto no manner wight"

<sup>3</sup> 74: "He (the Knight) was not fashionably dressed." *horse was*: most MSS read *hors weere(n)* = "horses were." I have preferred the reading of MS Lansdowne.

<sup>4</sup> 75-78: The poor state of the knight's clothes is generally interpreted to indicate his pious anxiety to fulfill a religious duty even before he has had a chance to change his clothes. Jones thinks it simply confirms that the knight was a mercenary who had pawned his armor. *voyage*: MSS have *viage*. *Blessed viage* was the term often used for the holy war of the crusades.

The Host:

?Let see now who shall tell the firstè tale.  
 As ever may I drinkèn wine or ale,  
 Whoso be rebel to my judgèment *Whoever is*  
 Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.  
 835 Now drawèth cut, ere that we further twinn; *draw lots before we go*  
 He which that has the shortest shall begin.  
 Sir Knight," quod he, "my master and my lord, *said he*  
 Now drawèth cut, for that is mine accord. *draw lots / wish*  
 Come near," quod he, "my lady Prioress.  
 840 And you, Sir Clerk, let be your shamefastness, *shyness*  
 Nor study not. Lay hand to, every man."

*They all draw lots.*

Anon to drawèn every wight began *person*  
 And shortly for to tellèn as it was,  
 Were it by áventure or sort or cas, *Whether by fate, luck or fortune*  
 845 The sooth is this, the cut fell to the knight, *The truth / the lot*  
 Of which full blithe and glad was every wight. *very happy / person*  
 And tell he must his tale as was reason  
 By forward and by composition *By agreement & contract*  
 As you have heard. What needeth wordès mo' ? *more*  
 850 And when this good man saw that it was so,  
 As he that wise was and obedient  
 To keep his forward by his free assent, *his agreement*  
 He saidè: "Since I shall begin the game,  
 What! welcome be the cut, in God's name.  
 855 Now let us ride, and hearkèn what I say." *and listen*  
 And with that word we ridèn forth our way  
 And he began with right a merry cheer *with great good humor*  
 His tale anon, and said as you may hear. *at once*

## *THE KNIGHT'S TALE*

### **Introduction**

Having drawn the lot to decide who is going to tell the first tale on the road to Canterbury, the Knight proceeds to tell the longest of all the tales in verse. It is, at least on the surface, a Romance; that is, in medieval terms, a tale of love and war, or as we might put it, sex and violence. But the sex here is a matter of convention rather than act, and in no way erotic or earthy as it is in other tales. The violence that we see is ordered and ritualistic, conducted according to rule; the violence that we do not see but hear about, is perhaps less ordered and rule-bound. There is not much "romance" in any modern sense of the word, and the tale appeals to something other than to the softer emotions.

At the beginning we see quite clearly the connected topics of sex and force: Theseus has won himself a bride by violence, and without a trace of erotic passion--just a war prize, as far as we can see. He has conquered the Amazons, a race of single women warriors, and has taken their leader as his wife; the violence is passed over as a sort of given, and we begin with the "lived happily ever after" part; which is the wrong way to *begin* a romance, and one good reason for wanting to label the tale in some other way.

This may seem overstated, because it is hard to detect any overt note of questioning within the text itself. At first perhaps the critical question only lurks at the back of the mind, but the accumulation of the rest of the tale brings it to the forefront: Is this tale really a romance designed to entertain by celebrating love and valor? Or is it something more?

To begin at the beginning: on the way home from his victorious war against the Amazons, to live happily ever after, Theseus, Duke of Athens, is shocked to hear of another conqueror's behavior: the widows from another war (presumably there were no widows of Theseus's war) complain piteously that Creon of Thebes will not allow them to bury their dead men, a nasty habit of Creon's. So the conquering hero turns around, starts and finishes another widow-making war, so

that even more widows can now live happily ever after, manless like Amazons. The act is at once his homecoming gift to his bride, the manned and tamed Amazon, Hippolyta, who proceeds obediently and placidly to Athens; and at the same time his sacrifice to the minotaur, War. For inside that much-admired construction, *The Knight's Tale*, lurks a Minotaur, not Picasso's version—lustful and savage but vital; this one is legal but lethal. It demands human sacrifice, a fearful and equivocal attraction to men who make offerings by war and related cruelties. Theseus feasts the monster once more, "sparing" only the lives of two young wifeless nobles whom he throws into prison for life.

Where, unlikely enough, "romance" begins, in spite of stone walls and iron bars which do not a prison make in that they do not subdue in the young knights the same drives that impel Theseus: lust and war. Or perhaps more accurately the Lust for War, since the sexual lust in the tale is largely conventional. This is no tale of Lancelot or Tristan who consummate their love as frequently as adverse circumstance permits. The two young prisoners fall for Emily at the same time, quite literally love at first sight, and promptly fall to battling over who shall possess this female that one of them thinks is a goddess. And the tale has shown that a virgin or a goddess is as good an excuse for a fight as a widow. Emily is not there to make love to, but to make war over.

When they both get free, they know only one way to settle their dilemma: a bloody fight. And when Theseus finds them fighting illegally in his territory, he knows one way to deal with the problem: a sentence of death. But under pressure from the women, who think that being fought over is touching, he decrees a LEGAL fight, a tournament, even more violent and bloody than the one he has just stopped. The first move of this great expositor of The First Mover is always violent. There is a lot of Fortitudo (physical Courage) but little Sapientia (Wisdom) in this ruler who is taken as the ideal by so many critics. Surely we are to take ironically the concession to Sapientia, his "moderation" at the opening of the tournament (1679-1706), when he forbids pole-axe and shortsword, and allows only longsword and mace! And (real restraint) only one ride with a sharp-ground spear, which, however, the fighter may continue to use if he is unhorsed. No wonder the people cry out:

*God save such a lord that is so good*

*He willeth no destruction of blood.* (1705-06)

Indeed!

One critic interprets rather differently: "Acknowledging with true wisdom the limitations of human control, Theseus eschews making the choice himself, [of Emily's husband]; not denying or combatting the role of chance, he merely provides a civilized context within which it can operate." [Jill Mann, "Chance and Destiny" in *Cambridge Chaucer Companion*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1986), p. 88]. He is hardly a wise ruler who cannot even choose a husband for his ward, unlike any Squire Paston; instead he leaves it to the "chance" outcome of a bloody tournament, which is his very deliberate choice; this arrangement can hardly be called without irony a "civilized context." It makes "civilization" consist in ordered violence which everyone can watch on the holiday declared for the occasion. Is not part of Chaucer's comment on this "civilization" the use of alliteration to describe the battle, a stylistic device he elsewhere dismisses as uncivilized "rum, ram, ruf," fit only for describing a barnyard row or a murderous melee?

Professor J.A. Burrow makes the same curious claim about civilized conduct in the same book (p. 121-2): "the tournament, the obsequies for Arcite, the parliament . . . represent man's attempts to accommodate and civilize the anarchic and inescapable facts of aggression, death and love, as social life requires." If there *is*, as Burrow claims, a political dimension to this "romance," conducting a war to seize a bride or to avenge a small group of widows for a sin that must have struck a 14th-century English audience as venial—this sort of behavior hardly "manifests a concern for matters of foreign relations" in any sense that most of us would accept, or which, perhaps, one 14th-century soldier-poet-diplomat could accept.

Were the wars in which Geoffrey Chaucer himself had taken part--or his Knight narrator--any better motivated than those of Theseus? Is this poem partly Chaucer's thoughtful response to organized royal violence in his medieval world, particularly the wars of his own ruler, Edward III?

If so, it might account in part for why he, a master of characterization, makes so little attempt in this tale to make the characters anything other than representative. They do not, for example,

have conversations; they make speeches, generally quite lengthy. The closest the young knights get to normal conversation is when they quarrel over Emily: they hurl abuse, accusations and challenges at each other, not so much a conversation as a flyting, the verbal equivalent of the single combat or tournament. For Palamon and Arcite are semi-allegorical rather than realistic characters. They are two Young Men smitten with Love for a Young Woman, as Young Men should be in Romances. Although they are natural cousins and Sworn Brothers in a warrior class, they quarrel over who shall have the Young Woman, and come to blows over the matter. An attempt to arbitrate the dispute in a Trial by Combat is arranged by an Older and Wiser Knight, Theseus. Arcite prays to his patron Mars to grant him Victory in the fight; Palamon prays to Venus to win the Young Woman, and the Young Woman prays to be left alone. The prayers are ritualistic and studied, the product or container of ideas rather than the passionate pleas of fully realized characters.

The incompatibility of their prayers inevitably raises the question for Christian readers about the outcome of competing requests by people who ask God for opposing things. Presumably even God cannot grant every petition. And does He want to? Does He care? Does a just and wise God rule this world at all?

*What is mankindè more unto you hold  
Than is the sheep that rowketh in the fold (huddles)  
For slain is man right as another beast . . .  
What governance is in this prescience  
That guiltèless tormenteth innocence? (1307-14)*

The plot is mildly absurd, a fact that occurs even to one of the characters for a moment; he sees that he and his opponent are fighting like dogs over a bone which neither can win. And Theseus has a moment of mockery of two men fighting over a woman who knows no more about their dispute than "does a cuckoo or a hare." But for the most part this realization does not interfere with the mechanical progress of the narrative. This is not lack of ingenuity on the part of a poet who is capable of devilishly ingenious plots. Here the plot seems to function mostly to carry something else — ideas or questions about Destiny, Fortune, free will, war, prayer, the existence of God, the power of lust, the frailty of vows, and so on.



At one point Arcite glimpses something for a moment when he gets his desire to be let out of prison and then laments it:

*We knowen not what that we prayen here.*

This realization does not dissuade him later from praying for Victory the night before the tournament, although his previous wish has been granted without divine intervention, and he was unhappy with it anyway. Earlier Palamon also had knelt to Venus and prayed in vain for release from prison (1103 ff). Now, some years later, he too has escaped without any supernatural help, but once more he prays to the same Venus to win the lady. And they all pray in temples whose paintings show the influence of the gods to be almost universally malevolent. So, it would appear that prayer is at best pointless, at worst harmful.

The gods Mars and Venus quarrel over what is to be the result of these prayers, and the case is determined by an Older Wiser God, Saturn, who assures everybody that all will get what they have asked for. The mirroring of the human situation in the "divine" is evident and not reassuring. The gods seem to be nothing more than reflections of the minds of the humans involved—made in the human image in fact, bickering and quarreling, and eventually solving the dilemma not with Godlike wisdom but by a rather shabby trick or "an elegant sophism" depending on your point of view.

Some readers take comfort from the speeches near the end of the tale by Theseus and his father about the general benevolence of The First Mover, who sees to it that everything works out for the best, even though we do not always see it. Others consider the speeches to be of the post-prandial variety, full of sound and platitude, signifying nothing: "Every living thing must die," and "Make virtue of necessity." This is not deep philosophy. But it allows the tale to end, however shakily, as all romances should end — with the marriage of the knight and his princess, who live happily ever after.

## Some notes on versification of this first tale (and others)

Some lines simply will not read smoothly in either modspell or old spelling, some only if the modspell is so modified as to be grotesque: putting stress on the second syllable of **lookíng** or **upwárd**, for example, as in line 2679 (see below). In some cases one cannot be sure how the rhythm was meant to go, and so I have left words unmarked; readers will have to exercise to their own judgement. In some place I have taken a chance and marked syllables even if the stress seems a little awkward. Rigid consistency has not seemed appropriate. And the reader is the final judge.

**Stress & Pronunciation of Proper and common nouns:**

Clearly the names of the protagonists could be spelled, stressed and pronounced in different ways depending on metrical and other needs:

*Arcite*: 2 syllables in 1145 & 1032 (rhymes with quite) ;

3 syllables: *Arcíta* 1013,1112; 1152 *Árcité*. 2256 & 2258 have *Arcita* in MSS. The first has stress on syllable #1 *Árcita*; the second on syllable #2 *Arcíta*.

*Emily* (1068), *Emelia* (1078)

*Palamon* 1031, *Palamoun* 1070 both reflecting the MSS

*Sáturnus* (2443); *Satúrn* 2450, and 2453 rhyming with *to turn*

*Fortúne* (915), *Fórtune* (925)

1977: *trees* possibly has two syllables but I have not marked the word because that seems a trifle grotesque; however, I have marked *stubbès* in the next line for two syllables because that seems more acceptable.

1235-6: *aventúre / dure*; 1239-40: *absénce / présénce*

1241-2: *able / changeable*. Clearly the last syllable of *changeable* is stressed but I have not marked it. In 2239 I marked the second syllable of *victóry* but did not do so six lines later when *víctory* is equally possible in reading.

1609: I keep *battail* for rhyme with *fail*

1787-8: With some trepidation I have marked *obstáculos / miráculos* to show how the stress should go rather than as a guide for correct pronunciation.

1975 should have *forést* to have at least a half-rhyme with *beast*, but I have not marked it.

2039/40: *old / would* do not rhyme ; in Shakespeare's **Venus & Adonis** *should* rhymes with *cool'd*

2321 & 2333-6: the word *Queint* recurs meaning both *quenched* and *quaint* (strange)2333. I have kept *queint / quaint* at 2333-4, partly for the rhyme, and partly because of clear word play. Even in mid line *queint* rather than *quenched* is kept because of the possibility of further wordplay causes me to keep.

2259: I have *prayer* rhyming with *dear*; the accent should come on the second syllable of *prayer*, French fashion, as one might naturally do with the original spelling *preyere*. But I have not marked it. Similarly with 2267. But in 2332 I *have* marked it.

2290: The necessary change from *coroune* to *crown* leaves an irremediable gap of one syllable.

2487/8: *service/ rise* I have made no attempt to mark the second syllable of *service* which needs to be stressed. Similarly 2685 has unmarked *request* where the meter demands a stress on the first syllable

2679: *Lokynge upward upon this Emelye* might be scanned rigidly with stresses on *-ynge* and

-*ward* in strict iambic meter, and indeed if one does not do so, the line limps a bit. But who would dare to do so even with Middle English spelling and pronunciation? Most will take the limp or pronounce *upon* as *'pon* or *on* (as I have done), rather than stress two succeeding words in a way that does such violence to our ideas of word stress. *lookíng* and *upwárd* are quite impossible, in modern dress at any rate. *obstáculos* / *miráculos*, above, are not much better.

2811-12: the ME *divinistre* / *registre* was probably pronounced French fashion with the stress -*ístre*

2789-90: *knighthood* / *kindred* do not rhyme. There is no reasonable way to change this.

**THE KNIGHT'S TALE***Part One*

*Theseus, duke of Athens, returns victorious from a war against the Amazons, with one of them as his wife*

- Whilom, as oldè stories tellen us, *W = Once upon a time*  
 860 There was a duke that hightè Theseus: *was called*  
 Of Athens he was lord and governor,  
 And in his timè such a conqueror  
 That greater was there none under the sun.  
 Full many a richè country had he won:  
 865 What with his wisdom and his chivalry,  
 He conquered all the reign of feminy, *realm of Amazons*  
 That whilom was y-clepèd Scythia, *once was called*  
 And wedded the queen Hyppolita,  
 And brought her home with him in his country,  
 870 With muchè glory and great solemnity,  
 And eke her youngè sister Emily. *also*  
 And thus with victory and melody  
 Let I this noble duke to Athens ride,  
 And all his host in armès him beside.  
 875 And certès, if it n'ere too long to hear, *certainly / weren't*  
 I would have told you fully the mannér  
 How wonnen was the reign of feminy *conquered / realm*  
 By Theseus and by his chivalry,  
 And of the greatè battle, for the nones, *on the occasion*  
 880 Betwixen Athens and the Amazons,  
 And how besiegèd was Hippolyta,  
 The fairè, hardy Queen of Scythia,  
 And of the feast that was at their wedding,  
 And of the tempest at their home-coming.  
 885 But all that thing I must as now forbear.  
 I have, God wot, a largè field to ere, *God knows / to plough*  
 And weakè be the oxen in my plough;

The remnant of the tale is long enough.  
 I will not letten eke none of this rout; *delay / this group*  
 890 Let every fellow tell his tale about,  
 And let's see now who shall the supper win,  
 And where I left I will again begin.

*The weeping widows of Thebes ask his intervention against Creon*

This duke of whom I makè mention,  
 When he was comen almost to the town  
 895 In all his weal and in his mostè pride, *success / great pride*  
 He was 'ware as he cast his eye aside *looked aside*  
 Where that there kneelèd in the high way  
 A company of ladies, tway and tway, *two by two*  
 Each after other, clad in clothès black.  
 900 But such a cry and such a woe they make  
 That in this world n'is creature living *= ne is = is not*  
 That heardè such another waymenting; *lamenting*  
 And of this cry they would not ever stent *stop*  
 Till they the reinès of his bridle hent. *caught*  
 905 "What folk be ye that at mine home-coming  
 Perturben so my feastè with crying?" *disturb*  
 Quod Theseus. "Have you so great envy  
 Of mine honouír, that thus complain and cry?  
 Or who has you misboden or offended? *threatened*  
 910 And telleth me if it may be amended  
 And why that you be clothèd thus in black."  
 The eldest lady of them allè spake,  
 When she had swoonèd with a deadly cheer, *deathly look*  
 That it was ruthè for to see and hear. *pitiful*  
 915 She saidè: "Lord to whom Fortúne has given  
 Victory, and as a conqueror to liven,  
 Nought grieveth us your glory and your honour,  
 But we besechen mercy and succour. *help*  
 Have mercy on our woe and our distress!  
 920 Some drop of pity, through thy gentleness,  
 Upon us wretched women let thou fall!  
 For certès, lord, there is none of us all *certainly*  
 That she n'ath been a duchess or a queen. *hasn't been*

	Now be we caitives, as it is well seen,	<i>outcasts</i>
925	Thankèd be Fortune and her falsè wheel, That no estate assureth to be well. <sup>1</sup>	
	Now certès, lord, to abiden your preséncé, Here in this temple of the goddess Cleméncé We have been waiting all this fortènight.	<i>await Mercy 2 weeks</i>
930	Now help us, lord, since it is in thy might. I, wretchè, which that weep and wailè thus, Was whilom wife to King Cappaneus That starved at Thebès--cursèd be that day! <sup>2</sup> And allè we that be in this array	<i>was once Who died at condition</i>
935	And maken all this lamentation, We losten all our husbands at that town, While that the siegè thereaboutè lay. And yet now oldè Creon, welaway! That lord is now of Thebès the city,	<i>alas!</i>
940	Fulfilled of ire and of iniquity-- He, for despite and for his tyranny, To do the deadè bodies villainy Of all our lordès which that been y-slaw, Has all the bodies on a heap y-draw,	<i>of anger &amp; evil spite dishonor husbands / slain</i>
945	And will not suffer them by no assent Neither to be y-buried nor y-brent, But maketh houndès eat them in despite!" And with that word, withouten more respite, They fellen gruf and crièd piteously:	<i>not allow nor burned in spite delay prostrate</i>
950	"Have on us wretched women some mercy, And let our sorrow sink into thy heart!" This gentle duke down from his courser start With heartè piteous when he heard them speak. Him thoughtè that his heart would all to-break	<i>his horse / jumped break apart</i>

*Theseus complies with their wish*

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<sup>1</sup> 926: Fortune was often portrayed as spinning a wheel on which people clung, some on the way up, some on the way down, some totally "downcast," but only onr at the top, however briefly. The wheel spins at Fortune's whim, so no one is assured of continual success.

<sup>2</sup> 933: "To starve" meant to die, not necessarily of hunger.

- 955 When he saw them so piteous and so mate, *defeated (as in chess)*  
 That whilom weren of so great estate. *once were*  
 And in his armès he them all up hent, *lifted up*  
 And them comfórteth in full good intent,  
 And swore his oath, as he was truè knight,
- 960 He wouldè do so ferforthly his might *do his best*  
 Upon the tyrant Creon them to wreak, *avenge*  
 That all the people of Greecè shouldè speak  
 How Creon was of Theseus y-served *by Theseus treated*  
 As he that had his death full well deserved.
- 965 And right anon withouten more abode *right away / delay*  
 His banner he displayeth and forth rode  
 To Thebès-ward, and all his host beside. *his army*  
 No nearer Athens would he go nor ride *walk nor ride*  
 Nor take his easè fully half a day,
- 970 But onward on his way that night he lay, *camped*  
 And sent anon Hippolyta the queen,  
 And Emily her youngè sister sheen, *shining, lovely*  
 Unto the town of Athens there to dwell,  
 And forth he rides. There is no more to tell.
- 975 The red statue of Mars with spear and targe *shield*  
 So shineth in his whitè banner large  
 That all the fieldès glittered up and down.  
 And by his banner borne is his penoun *standard*  
 Of gold full rich, in which there was y-beat *hammered*
- 980 The Minotaur, which that he won in Crete. *he overcame*  
 Thus rides this duke, thus rides this conqueror,  
 And in his host of chivalry the flower,  
 Till that he came to Thebès and alight *dismounted*  
 Fair in a field there as he thought to fight. *intended to*

*After his victory over Creon, Theseus imprisons two wounded young Theban nobles*

- 985 But shortly for to speaken of this thing,  
 With Creon which that was of Thebès king *who was*  
 He fought, and slew him manly as a knight  
 In plain bataille, and put the folk to flight. *open battle*  
 And by assault he won the city after,



- 990 And rent adown both wall and spar and rafter, *beam*  
 And to the ladies he restored again  
 The bonès of their husbands that were slain,  
 To do obséquies as was then the guise, *the custom*  
 But it were all too long for to devise *describe*
- 995 The greatè clamour and the waymenting *lamentation*  
 That the ladies made at the burning  
 Of the bodies, and the great honour  
 That Theseus, the noble conqueror,  
 Doth to the ladies when they from him went.
- 1000 But shortly for to tell is my intent.  
 When that this worthy duke, this Theseus,  
 Has Creon slain and wonnè Thebès thus,  
 Still in that field he took all night his rest,  
 And did with all the country as him lest. *as he pleased*
- 1005 To ransack in the tass of bodies dead, *heap*  
 Them for to strip of harness and of weed, *armor & clothes*  
 The pillers didn business and cure *pillagers*  
 After the battle and discomfiture. <sup>1</sup> *defeat*  
 And so befell that in the tass they found, *in the heap*
- 1010 Through-girt with many a grievous bloody wound, *shot through*  
 Two youngè knightès, lying by and by, *side by side*  
 Both in one armès wrought full richèly; *same coat of arms*  
 Of whichè two, Arcíta hight that one, <sup>2</sup> *one was called*  
 And that other knight hight Palamon.
- 1015 Not fully quick nor fully dead they were; *fully alive*  
 But by their coat-armoúr and by their gear  
 The heralds knew them best in specíal *noticed specially*  
 As they that weren of the blood royál  
 Of Thebès, and of sisters two y-born.
- 1020 Out of the tass the pillers have them torn *heap / pillagers*  
 And have them carried soft unto the tent  
 Of Theseus, and he full soon them sent

---

<sup>1</sup> 1005-08: "Ransacking the heap of dead bodies, stripping them of their armor and clothes, the pillagers were busy after the battle and defeat."

<sup>2</sup> 1013: Arcita: The names of some of the characters occur in more than one form, generally to accommodate rime or rhythm: Arcite / Arcita, Emily / Emelia, Palamon / Palamoun

To Athenès to dwellen in prison  
 Perpetually--them would he not ransom.  
 1025 And when this worthy duke has thus y-done,  
 He took his host and home he rides anon, *army / promptly*  
 With laurel crownéd as a conqueror.  
 And there he lives in joy and in honoúr  
 Term of his life. What needeth wordès more?

*Emily, Hippolyta's sister, walks in the spring garden*

1030 And in a tower, in anguish and in woe,  
 Dwellen this Palamon and eke Arcite *also*  
 For evermore; there may no gold them quite. *ransom*  
 This passeth year by year and day by day,  
 Till it fell once in a morrow of May *morning*  
 1035 That Emily, that fairer was to seen  
 Than is the lily upon its stalkè green,  
 And fresher than the May with flowers new  
 (For with the rosè colour strove her hue;  
 I n'ot which was the fairer of them two) *I don't know*  
 1040 Ere it were day, as was her wont to do, *her custom*  
 She was arisen and already dight, *dressed*  
 For May will have no sluggardy a-night. *lie-abeds*  
 The season pricketh every gentle heart,  
 And maketh it out of its sleep to start,  
 1045 And saith, "Arise and do thine observánce."  
 This maketh Emily have rémembránce  
 To do honoúr to May and for to rise.  
 Y-clothed was she fresh for to devise: *to perfection*  
 Her yellow hair was braided in a tress  
 1050 Behind her back a yardè long, I guess,  
 And in the garden at the sun uprist *sunrise*  
 She walketh up and down, and as her list *as she pleased*  
 She gathers flowers parti-white and red *half and half*  
 To make a subtle garland for her head,  
 1055 And as an angel heavenishly she sung.

*Palamon falls in love with Emily on seeing her from his prison*

- The greatè tower that was so thick and strong  
 Which of the castle was the chief dungeon,  
 There as the knightès weren in prison  
 (Of which I toldè you and tellen shall)
- 1060 Was even joinant to the garden wall *adjoining*  
 There as this Emily had her playing. *diversion*  
 Bright was the sun and clear in that morning,  
 And Palamon, this woeful prisoner,  
 As was his wont by leave of his jailor,
- 1065 Was risen and roamèd in a chamber on high,  
 In which he all the noble city saw,  
 And eke the garden full of branches green, *also*  
 There as the freshè Emily the sheen *the bright*  
 Was in her walk and roamèd up and down.
- 1070 This sorrowful prisoner, this Palamoun,  
 Goes in the chamber roaming to and fro,  
 And to himself complaining of his woe.  
 That he was born, full oft he said: "Alas!"  
 And so befell, by áventure or cas, *chance or destiny*
- 1075 That through a window thick of many a bar  
 Of iron great and square as any spar,  
 He cast his eye upon Emelia  
 And therewithal he blanched and crièd "Ah!"  
 As though he stungen were unto the heart.
- 1080 And with that cry Arcite anon up start *immediately*  
 And saidè: "Cousin mine, what aileth thee  
 That art so pale and deadly on to see?  
 Why criedst thou? Who has thee done offence?  
 For Godè's love, take all in patience
- 1085 Our prison, for it may none other be. *imprisonment*  
 Fortune has given us this adversity.  
 Some wicked aspect or disposition  
 Of Saturn, by some constellation,  
 Has given us this, although we had it sworn. *like it or not*
- 1090 So stood the heavens when that we were born.

- We must endure it; this is the short and plain." <sup>1</sup>  
 This Palamon answered and said again:  
 "Cousin, forsooth, of this opinïon  
 Thou hast a vain imagination."<sup>2</sup> *wrong idea*
- 1095 This prison causèd me not for to cry,  
 But I was hurt right now throughout mine eye *through*  
 Into mine heart,<sup>3</sup> that will my banè be. *my death*  
 The fairness of that lady that I see  
 Yond in the garden roaming to and fro
- 1100 Is cause of all my crying and my woe.  
 I n'ot whether she be woman or goddess, *I don't know*  
 But Venus is it soothly, as I guess."  
 And therewithal down on his knees he fell  
 And saidè: "Venus, if it be thy will
- 1105 You in this garden thus to transfigüre *t. (yourself)*  
 Before me, sorrowful, wretched créature,  
 Out of this prison help that we may 'scape  
 And if so be my destiny be shape  
 By étern word to dien in prison,
- 1110 Of our lineage have some compassïon,  
 That is so low y-brought by tyranny."

*His kinsman Arcite is also stricken by sight of Emily*

- And with that word Arcité gan espy  
 Whereas this lady roamèd to and fro,  
 And with that sight her beauty hurt him so
- 1115 That if that Palamon was wounded sore,  
 Arcite is hurt as much as he or more.  
 And with a sigh he saidè piteously:  
 "The freshè beauty slays me suddenly

---

<sup>1</sup> 1086-91: "The conjunction of planets and stars at our birth, particularly the malignant influence of Saturn, has destined our misfortune, whether we like it or not. So we must put up with it."

<sup>2</sup> 1094: "You have a totally wrong idea about this."

<sup>3</sup> 1097: A common metaphor for love at first sight was the image of the god of Love shooting the lover through the eye with his arrow.

Of her that roameth in the yonder place,  
 1120 And but I have her mercy and her grace, *unless / favor*  
 That I may see her at the leastè way,  
 I n'am but dead: there is no more to say." *as good as dead*

*They quarrel*

This Palamon, when he those wordès heard,  
 Despitously he lookèd and answered: *angrily*  
 1125 "Whether sayst thou this in earnest or in play?" *or in jest*  
 "Nay," quod Arcite, "in earnest, by my fay. *on my word*  
 God help me so, me list full evil play."<sup>1</sup>  
 This Palamon gan knit his browès tway: *two*  
 "It were to thee," quod he, "no great honour  
 1130 For to be false, nor for to be traitor  
 To me, that am thy cousin and thy brother  
 Y-sworn full deep, and each of us to other,  
 That never, for to dien in the pain, *in torture*  
 Till that the death departen shall us twain, *part us two*  
 1135 Neither of us in love to hinder other,  
 Nor in no other case, my levè brother, *my dear*  
 But that thou shouldèst truly further me  
 In every case, as I shall further thee.  
 This was thine oath, and mine also, certáin.  
 1140 I wot right well thou darest it not withsayn. *I know / deny*  
 Thus art thou of my counsel out of doubt, *you know my secret*  
 And now thou wouldest falsely be about  
 To love my lady whom I love and serve,  
 And ever shall till that mine heartè starve. *die*  
 1145 Now certès, false Arcite, thou shalt not so. *certainly*  
 I loved her first, and told to thee my woe  
 As to my counsel and my brother sworn *my confidant*  
 To further me, as I have told befor.  
 For which thou art y-bounden as a knight  
 1150 To helpè me, if it lie in thy might,

---

<sup>1</sup> 1125-7: "Are you saying this seriously or in jest?" "Seriously, I assure you," said A. "I am in no mood for joking."

- Or else thou art false, I dare well sayn."  
 This Arcitè full proudly spoke again:  
 "Thou shalt," quod he, "be rather false than I;  
 And thou art false, I tell thee, utterly.
- 1155 For par amour I loved her first ere thou. *For, as a lover*  
 What wilt thou say? Thou wistest not yet now *just now didn't know*  
 Whether she be a woman or goddess:  
 Thine is affection of holiness,  
 And mine is love as to creätüre,<sup>1</sup>
- 1160 For which I told to thee mine áventüre,  
 As to my cousin and my brother sworn.  
 I posè that thou lovedest her befor:  
 Wost thou not well the oldè clerkè's saw, *Let's suppose*  
 That `Who shall give a lover any law?' *scholar's saying*  
*Boeth. III, m 12*
- 1165 Love is a greater lawè, by my pan, *my head*  
 Than may be give to any earthly man;  
 And therefore positive law and such decree *man-made laws*  
 Is broke alday for love in each degree. *every day / all levels*  
 A man must needès love, maugre his head:<sup>2</sup>
- 1170 He may not flee it though he should be dead,  
 Al be she maiden, widow, or else wife. *Whether she is*

*One of them sees the absurdity of their quarrel*

- And eke it is not likely all thy life  
 To standen in her grace. No more shall I, *her favor*  
 For well thou wost thyselfen, verily *you know well*
- 1175 That thou and I be damnèd to prison *condemned*  
 Perpetually; us gaineth no ransom. *we won't get*  
 We strive as did the houndès for the bone;  
 They fought all day, and yet their part was none;  
 There came a kite, while that they were so wroth *bird of prey / angry*

---

<sup>1</sup> 1155-59: Arcite is making a "theological" distinction: he says that he fell in love with a woman; Palamon, however, did not know just now whether Emily was a woman or goddess, so his is a kind of divine love!

<sup>2</sup> 1169: "A man has to love whether he wants to or not", literally "A man must love in spite of his head."

- 1180 That bore away the bone bitwixt them both.  
 And therefore, at the kingè's court, my brother,  
 Each man for himself. There is no other.  
 Love if thee list, for I love and aye shall. *if you like / always*  
 And soothly, levè brother, this is all. *truly, dear brother*
- 1185 Here in this prison mustè we endure  
 And ever each of us take his áventure." *chance*

*One of them is released*

- Great was the strife and long bitwixt them tway, *two*  
 If that I haddè leisure for to say;  
 But to th'effect. It happened on a day, *To get on w. story*
- 1190 To tell it you as shortly as I may,  
 A worthy duke that hight Perotheus, *who was called*  
 That fellow was unto duke Theseus *friend*  
 Since thilkè day that they were children lit, *that d. / little*  
 Was come to Athens his fellow to visit,
- 1195 And for to play, as he was wont to do; *amuse himself*  
 For in this world he lovèd no man so,  
 And he loved him as tenderly again.  
 So well they loved, as oldè bookès sayn,  
 That when that one was dead, soothly to tell, *truth to tell*
- 1200 His fellow went and sought him down in hell.  
 But of that story list me not to write.<sup>1</sup> *I don't want to*  
 Duke Perotheus lovèd well Arcite,  
 And had him known at Thebès year by year  
 And finally at request and prayer
- 1205 Of Perotheus, withouten any ransom  
 Duke Theseus him let out of prison  
 Freely to go where that him list overall, *anywhere he liked*  
 In such a guise as I you tellen shall. *w. such condition*  
 This was the forward, plainly for t'endite *agreement / write*
- 1210 Bitwixen Theseus and him Arcite:  
 That if so were that Arcite were y-found  
 Ever in his life, by day or night, one stound, *for one hour*

---

<sup>1</sup> 1201: Is the speaker here the Knight or Chaucer?

In any country of this Theseus,  
 And he were caught, it was accorded thus: *agreed*  
 1215 That with a sword he shouldè lose his head.  
 There was no other remedy nor redd, *help*  
 But took his leave, and homeward he him sped.  
 Let him beware; his neck lieth to wed. *at risk*

*Arcite laments his release*

How great a sorrow suffers now Arcite!  
 1220 The death he feeleth through his heartè smite.  
 He weepeth, wailleth, crieth piteously;  
 To slay himself he waiteth privily.  
 He said, "Alas, the day that I was born!  
 Now is my prison worsè than beforñ;  
 1225 Now is me shape eternally to dwell *I am fated*  
 Not in purgatóry, but in hell!  
 Alas, that ever I knew Perotheus,  
 For elsè had I dwelled with Theseus,  
 Y-fettered in his prison evermo'.  
 1230 Then had I been in bliss and not in woe.  
 Only the sight of her whom that I serve,  
 Though that I never her gracè may deserve,  
 Would have sufficèd right enough for me.  
 O dearè cousin Palamon," quod he,  
 1235 "Thine is the victory of this áventúre:  
 Full blissfully in prison may'st thou dure. *continue*  
 In prison? Certès, nay, but Paradise!  
 Well has Fortúne y-turnèd thee the dice,  
 That hast the sight of her, and I th'abséñce.  
 1240 For possible is, since thou hast her preséñce, *It's possible*  
 And art a knight, a worthy and an able,  
 That by some case, since Fortune is changeable,  
 Thou mayst to thy desire some time attain.  
 But I that am exilèd, and barrén  
 1245 Of allè grace, and in so great despair *all favor*  
 That there n'is earth, nor water, fire, nor air,  
 Nor creäture that of them makèd is,



- That may me help or do comfórt in this. <sup>1</sup>  
 Well ought I starve in wanhope and distress. *die in despair*  
 1250 Farewell my life, my lust and my gladness! *my desire*  
     Alas, why 'plainen folk so in commúne *complain / often*  
     On purveyance of God, or of Fortúne, *providence*  
     That giveth them full oft in many a guise *many forms*  
     Well better than they can themselves devise? *much better*
- 1255 Some man desireth for to have riches,  
 That cause is of his murder or great sickness;  
 And some man would out of his prison fain, *gladly*  
 That in his house is of his meinee slain. *by his servants*  
 Infinite harmès be in this mattér.
- 1260 We witen not what thing we prayen here. *We know not*  
 We fare as he that drunk is as a mouse.  
 A drunken man wot well he has a house, *knows well*  
 But he n'ot which the rightè way is thither, *doesn't know*  
 And to a drunken man the way is slither. *slippery*
- 1265 And certès in this world so faren we.  
 We seeken fast after felicity,  
 But we go wrong full often, truly.  
 Thus may we sayen all, and namely I, *especially I*  
 That wend and had a great opinion *thought & felt sure*
- 1270 That if I might escapen from prison,  
 Then had I been in joy and perfect heal, *happiness*  
 Where now I am exíled from my weal. *my good*  
 Since that I may not see you, Emily,  
 I n'am but dead! There is no remedy!" *I'm as good as dead*

*Palamon laments his imprisonment*

- 1275 Upon that other sidè Palamon,  
 When that he wist Arcité was a-gone, *realized*  
 Such sorrow maketh he that the great tower  
 Resoundeth of his yowling and [his] clamor.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1246: All material things were thought to be made up of the four elements: fire, water, earth, and air.

- The purè fetters of his shins great <sup>1</sup> *even the fetters*
- 1280 Were of his bitter saltè tearès wet  
 "Alas!" quod he, "Arcita, cousin mine,  
 Of all our strife, God wot, the fruit is thine! *God knows*  
 Thou walkest now in Thebès at thy large, *freely*  
 And of my woe thou givest little charge. *care*
- 1285 Thou mayst, since thou hast wisdom and manhood,  
 Assemble all the folk of our kindred,  
 And make a war so sharp on this city  
 That by some áventure or some treaty *chance or agreement*  
 Thou mayst have her to lady and to wife
- 1290 For whom that I must needès lose my life.  
 For as by way of possibility,  
 Since thou art at thy large, of prison free, *from prison*  
 And art a lord, great is thine ádvantáge,  
 More than is mine, that starve here in a cage. *die*
- 1295 For I must weep and wail while that I live  
 With all the woe that prison may me give,  
 And eke with pain that love me gives also  
 That doubles all my torment and my woe!"  
 Therewith the fire of jealousy up start
- 1300 Within his breast, and hent him by the heart *seized*  
 So woodly that he like was to behold *fiercely*  
 The boxtree or the ashes dead and cold.<sup>2</sup> *boxwood*  
 Then said he: "O cruel godès that govern  
 This world with binding of your word etern,
- 1305 And writen in the table of adamant *hard rock*  
 Your parliament and your eternal grant, *decision / decree*  
 What is mankindè more unto your hold *important*  
 Than is the sheep that rowketh in the fold?<sup>3</sup> *huddles*  
 For slain is man right as another beast, *just like*
- 1310 And dwelleth eke in prison and arrest

---

<sup>1</sup> 1279: "Even the great fetters on his shins." This rendering presumes that *great* goes with *fetters*. It is also possible that the reference is to *swollen* shins.

<sup>2</sup> 1301-2: "He looked (as pale as) boxwood or cold ashes."

<sup>3</sup> 1308: "Does mankind mean anything more to you than sheep huddling in the fold?"

- And has sickness and great adversity,  
 And often times guiltlessly, pardee. *by God*  
 What governance is in this prescience  
 That guiltless tormenteth innocence? <sup>1</sup>
- 1315 And yet increaseth this all my penáncé, *my pain*  
 That man is bounden to his óbserváncé,  
 For Godé's sake to letten of his will, *control*  
 Whereas a beast may all his lust fulfill, *his desires*  
 And when a beast is dead he has no pain,
- 1320 But man after his death must weep and 'plain, *complain*  
 Though in this world he havè care and woe.  
 Withouten doubtè, it may standen so.  
 The answer of this let I to divinès, <sup>2</sup> *I leave to clerics*  
 But well I wot that in this world great pine is. *I know / suffering*
- 1325 Alas, I see a serpent or a thief  
 That many a true man has done mischíef,  
 Go at his large and where him list may turn. *free & go where he likes*  
 But I must be in prison through Saturn,  
 And eke through Juno, jealous and eke wood, *angry*
- 1330 That has destroyèd well nigh all the blood  
 Of Thebes, with its waste wallès wide! <sup>3</sup>  
 And Venus slays me on that other side *V = goddess of love*  
 For jealousy and fear of him—Arcite!"
- Now will I stint of Palamon a lite, *stop / a while*  
 1335 And let him in his prison stillè dwell,  
 And of Arcité forth I will you tell.  
 The summer passeth, and the nightès long  
 Increasen double wise the painès strong  
 Both of the lover and the prisoner.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1314: "What kind of governing is this which knows even before they are created (*prescience*) that innocent people are going to be tormented?"

<sup>2</sup> 1323-4: Who is speaking: Palamon, the Knight, or Chaucer?

<sup>3</sup> 1331: The goddess Juno was hostile to Thebes because her husband, Jupiter, had affairs with women of Thebes.

- 1340 I n'ot which has the woefuller mistér: *know not / situation*  
 For shortly for to say, this Palamon  
 Perpetually is damnéd to prison,  
 In chains and in fetters to be dead,  
 And Arcite is exíled upon his head *on pain of death*
- 1345 For evermore as out of that country,  
 Nor nevermore he shall his lady see.

*Demande d'amour*

- You lovers ask I now this questïon:<sup>1</sup>  
 Who has the worse, Arcite or Palamon?  
 That one may seen his lady day by day,  
 1350 But in [a] prison must he dwell alway;  
 That other where him list may ride or go, *he pleases / walk*  
 But see his lady shall he nevermo'.  
 Now deemeth as you listè, you that can, *judge as you wish*  
 For I will tellè forth as I began.

*End of Part One***Part Two***Arcite's love pains*

- 1355 Whan that Arcite to Thebès comen was,  
 Full oft a day he swelt and said: "Alas!" *was overcome*  
 For see his lady shall he nevermo'.  
 And shortly to concluden all his woe,  
 So muchel sorrow had never creäture

---

<sup>1</sup> 1347-53: The question is a "demande d'amour," a puzzling query about love, and a favorite medieval game. Supposedly conducted in a sort of ladies' lawcourt by Marie, Countess of Champagne and others, it certainly became a literary game. Boccaccio's *Filocolo* has many. See also in Chaucer *The Franklin's Tale*, 1621-22, and *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, 904-905.

- 1360 That is or shall while that the world may dure. *last*  
 His sleep, his meat, his drink is him bereft, *food / deprived of*  
 That lean he waxed and dry as is a shaft. *(So) that / stick*  
 His eyen hollow and grisly to behold, *grim*  
 His hue fallow, and pale as ashes cold. *color pallid*
- 1365 And solitary he was and ever alone,  
 And wailing all the night, making his moan.  
 And if he heardè song or instrument,  
 Then would he weep, he mightè not be stent. *stopped*  
 So feeble were his spirits and so low, *also*
- 1370 And changèd so that no man couldè know  
 His speechè nor his voice, though men it heard.  
 And in his gear for all the world he fared *his behavior*  
 Not only like the lover's malady  
 Of Hereos, but rather like manie, *mania*
- 1375 Engendred of humor meláncholic  
 Before, in his own cellè fántastic.<sup>1</sup>  
 And shortly, turnèd was all up-so-down  
 Both habit and eke disposicïon *also*  
 Of him, this woeful lover Daun Arcite. *Lord A.*

*Inspired by a vision, Arcite goes to Athens in disguise*

- 1380 What should I all day of his woe endite? *continually / tell*  
 When he endured had a year or two  
 This cruel torment and this pain and woe  
 At Thebès in his country, as I said,  
 Upon a night in sleep as he him laid,
- 1385 Him thought how that the wingèd god Mercury  
 Before him stood, and bade him to be merry.  
 His sleepy yard in hand he bore upright. *sleep-inducing wand*  
 A hat he wore upon his hairès bright.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1376: "Hereos": a conflation and confusion between "eros," love and "heros," a hero, hence the kind of extravagant lover's passion suffered by heroes in medieval romances. Its symptoms include those just given above. (See also Damian in *The Merchant's Tale*, and Aurelius in *The Franklin's Tale*). If it became bad enough, as with really big heroes like Tristan and Lancelot, it could turn into a "manie," a madness which afflicted the "cell" of fantasy, i.e. the foremost of the three divisions of the brain.

- Arrayèd was this god, as he took keep, *as he noted*  
 1390 As he was when that Argus took his sleep, *overcome by sleep*  
 And said him thus: "To Athens shalt thou wend. *go*  
 There is thee shapen of thy woe an end." *destined*  
 And with that word Arcitè woke and start.  
 "Now trully, how sorè that me smart," <sup>1</sup> *however it may hurt*  
 1395 Quod he, "to Athens right now will I fare.  
 Nor for the dread of death shall I not spare *hold back*  
 To see my lady that I love and serve.  
 In her preséncè I reckè not to starve."<sup>2</sup> *I don't care if*  
 And with that word he caught a great mirrour,  
 1400 And saw that changèd was all his colour,  
 And saw his visage all in another kind.  
 And right anon it ran him in his mind  
 That since his facè was so disfiguréd  
 Of malady the which he had endured, *From illness*  
 1405 He mightè well, if that he bore him low, *kept low profile*  
 Live in Athens evermore unknow, *unrecognized*  
 And see his lady well nigh day by day.  
 And right anon he changèd his array, *clothes*  
 And clad him as a poorè laborer,  
 1410 And all alonè, save only a squire  
 That knew his privity and all his case, *secret*  
 Which was disguisèd poorly as he was, *Who was*  
 To Athens is he gone the nextè way. *direct route*

*He takes a job*

- And to the court he went upon a day,  
 1415 And at the gate he proffered his servíce,  
 To drudge and draw what so men will devise. *order*  
 And shortly of this matter for to sayn,  
 He fell in office with a chamberlain *got a job*  
 The which that dwelling was with Emily. *Who*  
 1420 For he was wise, and couldè soon espy

---

<sup>1</sup> 1394: "However much it hurts me."

<sup>2</sup> 1398: "I do not care if I die in her presence." *starve* = die

Of every servant which that serveth her.  
 Well could he hewen wood and water bear,  
 For he was young and mighty for the nones, *to be sure*  
 And thereto he was strong and big of bones,  
 1425 To do what any wight can him devise. *anybody wants*  
 A year or two he was in this service,  
 Page of the chamber of Emily the bright,  
 And "Philostrate" said he that he hight. *said his name was*  
 But half so well-beloved a man as he  
 1430 Ne was there never in court of his degree. *his rank*  
 He was so gentle of condition  
 That throughout all the court was his renown.  
 They saiden that it were a charity *it would be right*  
 That Theseus would enhancen his degree, *promote him*  
 1435 And putten him in worshipful service, *dignified*  
 There as he might his virtue exercise. *abilities*

*A promotion*

And thus within a while his name is sprung,  
 Both of his deedès and his goodè tongue, *good reputation*  
 That Theseus has taken him so near,  
 1440 That of his chamber he made him a squire,  
 And gave him gold to maintain his degree. *his rank*  
 And eke men brought him out of his country,  
 From year to year, full privily his rent, *secretly*  
 But honestly and slyly he it spent  
 1445 That no man wondered how that he it had.  
 And three years in this wise his life he led,  
 And bore him so in peace and eke in war,  
 There was no man that Theseus hath more dear  
 And in this blissè let I now Arcite,  
 1450 And speak I will of Palamon a lite. *a little*

In darkness and horrible and strong prison  
 This seven year has sitten Palamon,

- Forpinèd, what for woe and for distress. *tormented*  
 Who feeleth double sore and heaviness  
 1455 But Palamon? that love distraineth so *pains*  
 That wood out of his wit he goes for woe. *mad*  
 And eke thereto he is a prisoner  
 Perpetually, not only for a year.  
 Who couldè rime in English properly  
 1460 His martyrdom? Forsooth, it am not I.  
 Therefore I pass as lightly as I may.

*An escape*

- It fell that in the seventh year, of May  
 The thirdè night, (as oldè bookès sayn  
 That all this story tellen morè plain)--  
 1465 Were it by áventure or destiny, *by chance or*  
 As when a thing is shapen it shall be, *is fated*  
 That soon after the midnight, Palamon,  
 By helping of a friend, broke his prison, *with help of*  
 And flees the city fast as he may go,  
 1470 For he had given his jailer drinkè so  
 Of a claret, made of a certain wine  
 With nárcotics and opium of Thebes fine,  
 That all that night, though that men would him shake,  
 The jailer slept; he mightè not awake.  
 1475 And thus he flees as fast as ever he may.  
 The night was short and fastè by the day, *near dawn*  
 That needès cost he most himselfen hide. *of necessity*  
 And to a grove fastè there beside  
 With dreadful foot then stalketh Palamon. *full of dread*  
 1480 For shortly, this was his opiniõn,  
 That in that grove he would him hide all day,  
 And in the night then would he take his way  
 To Thebès-ward, his friendès for to pray  
 On Theseus to help him to warrey. *make war*  
 1485 And shortly, either he would lose his life  
 Or winnen Emily unto his wife.  
 This is th'effect and his intentè plain.



*Arcite goes to the woods to celebrate May and sing a love lament*

- Now will I turnè to Arcite again,  
 That little wist how nigh that was his care, *knew / near / troubles*  
 1490 Till that Fortúne had brought him in the snare.  
 The busy lark, messenger of day,  
 Salueth in her song the morrow grey, *Greets*  
 And fiery Phoebus riseth up so bright *sun (god)*  
 That all the orient laugheth of the light,  
 1495 And with his streamès drieth in the greves *branches*  
 The silver droppès hanging on the leaves.  
 And Arcita, that in the court royál  
 With Theseus is squire principal,  
 Is risen and looketh on the merry day;  
 1500 And for to do his observánce to May,  
 Remembering on the point of his desire,  
 He on a courser startling as the fire *horse lively as*  
 Is riden into the fieldès him to play, *amuse himself*  
 Out of the court were it a mile or tway. *about a mile or two*  
 1505 And to the grove of which that I you told  
 By áventure his way he gan to hold *to make his way*  
 To maken him a garland of the greves *branches*  
 Were it of woodbine or of hawthorn leaves;  
 And loud he sang against the sunnè sheen: *bright sun*  
 1510 "May, with all thy flowers and thy green,  
 Welcome be thou, fairè freshè May,  
 In hope that I some greenè getten may."

*Palamon, the escapee, is hiding in that wood*

- And from his courser with a lusty heart *his horse*  
 Into the grove full hastily he start,  
 1515 And in a path he roameth up and down  
 Thereas by áventure this Palamoun *by chance*  
 Was in a bush, that no man might him see,  
 For sore afearèd of his death was he.  
 No thing ne knew he that it was Arcite.

- 1520 God wot he would have trowèd it full lite.<sup>1</sup> *believed / little*  
 But sooth is said, gone sithen many years, *truth / many years ago*  
 That "field hath eyen and the wood hath ears."  
 It is full fair a man to beat him even,  
 For alday meeten men at unset steven.<sup>2</sup>
- 1525 Full little wot Arcite of his fellow *little knows*  
 That was so nigh to hearken all his saw, *near / hear his words*  
 For in the bush he sitteth now full still.  
 When that Arcite had roamèd all his fill,  
 And sungen all the roundel lustily, *round song*
- 1530 Into a study he fell suddenly,  
 As do these lovers in their quaintè gears, *odd ways*  
 Now in the crop, now down in the briars, *top*  
 Now up, now down, as bucket in a well.  
 Right as the Friday, soothly for to tell,
- 1535 Now it shineth, now it raineth fast,<sup>3</sup>  
 Right so can gery Venus overcast *changeable*  
 The heartès of her folk right as her day  
 Is gereful; right so changeth she array. *her state*  
 Seld is the Friday all the week y-like. *seldom*
- 1540 When that Arcite had sung, he gan to sigh,  
 And set him down withouten any more: *more ado*  
 "Alas," quod he, "that day that I was bore. *born*  
 How longè, Juno, through thy cruelty  
 Wilt thou warreyen Thebès the city? *make war on*
- 1545 Alas, y-brought is to confusìon  
 The blood royál of Cadme and Amphion-  
 Of Cadmus, which that was the firstè man  
 That Thebès built or first the town began, *founded*  
 And of the city first was crownèd king.
- 1550 Of his lineage am I and his offspring,

---

<sup>1</sup> "God knows he would not have believed it", literally: "he would have believed it very little."

<sup>2</sup> 1523-4: "A man should always be ready, for it happens every day that people meet unexpectedly."

<sup>3</sup> 1534-5: Friday is Venus's day (Lat. veneris dies; Ital. venerdi), and its weather apparently was reputed to be especially unreliable.

- By very line, as of the stock royál.  
 And now I am so caitiff and so thrall, *captive / enslaved*  
 That he that is my mortal enemy,  
 I serve him as his squire poorly.
- 1555 And yet does Juno me well morè shame, *still more*  
 For I dare not beknow mine ownè name, *use*  
 But there as I was wont to hight Arcite, *was called*  
 Now hight I Philostrate, not worth a mite. *I am called*  
 Alas, thou fellè Mars! Alas, Juno! *cruel*
- 1560 Thus has your ire our lineage all fordo, *your anger / ruined*  
 Save only me and wretched Palamon  
 That Theseus martyreth in prison.  
 And over all this, to slay me utterly,  
 Love has his fiery dart so burningly
- 1565 Y-stickèd through my truè careful heart, *full of care*  
 That shapen was my death erst than my shirt.<sup>1</sup>  
 You slay me with your eyen, Emily.  
 You be the causè wherefore that I die.  
 Of all the remnant of mine other care
- 1570 Ne set I not the montance of a tare, *amount of a weed*  
 So that I could do ought to your pleasáncè."<sup>2</sup> *if I could*  
 And with that word he fell down in a trance  
 A longè time. And after he up start.

*Palamon has heard everything. Another quarrel.*

- This Palamon, that thought that through his heart  
 1575 He felt a cold sword suddenly glide,  
 For ire he quoke. No longer would he bide. *shook with anger*  
 And when that he had heard Arcita's tale,  
 As he were wood, with face dead and pale, *mad*  
 He start him up out of the bushes thick
- 1580 And said: "Arcitè, falsè traitor wick, *wicked*  
 Now art thou hent, that lov'st my lady so, *caught*

---

<sup>1</sup> 1566: "My death was arranged before my (first?) shirt." The comparison seems inept.

<sup>2</sup> 1569-71: "I would not care a straw about all my other troubles if only I could do anything to please you."

- For whom that I have all this pain and woe,  
 And art my blood, and to my counsel sworn,  
 As I full oft have told thee herebeforn,  
 1585 And hast bejapèd here duke Theseus, *fooled*  
 And falsely changèd hast thy namè thus.  
 I will be dead or elsè thou shalt die.  
 Thou shalt not love my lady Emily,  
 But I will love her only and no mo'; *more, i.e. no one else*
- 1590 For I am Palamon, thy mortal foe,  
 And though that I no weapon have in this place,  
 But out of prison am astart by grace,  
 I dreadè not that either thou shalt die, *doubt not*  
 Or thou ne shalt not loven Emily.
- 1595 Choose which thou wilt, or thou shalt not astart."  
 This Arcitè with full despitous heart, *escape*  
 When he him knew and had his talè heard, *furios*  
 As fierce as lion pullèd out his sword,  
 And saidè thus: "By God that sits above,
- 1600 N'ere it that thou art sick and wood for love, *Were it not / mad*  
 And eke that thou no weapon hast in this place, *And also*  
 Thou shouldest never out of this grovè pace, *walk*  
 That thou ne shouldest dien of my hand. *but die by*  
 For I defy the surety and the bond
- 1605 Which that thou sayst that I have made to thee.  
 What, very fool, think well that love is free,  
 And I will love her, maugre all thy might. *despite*

*They agree to a duel*

- But for as much as thou art a worthy knight,  
 And wilnest to darrein her by battail,<sup>1</sup> *to fight*
- 1610 Have here my truth, tomorrow I will not fail,  
 Withouten witting of any other wight, *knowledge / person*  
 That here I will be founden as a knight,  
 And bringen harness right enough for thee, *armor*  
 And choose the best, and leave the worst to me.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1609: "Art willing to fight a battle to vindicate your right to her."

- 1615 And meat and drinkè this night will I bring *food*  
 Enough for thee, and clothes for thy bedding.  
 And if so be that thou my lady win  
 And slay me in this wood where I am in,  
 Thou mayst well have thy lady as for me." *far as I'm concerned*
- 1620 This Palamon answered: "I grant it thee."  
 And thus they be departed till amorrow,  
 When each of them had laid his faith to borrow. *pledged his word*  
 O Cupid, out of all charity!  
 O regne, that would no fellow have with thee! *ruler / partner*
- 1625 Full sooth is said that lovè nor lordship  
 Will not, his thankès, have no fellowship; *willingly*  
 Well finden that Arcite and Palamon.<sup>1</sup>  
 Arcite is riden anon unto the town, *immediately*  
 And on the morrow ere it were dayè's light,
- 1630 Full privily two harness has he dight, *secured*  
 Both suffisant and meetè to darreine *adequate to conduct*  
 The battle in the field bitwixt them twain; *two*  
 And on his horse, alone as he was born,  
 He carrieth all this harness him befor;
- 1635 And in the grove at time and place y-set  
 This Arcite and this Palamon be met.  
 To changen gan the color in their face,  
 Right as the hunter's in the regne of Thrace, *realm, kingdom*  
 That standeth at the gappè with a spear,
- 1640 When hunted is the lion or the bear,  
 And heareth him come rushing in the greves, *bushes*  
 And breaketh both the boughs and the leaves,  
 And thinks: "Here comes my mortal enemy.  
 Withouten fail he must be dead or I,
- 1645 For either I must slay him at the gap,  
 Or he must slay me if that me mishap." *I'm unfortunate*  
 So farèd they in changing of their hue *color*

---

<sup>1</sup> 1623-27: "O Cupid, [god of love], totally without love! O ruler [regne] who will tolerate no partner. True is the saying that neither lover nor lord will share willingly [his thanks], as Arcite and Palamon certainly find out."

As far as ever each other of them knew.<sup>1</sup>  
 There was no "Good day" nor no saluing, *greeting*  
 1650 But straight, withouten word or rehearsing,  
 Ever each of them helped to arm the other,  
 As friendly as he were his ownè brother.

And after that with sharpè spearès strong  
 They foinen each at other wonder long. *thrust / v. long*  
 1655 Thou mightest weenè that this Palamon *think*  
 In his fighting were a wood lion, *angry*  
 And as a cruel tiger was Arcite.  
 As wildè boarès gonnen they to smite, *began*  
 That frothen white as foam, for ire wood. *mad with anger*  
 1660 Up to the ankle fought they in their blood.  
 And in this wise I let them fighting dwell,  
 And forth I will of Theseus you tell.

*Fate intervenes in the form of Theseus who comes upon them while hunting*

The destiny, minister general,  
 That executeth in the world overall *Who carries out*  
 1665 The purveyance that God has seen befor,<sup>2</sup> *The Providence*  
 So strong it is that, though the world had sworn  
 The contrary of a thing by yea or nay,  
 Yet sometimes it shall fallen on a day  
 That falls not eft within a thousand year. *not again*  
 1670 For certainly, our appetitès here, *passions*  
 Be it of war, or peace, or hate, or love,  
 All is this ruled by the sight above.  
 This mean I now by mighty Theseus,  
 That for to hunten is so desirous,  
 1675 And namely at the greatè hart in May, *especially / deer*

---

<sup>1</sup> 1637 and 1647-8: These appear to mean that each knew the other to be a bear or lion in strength and so each pales, like the hunter awaiting the onrush.

<sup>2</sup> 1663 ff: "Destiny, God's deputy, that carries out everywhere God's Providence, is so strong that even if the whole world is determined against it, things will sometimes happen in one day that will not occur again within a thousand years."

- That in his bed there dawneth him no day  
 That he n'is clad and ready for to ride  
 With hunt and horn and houndès him beside;  
 For in his hunting has he such delight  
 1680 That it is all his joy and appetite *desire*  
 To be himself the greatè hartè's bane; *killer*  
 For after Mars he serveth now Diane. *(goddess of hunting)*  
 Clear was the day, as I have told ere this,  
 And Theseus, with allè joy and bliss,  
 1685 With his Hippolyta the fairè queen,  
 And Emelía clothed all in green,  
 On hunting be they ridden royally,  
 And to the grove that stood full fastè by,  
 In which there was a hart, as men him told,  
 1690 Duke Theseus the straightè way has hold,  
 And to this land he rideth him full right, *clearing*  
 For thither was the hart wont have his flight, *accustomed*  
 And over a brook, and so forth on his way.  
 This Duke will have a course at him or tway,  
 1695 With houndès such as that him list command. *he chose*  
 And when this Duke was come unto the land,  
 Under the sun he looketh, and anon  
 He was 'ware of Arcite and Palamon,  
 That foughten breme as it were bullès two. *fiercely*  
 1700 The brightè swordès wenten to and fro  
 So hideously that with the leastè stroke  
 It seemèd as it wouldè fell an oak.  
 But what they werè, nothing he ne wot. *But who / he knew*  
 This Duke his courser with the spurrès smote, *horse*  
 1705 And at a start he was bitwixt them two, *suddenly*  
 And pulled out a sword, and cried: "Whoa!  
 No more, on pain of losing of your head.  
 By mighty Mars, he shall anon be dead  
 That smiteth any stroke that I may see.  
 1710 But telleth me what mister men you be, *kind of*  
 That be so hardy for to fighten here, *bold*  
 Withouten judge or other officer,  
 As it were in a listès royally?" *tournament arena*

*Palamon reveals their identities*

- This Palamon answered hastily  
 1715 And saidé: "Sir, what needeth wordés mo'?"  
 We have the death deservéd bothé two.  
 Two woeful wretches be we, two caitives, *captives*  
 That be encumbered of our owné lives; *of = by*  
 And as thou art a rightful lord and judge,  
 1720 Ne give us neither mercy nor refuge;  
 But slay me first, for sainté charity,<sup>1</sup>  
 But slay my fellow eke as well as me; *also*  
 Or slay him first, for though thou know'st it lite, *little do you know it*  
 This is thy mortal foe, this is Arcite,  
 1725 That from thy land is banished on his head, *on pain of death*  
 For which he has deservéd to be dead;  
 For this is he that came unto thy gate,  
 And saidé that he highté Philostrate. *was named*  
 Thus has he japed thee full many a year, *tricked*  
 1730 And thou hast maked him thy chief squire;  
 And this is he that loveth Emily.  
 For since the day is come that I shall die,  
 I maké plainly my confessiön  
 That I am thilké woeful Palamon, *I'm the same*  
 1735 That has thy prison broken wickedly.  
 I am thy mortal foe, and it am I  
 That loveth so hot Emily the bright, *so hotly*  
 That I will dien present in her sight.  
 Wherefore I aské death and my juwise. *sentence*  
 1740 But slay my fellow in the samé wise,  
 For both have we deservéd to be slain."

*The Duke instantly sentences them, but the ladies intervene*

This worthy Duke answered anon again

---

<sup>1</sup> 1721: *For sainté charity*, literally "for holy charity (or love)." The exclamation is presumably an anachronism in the mouth of a pagan. But neither is it very Christian or chivalrous, since his betrayal of his kinsman and fellow knight is about as vindictive as it well could be.



- And said: "This is a short conclusiōn.  
 Your ownè mouth by your confessiōn  
 1745 Hath damnèd you, and I will it record; *condemned*  
 It needeth not to pine you with the cord. *torture with rope*  
 You shall be dead, by mighty Mars the red."  
 The queen anon for very womanhood  
 Gan for to weep, and so did Emily,  
 1750 And all the ladies in the company.  
 Great pity was it, as it thought them all,  
 That ever such a chancè should befall;  
 For gentlemen they were of great estate, *high rank*  
 And nothing but for love was this debate;  
 1755 And saw their bloody woundès wide and sore,  
 And allè crièd, bothè less and more,  
 "Have mercy, lord upon us women all."  
 And on their barè knees adown they fall,  
 And would have kissed his feet there as he stood;  
 1760 Till at the last aslakèd was his mood,  
 For pity runneth soon in gentle heart,<sup>1</sup>  
 And though he first for irè quoke and start, *shook w. anger*  
 He has considered shortly, in a clause, *briefly*  
 The trespass of them both, and eke the cause; *offence / also*  
 1765 And although that his ire their guilt accused,  
 Yet in his reason he them both excused,  
 As thus: He thoughtè well that every man  
 Will help himself in love if that he can,  
 And eke deliver himself out of prison.  
 1770 And eke his heartè had compassion  
 Of women, for they wepten ever in one. *in unison*  
 And in his gentle heart he thought anon,  
 And soft unto himself he saidè: "Fie  
 Upon a lord that will have no mercy  
 1775 But be a lion both in word and deed  
 To them that be in repentánce and dread,

---

<sup>1</sup> 1761: "The heart of the truly noble (*gentle*) is easily moved to generosity (*pity*)." A famous and favorite phrase of Chaucer's, used also in *MerT* 4, 1986; *SquireT*, V, 479; *Leg. of Good Women*, Prol F, 503; *Man Of Law's T.* II, 660. For "gentle" see ENDPAPERS.

	As well as to a proud despitous man	
	That will maintainè what he first began.	<i>persist in</i>
	That lord has little of discretïon	
1780	That in such case can no divisïon,	<i>knows no difference</i>
	But weigheth pride and humbless after one."	<i>humility as the same</i>
	And shortly, when his ire is thus agone,	<i>his anger</i>
	He gan to looken up with eyen light,	
	And spoke these samè wordès all on height:	<i>aloud</i>
1785	"The God of Love, ah, benedicitee.	
	How mighty and how great a lord is he.	
	Against his might there gaineth no obstácles.	
	He may be cleped a god for his mirácles,	<i>called</i>
	For he can maken at his ownè guise	<i>his own whim</i>
1790	Of every heart as that him list devise.	<i>as he chooses</i>
	Lo, here this Arcite and this Palamon,	
	That quitly weren out of my prison,	<i>had escaped</i>
	And might have lived in Thebès royally,	
	And wit I am their mortal enemy,	<i>(they) know</i>
1795	And that their death lies in my might also,	
	And yet has Love, maugre their eyen two, <sup>1</sup>	<i>despite</i>
	Brought them hither bothè for to die.	
	Now looketh, is not that a high folly?	
	Who may be a fool, but if he love? <sup>2</sup>	
1800	Behold, for God's sake that sits above,	
	See how they bleed! Be they not well arrayed?	<i>Don't they / look good?</i>
	Thus has their lord, the God of Love, y-paid	
	Their wages and their fees for their service.	
	And yet they weenen for to be full wise	<i>they think</i>
1805	That serven Love, for aught that may befall.	<i>anything</i>
	But this is yet the bestè game of all,	
	That she for whom they have this jollity	<i>fun (ironic)</i>
	Can them therefore as muchè thank as me.	<i>for that</i>
	She wot no more of all this hottè fare,	<i>knows / fiery business</i>

---

<sup>1</sup> 1796: *maugre* ...: "In spite of both their eyes", i.e. in spite of common sense.

<sup>2</sup> 1799: This line seems to mean: "There is no fool like a lover fool."

- 1810 By God, than wot a cuckoo or a hare.  
 But all must be assayed, hot and cold.  
 A man must be a fool, or young or old. *either...or*  
 I wot it by myself full yore agone, *long ago*  
 For in my time a servant was I one, *a lover*
- 1815 And therefore, since I know of lovè's pain,  
 And wot how sore it can a man distraïn,  
 As he that has been caught oft in his lass, *know / distress*  
 I you forgive all wholly this trespass, *snare*  
 At réquest of the queen that kneeleth here,
- 1820 And eke of Emily my sister dear,  
 And you shall both anon unto me swear  
 That never more you shall my country dere, *harm*  
 Nor makè war upon me, night nor day,  
 But be my friendès in all that you may.
- 1825 I you forgive this trespass everydeal."  
 And they him swore his asking fair and well,  
 And him of lordship and of mercy prayed.

*Theseus orders a tournament to decide who shall have Emily*

- And he them granted grace, and thus he said:  
 "To speak of royal lineage and richesse, *riches*
- 1830 Though that she were a queen or a princess,  
 Each of you both is worthy, doubtèless,  
 To wedden when time is. But, natheless--  
 I speak as for my sister Emily  
 For whom you have this strife and jealousy--
- 1835 You wot yourself she may not wedden two *You know*  
 At oncè, though you fighten evermore. *even if you*  
 That one of you, al be him loath or lief, *like it or not*  
 He must go pipen in an ivy leef. *whistle in the wind*  
 This is to say, she may not now have both,
- 1840 Al be you never so jealous nor so wroth. *Even if / angry*  
 And forthy I you put in this degree, *therefore / position*  
 That each of you shall have his destiny  
 As him is shape, and hearken in what wise;  
 Lo, here your end of that I shall devise: *decreed for him*  
*part / announce*

- 1845 My will is this, for plat conclusion,  
 Withouten any replication;  
 If that you liketh, take if for the best:  
 That each of you shall go where that him lest,  
 Freely, withouten ransom or danger,
- 1850 And this day fifty weekès, far or near,  
 Ever each of you shall bring a hundred knights  
 Arméd for listès up at allè rights,<sup>1</sup>  
 All ready to darrein her by battail.  
 And this behote I you withouten fail,
- 1855 Upon my truth and as I am a knight,  
 That whether of you bothè that has might,  
 This is to say, that whether he or thou  
 May with his hundred as I spoke of now  
 Slay his contráry, or out of listès drive,
- 1860 Then shall I givè Emilia to wive  
 To whom that Fortune gives so fair a grace.  
 The listès shall I maken in this place,  
 And God so wisly on my soulè rue,  
 As I shall even judgè be and true.
- 1865 You shall no other endè with me maken,<sup>2</sup>  
 That one of you ne shall be dead or taken.  
 And if you thinketh this is well y-said,  
 Say your avis, and holdeth you apaid.  
 This is your end and your conclusion."
- 1870 Who looketh lightly now but Palamon?  
 Who springeth up for joyè but Arcite?  
 Who couldè tell or who could it endite  
 The joyè that is maked in the place,  
 When Theseus has done so fair a grace?
- 1875 But down on knee went every manner wight,  
 And thanken him with all their heart and might,  
 And namèly the Thebans often sithe.

*plain  
contradiction*

*he pleases*

*for tournament  
claim by fight  
promise*

*whichever*

*surely have mercy  
just judge*

*agreement / satisfied*

*oftentimes*

---

<sup>1</sup> 1853: "Completely armed and ready for the lists," i.e. for the place where the tournament would take place.

<sup>2</sup> 1863-66: "And as sure as I hope for God's mercy, I will be a fair and just judge. I will make no other arrangement with you (than this): one of you has to be killed or captured."

And thus with good hope and with heartè blithe  
 They take their leave and homeward gan they ride  
 1880 To Thebès, with its oldè wallès wide.

*happy*

*End of Part II*

Part Three

*The new stadium for the tournament*

I trow men wouldè deem it negligence  
 If I forget to tellen the dispençe  
 Of Theseus, that goes so busily  
 To maken up the listès royally,  
 1885 That such a noble theatre as it was  
 I dare well sayen in this world there n'as.  
 The circúit a milè was about,  
 Wallèd of stone and ditchèd all without.  
 Round was the shape in manner of compass,  
 1890 Full of degrees, the height of sixty pas,  
 That when a man was set on one degree  
 He letted not his fellow for to see.  
 Eastward there stood a gate of marble white,  
 Westward right such another in th'opposite;  
 1895 And shortly to concludè, such a place  
 Was none in earth as in so little space.  
 For in the land there was no crafty man  
 That geometry or ars-metric can,  
 Nor portrayer, nor carver of imáges,  
 1900 That Theseus ne gave him meat and wages,  
 The theatre for to maken and devise.  
 And for to do his rite and sacrifice,  
 He eastward has, upon the gate above,

*I suspect / think  
 expenditure*

*was not*

*outside*

*steps / paces  
 level*

*hindered not from*

*In short*

*craftsman  
 knew g. or arithmetic*

- In worship of Venus, goddess of love,  
 1905 Done make an altar and an oratory.<sup>1</sup>  
 And on the gate westward, in memory *above the gate*  
 Of Mars, he makèd has right such another,  
 That costè largèly of gold a fother. *a pile*  
 And northward in a turret on the wall,  
 1910 Of alabaster white and red coral,  
 An oratory richè for to see,  
 In worship of Diane of chastity, *(goddess) of c.*  
 Hath Theseus do wrought in noble wise. *caused to be made*  
 But yet had I forgotten to devise *describe*  
 1915 The noble carving and the portraitures,  
 The shape, the countenance, and the figúres,  
 That weren in these oratories three. *chapels*

*The temple of Venus*

- First, in the temple of Venus mayst thou see,  
 Wrought on the wall, full piteous to behold,  
 1920 The broken sleepès and the sighès cold,  
 The sacred tearès and the waymenting, *lamentation*  
 The fiery strokès of the desiring  
 That Lovè's servants in this life endure,  
 The oathès that their covenants assure,  
 1925 Pleasance and Hope, Desire, Foolhardiness,  
 Beauty and Youth, Bawdery, Richesse, *gaiety, wealth*  
 Charms and Force, Leasings, Flattery, *Magic / lies*  
 Dispense, Business, and Jealousy, *money*  
 That wore of yellow goldès a garland, *marigolds*  
 1930 And a cuckoo sitting on her hand;  
 Feastès, instrumentès, carols, dances, *songs*  
 Lust and array, and all the circumstances *adornment*  
 Of love, which that I reckoned and reckon shall,  
 By order weren painted on the wall,  
 1935 And more than I can make of mention.  
 For soothly all the Mount of Citheron,

---

<sup>1</sup> 1905: He had an altar and a chapel built

- Where Venus has her principal dwelling,  
 Was showèd on the wall in portraying,  
 With all the garden and the lustiness.
- 1940 Not was forgotten the porter Idleness,<sup>1</sup>  
 Nor Narcissus the fair of yore agon *of long ago*  
 Nor yet the folly of king Salomon,  
 Nor yet the greatè strength of Hercules,  
 Th'enchantments of Medea and Circes, *Circe*
- 1945 Nor of Turnus with the hardy fierce couráge,  
 The richè Croesus, caitiff in serváge. *captive in slavery*  
 Thus may you see that wisdom nor riches, *wealth*  
 Beauty nor sleightè, strengthè, hardiness, *nor cleverness*  
 Ne may with Venus holdè champarty, *partnership*
- 1950 For as her list, the world then may she gie. *as she wishes / rule*  
 Lo, all these folk so caught were in her lass *snare*  
 Till they for woe full often said "Alas!"  
 Sufficeth here examples one or two, *[of the paintings]*  
 Although I couldè reckon a thousand more. *And though*
- 1955 The statue of Venus, glorious for to see,  
 Was naked, floating in the largè sea,  
 And from the navel down all covered was  
 With wavès green and bright as any glass.  
 A citole in her right hand haddè she, *harp*
- 1960 And on her head, full seemly for to see,  
 A rose garland, fresh and well smelling,  
 Above her head her dovès flickering. *fluttering*  
 Before her stood her sonnè, Cupido.  
 Upon his shoulders wingès had he two,
- 1965 And blind he was, as it is often seen;  
 A bow he bore, and arrows bright and keen.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1940 ff: All the instances cited in the following lines are meant to exemplify the claim that nothing can compete with the power of Love. Idleness was the porter of the love garden in *The Romance of the Rose*, a poem that Chaucer knew and probably translated. Echo died of unrequited love for Narcissus. Solomon, famed for wisdom, was nevertheless, led into idolatry through his lust for women; Hercules the strong was poisoned by a shirt sent to him by his jealous wife. Medea, beautiful and good at "sleight," tricked her family for her lover Jason who afterwards abandoned her; Circe enchanted the followers of Odysseus; "hardy" Turnus fought Aeneas for Lavinia. Croesus was certainly rich and proud, but his love follies are not recorded.

*The temple of Mars*

- Why should I not as well eke tell you all *also*  
 The portraiture that was upon the wall  
 Within the temple of mighty Mars the red? *[God of War]*
- 1970 All painted was the wall in length and breadth  
 Like to the estres of the grisly place *interior*  
 That hight the greatè temple of Mars in Thrace, *was called*  
 In thilkè coldè frosty regiõn *In that*  
 There as Mars has his sovereign mansion. *chief shrine*
- 1975 First on the wall was painted a forest,  
 In which there dwelleth neither man nor beast,  
 With knotty, knarry, barren trees old, *rough*  
 Of stubbès sharp and hideous to behold,  
 In which there ran a rumble in a swough, *sound / wind*
- 1980 As though a storm should bursten every bough.  
 And downward on a hill under a bent *grassy slope*  
 There stood the temple of Mars armipotent, *mighty in arms*  
 Wrought all of burnèd steel, of which th'entry *burnished*  
 Was long and strait and ghasly for to see, *narrow*
- 1985 And thereout came a rage and such a veze *blast*  
 That it made all the gatè for to rese. *shake*  
 The northern light in at the doorès shone,  
 For window on the wall ne was there none  
 Through which men mighten any light discern.
- 1990 The door was all of adamant etern, *hard rock*  
 Y-clenchèd overthwart and endalong *length and breadth*  
 With iron tough; and for to make it strong  
 Every pillar the temple to sustain  
 Was tonne-great, of iron bright and sheen. *barrel-thick / shining*
- 1995 There saw I first the dark imagining *plotting*  
 Of Felony, and all the compassing, *accomplishment*  
 The cruel Ire, red as any gleed, *Anger / hot coal*  
 The pick-purse, and eke the palè Dread,  
 The smiler with the knife under the cloak,
- 2000 The shippen burning with the blackè smoke, *barn*  
 The treason of the murdering in the bed,  
 The open War with woundès all be-bled, *bleeding*



- Contest with bloody knife and sharp menáce.  
 All full of chirking was that sorry place. *noises*
- 2005 The slayer of himself yet saw I there;  
 His heartè's blood has bathed all his hair;  
 The nail y-driven in the shode at night, *into the head*  
 The coldè Death with mouth gaping upright. *on his back*  
 Amiddest of the temple sat Mischance, *In the midst / Disaster*
- 2100 With discomfórt and sorry countenance.  
 Yet saw I Woodness, laughing in his rage; *Madness*  
 Arméd Complaint, Outhees, and fierce Outrage; *outcries at crime*  
 The carrion in the bush with throat y-carve, *corpse / cut*  
 A thousand slain and not of qualm y-starve, *killed by plague*
- 2150 The tyrant with the prey by force y-reft, *seized*  
 The town destroyèd--there was nothing left.  
 Yet saw I burnt the shippès hoppesteres,<sup>1</sup> *ships of war*  
 The hunter strangled with the wildè bears, *by the*  
 The sow freten the child right in the cradle, *mauling*
- 2200 The cook y-scalded for all his longè ladle.  
 Nought was forgotten by the infortúne of Marte: *bad influence of Mars*  
 The carter overridden with his cart;  
 Under the wheel full low he lay adown.  
 There were also of Mars's divisïon *followers*
- 2250 The barber and the butcher, and the smith  
 That forges sharpè swordès on his stith. *anvil*  
 And all above depainted in a tower  
 Saw I Conquest, sitting in great honoúr,  
 With the sharpè sword over his head
- 2300 Hanging by a subtle twinè's thread. *slender*  
 Depainted was the slaughter of Julius, *Caesar*  
 Of great Nero, and of Antonius. *Mark Antony*  
 Al be that thilkè time they were unborn, *Although at that*  
 Yet was their death depainted therebeforn,
- 2350 By menacing of Mars, right by figúre. *prefiguring*  
 So was it showèd in that portraiture,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2017: Literally *hoppesters* are female dancers. "Dancing ships" or "ship's dancers" does not make much sense here. The phrase is probably a result of Chaucer's mistranslation of an Italian phrase that meant "ships of war."

- As is depainted in the stars above  
 Who shall be slain, or elsè dead for love.  
 Sufficeth one example in stories old;  
 2040 I may not reckon them allè, though I would.  
 The statue of Mars upon a cartè stood *chariot*  
 Armèd, and lookèd grim as he were wood. *angry*  
 And over his head there shinen two figúres  
 Of starrès that be clepèd in scriptúres *called in books*  
 2045 That one Puella, that other Rubeus. *divination figures*  
 This god of armès was arrayèd thus:  
 A wolf there stood before him at his feet,  
 With eyen red, and of a man he eat. *ate*  
 With subtle pencil painted was this story  
 2050 In rédouting of Mars and of his glory. *reverence*

*The temple of Diana*

- Now to the temple of Diane the chaste *goddess of chastity*  
 As shortly as I can I will me haste,  
 To tellè you all the description.  
 Depainted be the wallès up and down  
 2055 Of hunting and of shamefast chastity.<sup>1</sup> *of modest*  
 There saw I how woeful Calistopee, *Callisto*  
 When that Diane agrievèd was with her,  
 Was turnèd from a woman to a bear,  
 And after was she made the Lodè-Star. *pole star*  
 2060 Thus was it painted, I can say you no farre. *tell you no farther*  
 Her son is eke a star, as men may see. *[Boötes] is also*  
 There saw I Dane y-turnèd to a tree. *Daphne*  
 (I meanè not the goddessè Diane,  
 But Penneus' daughter which that hightè Dane.<sup>2</sup> *who was called*

---

<sup>1</sup> 2051-55: Diana (Roman name for Greek goddess Artemis) has a number of different (and conflicting) attributes all portrayed in this picture. She is the virgin huntress and goddess of chastity, but also as Lucina, she is goddess of childbirth. As Luna she is goddess of the moon but as Hecate or Prosperine (Persephone) she is a goddess of the underworld ruled by Pluto.

<sup>2</sup> 2062-64: Daphne (here called Dane) was transformed into a laurel tree by her father to  
 (continued...)

- 2065 There saw I Actaeon a hart y-makèd, *turned into a deer*  
 For vengeance that he saw Diane all naked:  
 I saw how that his houndès have him caught  
 And freten him, for that they knew him not.<sup>1</sup> *torn to pieces*  
 Yet painted was little further more
- 2070 How Atalanta hunted the wild boar,  
 And Meleager, and many another more,  
 For which Diana wrought him care and woe. *caused him*  
 There saw I many another wonder story,  
 The which me list not draw into memóry.<sup>2</sup>
- 2075 This goddess on a hart full highè sat, *deer*  
 With smallè houndès all about her feet,  
 And underneath her feet she had a moon;  
 Waxing it was, and shouldè wanè soon. *Growing / fade*  
 In gaudy green her statue clothèd was, *yellowish green(?)*
- 2080 With bow in hand and arrows in a case;  
 Her eyen castè she full low adown  
 Where Pluto has his darkè regiön. *underworld*  
 A woman trávailing was her beforñ, *in labor*  
 But for her child so longè was unborn, *But because*
- 2085 Full piteously Lucina gan she call, *[L = goddess of childbirth]*  
 And saidè: "Help, for thou mayst best of all."  
 Well could he paintè lifelike that it wrought;  
 With many a florin he the huès bought. *gold coin / colors*  
 Now be these lists made, and Theseus,
- 2090 That all his great costè arrayèd thus  
 The temples and the theatre everydeal,  
 When it was done him likèd wonder well. *it pleased him*  
 But stint I will of Theseus a lite, *stop / a little*  
 And speak of Palamon and of Arcite.

---

(...continued)

escape the embraces of the god Apollo who was pursuing her.

<sup>1</sup> 2065-8: Actaeon was a hunter who looked at Diana while she was bathing in a pool and was punished by her for this "crime" by being turned into a deer (hart), which was torn apart by his own hounds.

<sup>2</sup> 2074: "Which I do not want to recall now."

*The combatants arrive*

- 2095 The day approacheth of their réturning,  
 That ever each should a hundred knightès bring  
 The battle to darrein, as I you told. *fight*  
 And to Athens, their covenant for to hold, *agreement*  
 Has ever each of them brought a hundred knights,
- 2100 Well armèd for the war at allè rights; *in every way*  
 And sikerly there trowèd many a man *certainly / believed*  
 That never sithen that the world began, *since*  
 As for to speak of knighthood of their hand,  
 As far as God has makèd sea and land,
- 2105 N'as of so few so noble a company.<sup>1</sup>  
 For every wight that lovèd chilvalry, *every person*  
 And would, his thankès, have a passant name,<sup>2</sup>  
 Has prayèd that he might be of that game, *sport*  
 And well was him that thereto chosen was. *pleased was he*
- 2110 For if there fell tomorrow such a case,  
 You knowen well that every lusty knight  
 That loveth paramours and has his might, *women*  
 Were it in Engeland or elsèwhere,  
 They would, their thankès, wilnen to be there. *w. gladly be there*
- 2115 To fighten for a lady, ben'citee, *bless us*  
 It were a lusty sightè for to see.

*Palamon with his 100*

And right so farèd they with Palamon.  
 With him there wenten knightès many a one  
 Some will be armed in a habergeon,<sup>3</sup> *One / chainmail*

---

<sup>1</sup> 2100 ff: "Many believed that since the Creation there had never been in the world so select a group of knights in the annals of chivalry."

<sup>2</sup> 2107 "And who would gladly have a surpassing name" (for chivalry). *his thanks* or *their thanks* = gladly, with thanks.

- 2120 And in a breastplate and a light gipon; *padded tunic*  
 And some will have a pair of platès large *Another*  
 And some will have a Prussian shield or targe; *light shield*  
 Some will be armèd on his leggès well,  
 And have an ax, and some a mace of steel-
- 2125 There is no newè guise that it n'as old.<sup>1</sup> *fashion*  
 Armèd were they as I have you told,  
 Ever each after his opinïon. *to his own taste*  
 There mayst thou see coming with Palamon  
 Lygurge himself, the greatè king of Thrace.
- 2130 Black was his beard and manly was his face.  
 The circles of his eyeen in his head, *his eyeballs*  
 They glowed betwixen yellow and red,  
 And like a griffon lookèd he about, *[part lion, part eagle]*  
 With kempe hairès on his browès stout.<sup>2</sup>
- 2135 His limbs great, his brawnès hard and strong, *muscles*  
 His shoulders broad, his armès round and long,  
 And as the guisè was in his country, *fashion*  
 Full high upon a char of gold stood he, *chariot*  
 With fourè whitè bullès in the traces.
- 2140 Instead of coat-armoúr over his harness,<sup>3</sup> *armor*  
 With nailès yellow and bright as any gold, *studs*  
 He had a bear's skin, coal-black for old. *bearskin / with age*  
 His longè hair was combed behind his back;  
 As any raven's feather it shone for-black. *deep black*
- 2145 A wreath of gold, arm-great, of hugè weight, *thick as an arm*

---

<sup>3</sup>(...continued)

2119 ff: "Some" retains its old meaning of "one," "a certain one." The switch from past tense to what looks like future is odd, but has no significance; the "future" should be read as past. Presumably "will be armed" has the sense of "wishes (or chooses) to be armed," which still needs to be read as a past tense: "One was armed in ..."

<sup>1</sup> 2125: "There is no new fashion (in arms) that has not been old." Since Chaucer has put his characters in what seems to be medieval armor, perhaps this sentence is saying that he is aware of the anachronism, as in 2033 above.

<sup>2</sup> 2134: "With bushy hairs in his prominent eyebrows."

<sup>3</sup> 2140: *coat-armour*: a garment worn over armor (*harness*), and embroidered with a coat-of-arms."

Upon his head, set full of stonès bright, *gemstones*  
 Of finè rubies and of diamonds.  
 About his char there wentè white alaunts, *chariot / wolfhounds*  
 Twenty and more, as great as any steer,  
 2150 To hunten at the lion or the deer,  
 And followed him with muzzle fast y-bound,  
 Collared of gold, and tourettes filèd round. *rings*  
 A hundred lordès had he in his rout, *group*  
 Armed full well, with heartès stern and stout.

*Arcite's troop led by Emetrius*

2155 With Árcita, in stories as men find,  
 The great Emetrius, the king of Ind,  
 Upon a steedè bay trappèd in steel, *armed in*  
 Covered in cloth of gold diapered well, *elaborately patterned*  
 Came riding like the god of armès, Mars.  
 2160 His coat-armour was of cloth of Tars, *purple colored silk*  
 Couched with pearlès white and round and great; *Set w.*  
 His saddle was of burned gold new y-beat. *burnished*  
 A mantlet upon his shoulder hanging, *cape*  
 Bretful of rubies red as fire sparkling; *covered with*  
 2165 His crispè hair like ringès was y-run, *curly / falling*  
 And that was yellow and glittered as the sun;  
 His nose was high, his eyen bright citron, *lemon-colored*  
 His lips round, his colour was sanguine *ruddy*  
 A fewè frakens in his face y-sprend, *freckles / sprinkled*  
 2170 Betwixen yellow and somdeal black y-mend; *mingled*  
 And as a lion he his looking cast. *he glared*  
 Of five and twenty year his age I cast. *calculate*  
 His beard was well begunnè for to spring. *to grow*  
 His voice was as a trumpet thundering.  
 2175 Upon his head he weared of laurel green  
 A garland fresh and lusty for to seen.  
 Upon his hand he bore for his delight  
 An eagle tame, as any lily white.  
 A hundred lordès had he with him there,  
 2180 All armèd, save their heads, in all their gear,  
 Full richly in allè manner things;

For trusteth well that dukès, earlès, kings,  
 Were gathered in this noble company  
 For love and for increase of chivalry.

2185 About this king there ran on every part *side*  
 Full many a tamè lion and leopard.

*Theseus throws a feast for the occasion*

And in this wise these lordès all and some *one and all*  
 Be on the Sunday to the city come  
 Aboutè prime, and in the town alight. *9 am; dismounted*

2190 This Theseus, this Duke, this worthy knight,  
 When he had brought them into his city,  
 And inned them, ever each at his degree, *lodged / rank*

He feasteth them and does so great labour  
 To easen them and do them all honour,  
 2195 That yet men weenen that no mannè's wit *men judge / wisdom*  
 Of no estate ne could amenden it.<sup>1</sup> *any rank / improve*

The minstrelcy, the service at the feast, *music*  
 The greatè giftès to the most and least,  
 The rich array of Theseus' paláce,

2200 Nor who sat first or last upon the dais,  
 What ladies fairest be and best dancing,  
 Or which of them can dancen best and sing,

Nor who most feelingly speaks of love,  
 What hawkès sitten on the perch above,  
 2205 What houndès lien on the floor adown--  
 Of all this make I now no mentïon.

But all th'effect; that thinketh me the best. *outcome*  
 Now comes the point, and hearken if you lest. *listen if y please*

*Palamon goes to the temple of Venus*

The Sunday night, ere day began to spring,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2195-6: "Men are still of the opinion that no one's intelligence, of whatever rank, could improve upon it." *Occupatio* is the figure of speech used in the following lines, in which the author says he will not tell about what he then proceeds to tell about.

- 2210 When Palamon the larkè heardè sing,  
 Although it n'ere not day by hourès two *was not*  
 Yet sang the lark; and Palamon right tho, *then*  
 With holy heart and with a high couráge, *great devotion*  
 He rose to wenden on his pilgrimáge
- 2215 Unto the blissful Cytherea benign,  
 I meanè Venus honorable and digne, *revered*  
 And in her hour he walketh forth a pace *[just before dawn]*  
 Unto the listès where her temple was,  
 And down he kneeleth, and with humble cheer *manner*
- 2220 And heartè sore, he said as you shall hear:  
 "Fairest of fair, O lady mine Venus,  
 Daughter of Jove and spouse to Vulcanus,  
 Thou gladder of the Mount of Citheron, *joy*  
 For thilkè love thou haddest to Adon, *that love / Adonis*
- 2225 Have pity of my bitter tearès smart,  
 And take mine humble prayer at thine heart. *painful*  
 Alas! I ne have no language to tell  
 Th'effect nor the torments of my hell.  
 My heartè may my harmès not bewray. *show*
- 2230 I am so cónfused that I cannot say  
 But "Mercy!" lady bright, that knowest well  
 My thoughts, and seest what harmès that I feel.  
 Consider all this, and rue upon my sore, *have pity*  
 As wisly as I shall for evermore *As surely*
- 2235 Emforth my might, thy truè servant be, *As much as I can*  
 And holden war always with chastity.  
 That make I mine avow, so you me help.  
 I keepè nought of armès for to yelp, *don't care to boast*  
 Nor I ask not tomorrow to have victóry,  
 Nor renown in this casè, nor vainè glory *fame in arms trumpeted*  
 Of prize of armès blowèn up and down,  
 But I would have fully possession  
 Of Emily, and die in thy service.  
 Find thou the manner how and in what wise.
- 2245 I reckè not but it may better be *I care not*  
 To have victory of them, or they of me,  
 So that I have my lady in mine arms. *Provided*



- For though so be that Mars is god of arms,  
 Your virtue is so great in heaven above  
 2250 That, if you list, I shall well have my love. *Your power  
if you wish*  
 Thy temple will I worship evermo',  
 And on thine altar, where I ride or go, *wherever I r. or walk*  
 I will do sacrifice and fires beet. *kindle*  
 And if you will not so, my lady sweet,  
 2255 Then pray I thee tomorrow with a spear  
 That Arcita me through the heartè bere; *thrust*  
 Then reck I not, when I have lost my life,  
 Though that Arcita win her to his wife.  
 This is th'effect and end of my prayer:  
 2260 Give me my love, thou blissful lady dear."  
 When th'orison was done of Palamon, *the prayer*  
 His sacrifice he did, and that anon, *promptly*  
 Full piteously, with allè circumstánces, *piously / rites*  
 Al' tell I not as now his observánces. *Although*  
 2265 But at the last the statue of Venus shook,  
 And made a signè whereby that he took  
 That his prayer accepted was that day;  
 For though the signè showèd a delay,  
 Yet wist he well that granted was his boon, *knew he / prayer*  
 2270 And with glad heart he went him home full soon.

*Emily prays in the temple of Diana*

- The third hour unequal that Palamon<sup>1</sup>  
 Began to Venus' temple for to gon, *to go*  
 Up rose the sun, and up rose Emily,  
 And to the temple of Diane gan she hie. *hasten*  
 2275 Her maidens that she thither with her led  
 Full readily with them the fire they had,  
 Th'incense, the clothès, and the remnant all *all the rest*  
 That to the sacrificè longen shall, *belongs to*

---

<sup>1</sup> 2271: "unequal": Darkness and daylight were divided into twelve parts each. 1/12th of the hours of darkness would be unequal to 1/12 of the hours of daylight except around the solstice. This is a difficult line to scan metrically even with ME spelling.

- The hornès full of mead, as was the guise. *custom*
- 2280 There lackèd naught to do her sacrifice. *Incensing / hangings*  
 Smoking the temple, full of clothès fair, *devout*  
 This Emily with heartè debonair  
 Her body washed with water of a well.  
 (But how she did her rite I dare not tell,
- 2285 But it be any thing in general, *Except in general?*  
 And yet it were a game to hearen all. *would be pleasant*  
 To him that meaneth well it were no charge; *problem*  
 But it is good a man be at his large).<sup>1</sup> *to be free*  
 Her brightè hair was combed untressèd all;
- 2290 A coroun of a greenè oak cerial *crown of evergreen oak*  
 Upon her head was set, full fair and meet. *proper*  
 Two firès on the altar gan she beet, *kindle*  
 And did her thingès as men may behold *rites / read*  
 In Stace of Thebes and other bookès old. *"Thebaid" by Statius.*
- 2295 When kindled was the fire, with piteous cheer *pious(?) manner*  
 Unto Diane she spoke as you may hear:  
 "O chastè goddess of the woodès green,  
 To whom both heaven and earth and sea is seen; *visible*  
 Queen of the regne of Pluto, dark and low, *realm (of underworld)*
- 2300 Goddess of maidens, that mine heart hast know *knowest*  
 Full many a year, and wost what I desire,  
 As keep me from thy vengeance and thine ire  
 That Actaeon abouttè cruelly. *paid dearly for*
- Chaste goddessè, well wost thou that I *you know that*
- 2305 Desire to be a maiden all my life,  
 Nor never will I be nor love nor wife. *lover*  
 I am, thou wost, yet of thy company *the chase*  
 A maid, and love hunting and venery,  
 And for to walken in the woodès wild,
- 2310 And not to be a wife and be with child.  
 Not will I knowè company of man. *I don't wish*  
 Now help me, lady, since you may and can,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2284-88: The meaning of this passage is obscure. Perhaps the narrator is saying that he will not be like Actaeon (2303 below) watching a girl take her bath? What a man should be free to do is not clear.

- For those three formès that thou hast in thee.<sup>1</sup>  
 And Palamon, that has such love to me,  
 2315 And eke Arcite, that loveth me so sore, *And also*  
 This grace I prayè thee withouten more, *and no more*  
 As sendè love and peace bitwixt them two,  
 And from me turn away their heartès so  
 That all their hottè love and their desire,  
 2320 And all their busy torment and their fire  
 Be queint or turnéd in another place. *quenched*  
 And if so be thou wilt not do me grace,  
 Or if my destiny be shapen so  
 That I shall needès have one of them two, *must have*  
 2325 As send me him that most desireth me.  
 Behold, goddess of cleanè chastity,  
 The bitter tears that on my cheekès fall.  
 Since thou art maid and keeper of us all,  
 My maidenhood thou keep and well conserve.  
 2330 And while I live, a maid I will thee serve."  
 The firès burn upon the altar clear,  
 While Emily was thus in her prayér,  
 But suddenly she saw a sightè quaint, *strange*  
 For right anon one of the fires queint, *quenched*  
 2335 And quicked again, and after that anon *And lit up*  
 The other fire was queint and all agone,  
 And as it queint it made a whistling,  
 As do these wettè brands in their burning, *wet branches*  
 And at the brandès' end out ran anon  
 2340 As it were bloody droppès many a one.  
 For which so sore aghast was Emily  
 That she was well nigh mad, and gan to cry,  
 For she ne wistè what it signified;  
 But only for the fear thus has she cried,  
 2345 And wept that it was pity for to hear. *(in a way) that*  
 And therewithal Diana gan appear,  
 With bow in hand, right as an hunteress,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2313: She asks help from Diana who is also known as Luna, the moon goddess; as Hecate, goddess of the underworld; and as Lucina, goddess of childbirth. See above 2051, note.

- And saidè: "Daughter, stint thy heaviness. *cease thy grief*  
 Among the goddès high it is affirmed,  
 2350 And by eternal word written and confirmed,  
 Thou shalt be wedded unto one of tho *those*  
 That have for thee so muchè care and woe,  
 But unto which of them I may not tell.  
 Farewell, for I ne may no longer dwell.  
 2355 The fires which that on mine altar burn  
 Shall thee declaren ere that thou go hence *tell you before*  
 Thine áventure of love as in this case." *destiny*  
 And with that word the arrows in the case  
 Of the goddessè clatter fast and ring,  
 2360 And forth she went, and made a vanishing.  
 For which this Emily astonéd was, *astonished*  
 And saidè: "What amounteth this, alas?  
 I put me in thy protection,  
 Diana, and in thy dispositiön."  
 2365 And home she goes anon the nextè way. *shortest way*  
 This is th'effect, there is no more to say. *the outcome*

*Arcite prays in the temple of Mars*

- The nextè hour of Mars following this,  
 Arcite unto the temple walkéd is  
 Of fiercè Mars, to do his sacrifice,  
 2370 With all the ritès of his pagan wise. *fashion*  
 With piteous heart and high devotiön, *pious*  
 Right thus to Mars he said his orison: *prayer*  
 "O strongè god, that in the regnes cold *realms*  
 Of Thrace honouèred art and lord y-hold, *regarded as*  
 2375 And hast in every regne and every land  
 Of armès all the bridle in thine hand, *the control*  
 And them fortunèst as thee list devise: *reward / as you like*  
 Accept of me my piteous sacrifice. *pious*  
 If so be that my youthè may deserve,  
 2380 And that my might be worthy for to serve  
 Thy godhead, that I may be one of thine,  
 Then pray I thee to rue upon my pine, *take pity / misery*

- For thilkè pain and thilkè hottè fire *that same*  
 In which thou whilom burnedst for desire *once*
- 2385 When that thou usedest the beauty  
 Of fairè, youngè, freshè Venus free,  
 And haddest her in armès at thy will,  
 Although thee once upon a time misfell, *were unfortunate*  
 When Vulcanus had caught thee in his lass, *trap*
- 2390 And found thee lying by his wife, alas.  
 For thilkè sorrow that was in thine heart,  
 Have ruth as well upon my painès smart. *pity / sharp*  
 I am young and uncunning, as thou wost, *inexperienced / know*  
 And as I trow, with love offended most *I think / afflicted*
- 2395 That ever was any livè creätúre.  
 For she that does me all this woe endure *causes me to*  
 Ne recketh never whether I sink or fleet; *float*  
 And well I wot ere she me mercy heet,<sup>1</sup> *favor show*  
 I must with strengthè win her in the place, *in the lists*
- 2400 And well I wot withouten help and grace *I know*  
 Of thee ne may my strengthè not avail.  
 Then help me, lord, tomorrow in my bataille,  
 For thilkè fire that whilom burnèd thee, *For the same / once*  
 As well as thilkè fire now burneth me,
- 2405 And do that I tomorrow have victóry. *grant that*  
 Mine be the travail, and thine be the glory. *work*  
 Thy sovereign temple will I most honouír  
 Of any place, and always most labouír  
 In thy pleasánce and in thy craftès strong.<sup>2</sup> *To please you*
- 2410 And in thy temple I will my banner hang,  
 And all the armès of my company,  
 And evermore until that day I die  
 Eternal fire I will before thee find. *provide*  
 And eke to this avow I will me bind: *also / vow*
- 2415 My beard, my hair, that hangeth long adown,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2398: "And I know well that before she will show me any favor ..." The Chaucer Glossary implies tht the form hote rather than Heete was used in Skeat. I could use it and float for the preceding line.

<sup>2</sup> "I will always work very hard to please you and (be) strong in your service"

- That never yet ne felt offensiõn  
 Of razor nor of shears, I will thee give;  
 And be thy truè servant while I live.  
 Now lord, have ruth upon my sorrows sore. *pity*
- 2420 Give me the victory. I ask no more."  
 The prayer stint of Árcita the strong. *stopped*  
 The ringès on the temple door that hung  
 And eke the doors clatterèd full fast,  
 Of which Arcíta somewhat him aghast. *was afraid*
- 2425 The fires burned upon the altar bright  
 That it gan all the temple for to light. *so that*  
 A sweetè smell anon the ground up gave  
 And Árcita anon his hand up have, *lifted up*  
 And more incénse into the fire he cast,
- 2430 With other ritès more, and at the last  
 The statue of Mars began his hauberk ring, *to rattle its armor*  
 And with that sound he heard a murmuring,  
 Full low and dim, that saidè thus: "Victóry!"  
 For which he gave to Mars honoúr and glory.
- 2435 And thus with joy and hopè well to fare  
 Arcite anon unto his inn is fare, *lodging has gone*  
 As fain as fowl is of the brightè sun. *glad as bird*

*An argument among the gods*

- And right anon such strife there is begun  
 For thilkè granting, in the heaven above *Because of that*
- 2440 Betwixtè Venus, the goddèss of love,  
 And Mars, the sternè god armipotent, *powerful in arms*  
 That Jupiter was busy it to stent, *stop*  
 Till that the palè Sáturnus the cold,  
 That knew so many of adventures old, *events*
- 2445 Found in his old experience an art *trick*  
 That he full soon has pleasèd every part. *(So) that / party*  
 As sooth is said, eld has great advantáge;  
 In eld is bothè wisdom and uságe; *truth / old age*  
 Men may the old outrun but not outred. *experience*
- 2450 Saturn anon, to stinten strife and dread, *outwit*  
*to stop*

Albeit that it is against his kind,  
Of all this strife he can remedy find.

*Although / his nature*

*Saturn settles the argument*

- "My dearè daughter Venus," quod Satúrn,  
"My coursè, that has so widè for to turn,  
2455 Has morè power than wot any man.  
Mine is the drenching in the sea so wan;  
Mine is the prison in the darkè cote;  
Mine is the strangling and hanging by the throat,  
The murmur and the churlès' rébelling,  
2460 The groining and the privy empoisoning.  
I do vengeáncè and plain correction  
While I dwell in the sign of the lion.  
Mine is the ruin of the highè halls,  
The falling of the towers and of the walls  
2465 Upon the miner or the carpenter.  
I slewè Sampson, shaking the pillar;  
And minè be the maladiès cold,  
The darkè treasons, and the castès old.  
My looking is the father of pestilence.  
2470 Now weep no more, I shall do diligence  
That Palamon, that is thine ownè knight,  
Shall have his lady as thou hast him hight.  
Though Mars shall help his knight, yet natheless,  
Betwixtè you there must be some time peace,  
2475 Al be you not of one complexïon,  
That causeth alday such divisïon.  
I am thine aièl, ready at thy will.  
Weep now no more; I will thy lust fulfill."  
Now will I stinten of the gods above,  
2480 Of Mars and Venus, the goddèss of love,  
And tellè you as plainly as I can  
The great effect for which that I began.

*granddaughter*

*orbit*

*than knows*

*drowning / pale*

*cell*

*peasants'*

*grumbling / secret*

*open*

*sign of Leo*

*plots*

*My glance*

*take pains*

*promised*

*temperament*

*every day*

*grandfather*

*your wish*

*stop (talking) about*

*result, ending*

*End of Part III*

## Part Four

*Preparations for the tournament*

- Great was the feast in Athenès that day,  
 And eke the lusty season of that May *also*  
 2485 Made every wight to be in such pleasáncē *person*  
 That all that Monday joustēn they and dance,  
 And spendēn it in Venus' high service.  
 But by the causē that they shouлдē rise *Because*  
 Early for to see the greatē fight,  
 2490 Unto their restē wentēn they at night.  
 And on the morrow when the day gan spring,  
 Of horse and harness noise and clattering  
 There was in hostelriēs all about;  
 And to the palace rode there many a rout *group*  
 2495 Of lordēs upon steedēs and palfreys. *war horses / riding horses*  
 There mayst thou see devising of harness, *preparing*  
 So uncouth and so rich, and wrought so well *so unusual*  
 Of goldsmithry, of broiding, and of steel, *embroidery*  
 The shieldēs brightē, testers, and trappúres, *head armor / trappings*  
 2500 Gold-hewn helms, hauberks, coat-armoúrs, *gold-worked / mail coats*  
 Lords in parēmēnts on their coursers, *robes / horses*  
 Knightēs of retinue and eke squires *also*  
 Nailing the spears and helmets buckling;  
 Giggēng of shieldēs, with lainers lacing: *strapping / lanyards*  
 2505 There as need was they werē no thing idle.  
 The foamy steedēs on the golden bridle  
 Gnawing; and fast the armourers also  
 With file and hammer, pricking to and fro; *spurring*  
 Yeomen on foot and commons many a one *Servants*  
 2510 With shortē staves, thick as they may gon;  
 Pipēs, trumpets, nakers, clarions, *drums / bugles*  
 That in the battle blowēn bloody sounds;  
 The palace full of people up and down,  
 Here three, there ten, holding their questīōn, *arguing*  
 2515 Divining of these Theban knightēs two. *speculating about*



Some saidè thus, some said it shall be so;  
 Some held with him with the blackè beard,  
 Some with the bald, some with the thickly-haired;  
 Some said *he* lookèd grim, and *he* would fight:  
 2520 "*He* has a sparth of twenty pound of weight."  
 Thus was the hallè full of divining  
 Long after that the sun began to spring.

*"he" = this / that one*  
*"battle axe*  
*conjectures*

*Theseus announces the rules*

The greatè Theseus, that of his sleep awakèd  
 With minstrelsy and noisè that was makèd,  
 2525 Held yet the chambers of his palace rich,  
 Till that the Theban knightès, both alike  
 Honouèred, were into the palace fet. *Still stayed in*  
 Duke Theseus is at a window set,  
 Arrayed right as he were a god in throne; *fetched*  
 2530 The people presseth thitherward full soon,  
 Him for to see and do high reverence,  
 And eke to hearken his hest and his sentènce. *order & judgement*  
 A herald on a scaffold made a "Ho!"  
 Till all the noise of people was y-do. *ceased*  
 2535 And when he saw the people of noise all still,  
 Thus showèd he the mighty dukè's will:  
 "The lord has of his high discretìon  
 Considered that it were destruction  
 To gentle blood to fighten in the guise *the manner*  
 2540 Of mortal battle now in this emprise; *enterprise*  
 Wherefore, to shapen that they shall not die,  
 He will his firstè purpose modify: *ensure*  
 No man, therefóre, on pain of loss of life,  
 No manner shot, nor pole-ax, nor short knife *missile*  
 2545 Into the listès send or thither bring,  
 Nor short-sword for to stoke with point biting, *to stab*  
 No man ne draw nor bear it by his side.  
 Nor no man shall unto his fellow ride  
 But one course with a sharp y-grounden spear.  
 2550 Foin, if him list, on foot, himself to were. *Thrust if he likes / defend*

- And he that is at mischief shall be take,  
 And not slain, but be brought unto the stake  
 That shall ordainèd be on either side;<sup>1</sup>  
 But thither he shall by force, and there abide.
- 2555 And if so fallè the chieftain be take  
 On either side, or elsè slay his make,  
 No longer shall the tourneyingè last.  
 God speedè you: go forth and lay on fast.  
 With long sword and with maces fight your fill.
- 2560 Go now your way. This is the lordè's will."  
 The voice of people touched the heaven,  
 So loudè crièd they with merry steven:  
 "God savè such a lord that is so good;  
 He willeth no destruction of blood."
- 2565 Up go the trumpets and the melody,  
 And to the lists rideth the company,  
 By ordinance, throughout the city large,  
 Hangèd with cloth of gold and not with serge.  
 Full like a lord this noble Duke gan ride,
- 2570 These two Thebans upon either side,  
 And after rode the Queen and Emily,  
 And after that another company  
 Of one and other after their degree.  
 And thus they passen throughout the city,
- 2575 And to the listès camè they betime,  
 It was not of the day yet fully prime.

*overcome / captured*  
*surrender post*  
*set up*

*befall / leader*  
*opponent*

*voice*

*In order / through*

*by rank*  
*pass through*  
*in good time*

*All spectators take their places and the tournament begins*

*mid-morning*

- When set was Theseus full rich and high,  
 Hippolyta the queen and Emily,  
 And other ladies in degrees about,
- 2580 Unto the seats presseth all the rout,  
 And westward through the gatès under Mart  
 Arcite and eke the hundred of his part,

*ranks*

*the crowd*

*Mars*

*party*

---

<sup>1</sup> At the edge of the *lists*, the tournament place, stakes have been set up to serve as a kind of sideline; any warrior captured and forced to the sideline is out of the fight.

- With banner red is entered right anon.  
 And in that selfè moment Palamon *same*
- 2585 Is under Venus eastward in the place,  
 With banner white and hardy cheer and face. *brave*  
 In all the world, to seeken up and down,  
 So even without variation *evenly matched*  
 There n'erè suchè companiès tway; *weren't two such*
- 2590 For there was none so wisè that could say  
 That any had of other advantáge  
 Of worthiness nor of estate nor age, *Of bravery or rank*  
 So even were they chosen for to guess;  
 And in two ringès fairè they them dress. *they get ready*
- 2595 When that their namès read were every one,  
 That in their number guilè was there none, *(So)that / cheating*  
 Then were the gates shut and cried was loud:  
 "Do now your devoir, youngè knightès proud." *duty*  
 The heralds left their pricking up and down. *spurring*
- 2600 Now ringen trumpets loud and clarion. *bugle*  
 There is no more to say, but east and west  
 In go the spears full sadly in the rest, *tightly*  
 In goes the sharpè spur into the side,  
 There see men who can joust and who can ride.
- 2605 There shiveren shaftès upon shieldès thick, *spear shafts split*  
 He feeleth through the heartè-spoon the prick. *He = One / breast bone*  
 Up springen spearès twenty foot on height,  
 Out go the swordès as the silver bright,  
 The helmets they to-hewen and to-shred, *"to" is intensive*
- 2610 Out burst the blood with sternè streamès red, *gushing*  
 With mighty maces the bones they to-burst;  
*He* through the thickest of the throng gan thrust. *"He" = one*  
 There stumble steedès strong and down goes all.  
*He* rolleth under foot as does a ball, *"He" = another*
- 2615 *He* foineth on his feet with his truncheon,  
 And *he* him hurtleth with his horse adown,  
*He* through the body is hurt and sithen take, *& then captured*  
 Maugre his head, and brought unto the stake, *Against his will*  
 As forward was; right there he must abide. *agreement was*
- 2620 Another led is on that other side.

- And some time does them Theseus to rest, *makes them*  
 Them to refresh and drinken if them lest. *if they wish*  
 Full oft a-day have thesè Thebans two  
 Together met and wrought his fellow woe. *caused*  
 2625 Unhorsèd has each other of them tway. *two*  
 There was no tiger in Vale of Galgophay,  
 When that her whelp is stole when it is lite, *little*  
 So cruel in the hunt as is Arcite,  
 For jealous heart, upon this Palamon.  
 2630 Ne in Belmary there n'is so fell lion, *fierce*  
 That hunted is or for his hunger wood, *mad with hunger*  
 Ne of his prey desireth so the blood,  
 As Palamon to slay his foe Arcite.  
 The jealous strokès on their helmets bite, *angry blows*  
 2635 Out runneth blood on both their sidès red.

*Palamon is captured*

- Some time an end there is of every deed,  
 For ere the sun unto the restè went, *before sunset*  
 The strongè king Emetrius gan hent *seized*  
 This Palamon as he fought with Arcite,  
 2640 And made his sword deep in his flesh to bite,  
 And by the force of twenty is he take,  
 Unyolden, and y-drawn to the stake. *Unyielding*  
 And in the rescue of this Palamon,  
 The strongè king Lygurge is born adown,  
 2645 And King Emetrius, for all his strength,  
 Is borne out of his saddle a swordè's length,  
 So hit him Palamon ere he were take.  
 But all for naught: he brought was to the stake.  
 His hardy heartè might him helpè naught;  
 2650 He must abidè when that he was caught,  
 By force and eke by composition. *and as agreed*  
 Who sorroweth now but woeful Palamon,  
 That must no morè go again to fight?

*Theseus announces the victor; Venus sulks; Saturn strikes*

- And when that Theseus haddè seen this sight,  
 2655 Unto the folk that foughten thus each one  
 He crièd, "Whoa! No more, for it is done.  
 I will be truè judge and not party. *partial*  
 Arcite of Thebès shall have Emily,  
 That by his fortune has her fair y-won." *fairly*
- 2660 Anon there is a noise of people begun  
 For joy of this, so loud and high withall,  
 It seemèd that the listès shouldè fall.  
 What can now fairè Venus do above?  
 What says she now? What does this queen of love,  
 2665 But weepeth so for wanting of her will, *not getting her way*  
 Till that her tearès in the listès fell.  
 She said: "I am ashamed, doubtèless."  
 Saturnus said: "Daughter, hold thy peace.  
 Mars has his will, his knight has all his boon. *prayer*
- 2670 And, by my head, thou shalt be easèd soon."  
 The trumpers with the loudè minstrelcy, *trumpeters / music*  
 The heralds that full loudè yell and cry,  
 Be in their weal for joy of daun Arcite. *Are glad*  
 But hearken me, and stinteth noise a lite *a little*
- 2675 Which a miracle there befell anon! *What a / shortly*  
 This fierce Arcite has off his helm y-done, *had doffed*  
 And on a courser for to show his face, *war-horse*  
 He pricketh endalong the largè place, *rides along / arena*  
 Looking upward on this Emily,
- 2680 And she again him cast a friendly eye. *towards him*  
 For women, as to speaken in commune, *generally*  
 They follow all the favour of Fortúne,  
 And she was all his cheer as in his heart. *joy*  
 Out of the ground a Fury infernal start, *shot*
- 2685 From Pluto sent at request of Satúrn,  
 For which his horse for fearè 'gan to turn  
 And leap aside, and foundered as he leaped. *stumbled*  
 And ere that Árcité may taken keep, *before / act*  
 He pight him on the pommel of his head, *pitched / crown*
- 2690 That in the place he lay as he were dead, *(So) that*

His breast to-bursten with his saddle-bow.<sup>1</sup>  
 As black he lay as any coal or crow,  
 So was the blood y-runen in his face.  
 Anon he was y-borne out of the place,  
 2695 With heartè sore to Theseus' palace.  
 Then was he carven out of his harness, *cut / armor*  
 And in a bed y-brought full fair and blive, *quickly*  
 For he was yet in memory and alive, *still conscious*  
 And always crying after Emily.

*Activities after the tournament*

2700 Duke Theseus with all his company  
 Is comen home to Athens his city  
 With allè bliss and great solemnity.  
 Albeit that this áventure was fall,<sup>2</sup> *Although / accident*  
 He wouldè not discomforten them all. *upset everyone*  
 2705 Men said eke that Arcíte shall not die:  
 "He shall be healèd of his malady."  
 And of another thing they were as fain: *glad*  
 That of them allè was there none y-slain,  
 Al were they sore y-hurt, and namely one, *Although / especially*  
 2710 That with a spear was thirlèd his breast bone. *pierced*  
 To other woundès and to broken arms  
 Some haddè salvès and some haddè charms; *ointments / spells*  
 Fermacies of herbès and eke save *Concoctions / sage*  
 They drank, for they would their limbès have. *wante to keep*  
 2715 For which this noble Duke, as he well can,  
 Comfórteth and honóúreth every man,  
 And madè revel all the longè night  
 Unto the strangè lordès, as was right. *foreign lords*  
 Ne there was holden no discomfiting, *disgrace*  
 2720 But as a joust or as a tourneying,  
 For soothly there was no discomfiture, *disgrace*

---

<sup>1</sup> 2691: "His breast torn open by the bow at the front of the saddle" which he has somehow struck in his fall.

<sup>2</sup> 2703: "Although this accident had occurred"

- For falling n'is not but an áventure, *only accidental*  
 Nor to be led by force unto the stake,  
 Unyolden, and with twenty knights y-take, *Unsurrendering*  
 2725 One persón alone, withouten mo' *unaided*  
 And harried forth by armè, foot, and toe  
 And eke his steedè driven forth with staves,  
 With footmen, bothè yeomen and eke knaves--  
 It n'as aretted him no villainy; *held no disgrace*  
 2730 There may no man clepen it cowardy. *call it cowardice*  
 For which anon Duke Theseus let cry-- *caused to be announced*  
 To stinten allè rancour and envy-- *stop*  
 The gree as well of one side as of other, *reward*  
 And either side alike as other's brother,  
 2735 And gave them giftès after their degree, *according to rank*  
 And fully held a feastè dayès three,  
 And cónveyèd the kingès worthily *accompanied*  
 Out of his town a journey largèly. *a full day's ride*  
 And home went every man the rightè way,  
 2740 There was no more but "Farewell, have good day."  
 Of this battle I will no more endite,  
 But speak of Palamon and of Arcite.

*Arcite's injury does not heal*

- Swelleth the breast of Árcite, and the sore  
 Encreaseth at his heartè more and more;  
 2745 The clothered blood, for any leechcraft, *despite doctoring*  
 Corrupteth, and is in his bouk y-left, *body*  
 That neither vein-blood nor ventusing, *blood letting / cupping*  
 Nor drink of herbès may be his helping.  
 The virtue expulsíve or animal *immune system*  
 2750 From thilkè virtue clepèd natural  
 Ne may the venom voiden nor expell;<sup>1</sup> *poison overcome*  
 The pipès of his lungs began to swell,

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<sup>1</sup> 2749-51: "thilke virtue": that power, ability ; in medieval medicine the "animal" power was in the brain, the "natural" power in the liver. In this case the appropriate "virtue" was unable to overcome the infection.

- And every lacert in his breast adown *muscle*  
 Is shent with venom and corruption. *destroyed*  
 2755 Him gaineth neither, for to get his life, *It helps not*  
 Vomit upward, nor downward laxative.  
 All is to-bursten thilkè region; *that part of body*  
 Nature has now no domination; *no control*  
 And certainly, where Nature will not work,  
 2760 Farewell, physic, go bear the man to church.  
 This all and sum: that Árcita must die, *In short*  
 For which he sendeth after Emily, *sends for*  
 And Palamon that was his cousin dear.

*His last will and testament*

- Then said he thus, as you shall after hear:  
 2765 "Not may the woeful spirit in mine heart *Tell even a bit*  
 Declare a point of all my sorrows smart  
 To you, my lady, that I lovè most;  
 But I bequeath the service of my ghost *spirit*  
 To you aboven every creätüre  
 2770 Since that my lifè may no longer dure. *last*  
 Alas the woe! Alas the painès strong  
 That I for you have suffered, and so long!  
 Alas the death! Alas, mine Emily!  
 Alas, departing of our company! *parting*  
 2775 Alas, mine heart's queen! Alas, my wife!<sup>1</sup>  
 Mine heartè's lady, ender of my life.  
 What is this world? What asketh man to have?  
 Now with his love, now in his coldè grave  
 Alone, withouten any company.  
 2780 Farewell, my sweetè foe, mine Emily,  
 And softè take me in your armès tway, *two arms*  
 For love of God, and hearken what I say:  
 I have here with my cousin Palamon  
 Had strife and rancour many a day agone

---

<sup>1</sup> 2775: wife: In Boccaccio's "Teseida," Chaucer's source for this tale, Arcite and Emily marry after his victory.



- 2785 For love of you, and for my jealousy.  
 And Jupiter so wise my soulè gie *guide*  
 To speaken of a servant properly *a lover*  
 With allè circumstances truly,  
 That is to sayen, truth, honouúr, knighthood,  
 2790 Wisdom, humbless, estate, and high kindred, *rank*  
 Freedom, and all that 'longeth to that art, *generosity / belongs*  
 So Jupiter have of my soulè part,  
 As in this world right now ne know I none  
 So worthy to be loved as Palamon,  
 2795 That serveth you and will do all his life.  
 And if that ever you shall be a wife,  
 Forget not Palamon, the gentle man."  
 And with that word his speech to faile gan;  
 For from his feet up to his breast was come  
 2800 The cold of death that had him overcome.  
 And yet moreover, for in his armès two  
 The vital strength is lost and all ago;  
 Only the intellect withouten more,  
 That dwellèd in his heartè sick and sore,  
 2805 Gan failen when the heartè feltè death.  
 Duskèd his eyen two and failèd breath,  
 But on his lady yet he cast his eye.  
 His lastè word was: "Mercy, Emily."  
 His spirit changed house and wentè there  
 2810 As I came never, I can not tellen where; *As I was never there*  
 Therefore I stint, I am no divinister: *I stop / no theologian*  
 Of soulès find I not in this register, *this source?*  
 Ne me ne list thilke opinions to tell *I don't wish*  
 Of them, though that they writen where they dwell.<sup>1</sup>  
 2815 Arcite is cold, there Mars his soul gie. *guide*

*The mourning for Arcite. The funeral*

Now will I speaken forth of Emily.

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<sup>1</sup> 2813-14: "And I don't want to give the opinions of those who write about the afterworld" seems to be the general meaning.

Shright Emily and howleth Palamon, *Shrieked*  
 And Theseus his sister took anon *sister -in-law*  
 Swooning, and bore her from the corpse away.  
 2820 What helpeth it to tarry forth the day *take all day*  
 To tellen how she wept both eve and morrow?  
 For in such cases women have such sorrow,  
 When that their husbands be from them a-go, *gone*  
 That for the morè part they sorrow so,  
 2825 Or elsè fall in such a malady,  
 That at the lastè certainly they die.  
 Infinite be the sorrows and the tears  
 Of oldè folk and folk of tender years  
 In all the town for death of this Theban;  
 2830 For him there weepeth bothè child and man.  
 So greatè weeping was there none, certáin,  
 When Hector was y-brought all fresh y-slain  
 To Troy. Alas, the pity that was there,  
 Cratching of cheekès, rending eke of hair: *Scratching / also*  
 2835 "Why wouldest thou be dead," these women cry,  
 "And haddest gold enough and Emily?" <sup>1</sup>  
 No man mightè gladden Theseus  
 Saving his oldè father Egeus,  
 That knew this worldè's transmutation,  
 2840 As he had seen it change both up and down,  
 Joy after woe, and woe after gladness;  
 And showèd them example and likeness:  
 "Right as there dièd never man," quod he,  
 "That he ne lived in earth in some degree,  
 2845 Right so there livèd never man," he said,  
 "In all this world that some time he ne died.  
 This world n'is but a thoroughfare full of woe,  
 And we be pilgrims passing to and fro.  
 Death is an end of every worldly sore."  
 2850 And overall this yet said he muchel more  
 To this effect, full wisely to exhort

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<sup>1</sup> 2835-6: It is difficult to decide what to make of the sentiment expressed in these two lines which seem singularly unapt at this point.

	The people that they should them recomfort.	<i>take comfort</i>
	Duke Theseus with all his busy cure	<i>care</i>
	Casteth now wherè that the sepulture	<i>Considers / burial</i>
2855	Of good Arcite may best y-makèd be, And eke most honourable in his degree.	
	And at the last he took conclusion	<i>made decision</i>
	That there as first Arcite and Palamon	<i>there where</i>
	Haddè for love the battle them between,	
2860	That in the selfè grovè, sweet and green, There as he had his amorous desires,	<i>self same</i>
	His còmplaint, and for love his hottè fires,	<i>song of lament</i>
	He wouldè make a fire in which the office	<i>rites</i>
	Funeral he mightè all accomplish,	<i>"funeral" is an adj.</i>
2865	And let anon command to hack and hew The oakès old, and lay them in a row, In colpons well arrayèd for to burn.	<i>promptly gave</i>
	His officers with swiftè feet they run And ride anon at his commandèment,	
2870	And after this Theseus has y-sent After a bier, and it all overspread	<i>Sent for</i>
	With cloth of gold, the richest that he had, And of the samè suit he clad Arcite,	<i>material</i>
	Upon his handès two his glovès white,	
2875	Eke on his head a crown of laurel green, And in his hand a sword full bright and keen.	
	He laid him, bare the visage, on the bier.	<i>face uncovered</i>
	Therewith he wept that pity was to hear, And for the people shouldè see him all,	<i>so that all the people</i>
2880	When it was day he brought him to the hall That roareth of the crying and the sound.	<i>echoes with</i>
	Then came this woeful Theban Palamon, With fluttery beard and ruggy ashy hairs,	<i>scraggly / rough</i>
	In clothès black, y-droppèd all with tears,	
2885	And passing other of weeping, Emily, The ruefullest of all the company.	<i>surpassing</i> <i>saddest</i>
	In as much as the servicè should be The morè noble and rich in his degree,	<i>acc. to his rank</i>
	Duke Theseus let forth three steedès bring	

- 2890 That trapped were in steel all glittering,  
 And covered with the arms of Daun Arcite. *Sir A.*  
 Upon these steeds that weren great and white,  
 There satten folk of which one bore his shield; *There sat*  
 Another his spear up in his handès held;
- 2895 The thirdè bore with him his bow Turkish.  
 Of burned gold was the case and eke th' harness, *burnished / armor*  
 And ridden forth a pace with sorrowful cheer  
 Toward the grove, as you shall after hear.  
 The noblest of the Greekès that there were
- 2900 Upon their shoulders carried the bier,  
 With slackè pace, and eyen red and wet, *slow march*  
 Throughout the city by the master street, *main street*  
 That spread was all with black. And wonder high  
 Right of the samè is the street y-wry. *covered*
- 2905 Upon the right hand went old Egeus,  
 And on that other side Duke Theseus,  
 With vessels in their hands of gold full fine, *refined*  
 All full of honey, milk, and blood, and wine.  
 Eke Palamon with full great company *And*
- 2910 And after that came woeful Emily,  
 With fire in hand, as was that time the guise *fashion*  
 To do the office of funeral service.  
 High labour and full great apparreling  
 Was at the service and the fire-making,
- 2915 That with his greenè top the heaven raught, *its / reached*  
 And twenty fathom of breadth the armès straight, *stretched*  
 This is to say, the boughs were so broad.  
 Of straw first there was laid many a load.<sup>1</sup>  
 But how the fire was makèd upon height,
- 2920 Nor eke the namès how the trees hight-- *were called*  
 As oak, fir, birch, asp, alder, holm, poplar,  
 Willow, elm, plane, ash, box, chestain, lind, laurer,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2919: Here begins what has been called the longest sentence in Chaucer's poetry and perhaps the longest *occupatio* in English, a rhetorical feature as dear to Chaucer and to the Middle Ages generally as the catalogue which it is also. *Occupatio* is the pretence that the author does not have the time, space or talent to describe what he then sets out to describe. The catalogue is self explaining, if not self justifying to modern taste.

- Maple, thorn, beech, hazel, yew, whippletree--  
 How they were felled shall not be told for me, *by me*  
 2925 Nor how the goddès runnen up and down, *[g. of the woods]*  
 Disherited of their habitation  
 In which they wonèden in rest and peace: *used to live*  
 Nymphs, fauns, and hamadryadès; *wood deities*  
 Nor how the beastès and the birdès all  
 2930 Fledden for fearè when the wood was fall; *felled*  
 Nor how the ground aghast was of the light  
 That was not wont to see the sunnè bright; *accustomed*  
 Nor how the fire was couchèd first with stree *laid w. straw*  
 And then with dry stickès cloven a-three, *cut in three*  
 2935 And then with greenè wood and spicery, *aromatic wood*  
 And then with cloth of gold and with perry, *jewelry*  
 And garlands hanging full of many a flower,  
 The myrrh, th'incense with all so great savour,  
 Nor how Arcité lay among all this,  
 2940 Nor what richness about the body is,  
 Nor how that Emily, as was the guise, *custom*  
 Put in the fire of funeral service,  
 Nor how she swoonèd when men made the fire,  
 Nor what she spoke, nor what was her desire,  
 2945 Nor what jewels men in the firè cast  
 When that the fire was great and burnèd fast,  
 Nor how some cast their shield and some their spear,  
 And of the vestèments which that therè were,  
 And cuppès full of milk and wine and blood  
 2950 Into the fire that burnt as it were wood; *mad*  
 Nor how the Greekès with a hugè rout *crowd*  
 Thricè riden all the fire about,  
 Upon the left hand, with a loud shouting,  
 And thricè with their spearès clattering,  
 2955 And thricè how the ladies gan to cry,  
 And how that led was homeward Emily;  
 Nor how Arcite is burnt to ashes cold;  
 Nor how that lichè-wakè was y-hold *wake for dead*  
 All thilkè night; nor how the Greekès play *that night*  
 2960 The wakè-plays; ne keep I nought to say *funeral games*

Who wrestleth best naked with oil anoint,  
 Nor who that bore him best in no disjoint.<sup>1</sup>  
 I will not tellen all how that they gon go  
 Homè to Athens when the play is done,  
 2965 But shortly to the point then will I wend,  
 And maken of my longè tale an end.

*Theseus sends for Palamon and Emily*

By process and by length of certain years, *course of time*  
 All stinted is the mourning and the tears *ceased*  
 Of Greekès by one general assent.  
 2970 Then seemèd me there was a parliament *I gather*  
 At Athens, upon a certain point and case;  
 Among the whichè points y-spoken was  
 To have with certain countries álliance,  
 And have fully of Thebans obeïsance; *submission*  
 2975 For which noble Theseus anon  
 Let senden after gentle Palamon, *Had P. sent for*  
 Unwist of him what was the cause and why. *Without telling*  
 But in his blackè clothès sorrowfully  
 He came at his commandèment in hie. *in haste*  
 2980 Then sentè Theseus for Emily.  
 When they were set, and hushed was all the place,  
 And Theseus abiden has a space *a while*  
 Ere any word came from his wisè breast, *Before*  
 His eyen set he there as was his lest, *where he wished*  
 2985 And with a sad viságe he sighèd still,  
 And after that right thus he said his will:

*His speech about Destiny*

"The Firstè Mover of the cause above,  
 When he first made the fairè Chain of Love,  
 Great was th'effect, and high was his intent; *result*  
 2990 Well wist he why and what thereof he meant. *knew he*

---

<sup>1</sup> 2962: "Nor who came off best, with least difficulty" (?)

- For with that fairè Chain of Love he bound  
 The fire, the air, the water, and the land  
 In certain boundès that they may not flee.  
 That samè Prince and that Mover," quod he,
- 2995 "Hath 'stablished in this wretched world adown *below*  
 Certain dayès and duration  
 To all that is engendred in this place,  
 Over the whichè day they may not pace, *Past which*  
 All may they yet those dayès well abridge, *Although / shorten*  
 3000 There needeth no authority to allege, *cite authorities*  
 For it is provèd by experience,  
 But that me list declaren my senténce. *I wish / opinion*  
 Then may men by this order well discern  
 That thilkè Mover stable is and etern.
- 3005 Then may men knowè, but it be a fool, *except for*  
 That every part deriveth from its whole,  
 For Nature has not taken its beginning  
 Of no part'y or cantele of a thing, *part or bit*  
 But of a thing that perfect is and stable,  
 3010 Descending so till it be còrrumpable. *corruptible*  
 And therefore for his wisè purveyance *providence*  
 He has so well beset his ordinance *so ordered things*  
 That species of thingès and progressions  
 Shall endure by successions,
- 3015 And not etern, withouten any lie.  
 This mayst thou understand and see at eye.<sup>1</sup>  
 Lo, the oak that has so long a nourishing  
 From timè that it first beginneth spring,  
 And has so long a life, as you may see,  
 3020 Yet at the lastè wasted is the tree.  
 Consider eke how that the hardè stone  
 Under our foot on which we ride and gon, *and walk*  
 Yet wasteth it as it lies by the way; *wears away*

---

<sup>1</sup> 3005-16: Every part is part of a whole, and is therefore imperfect. Only the perfect, i.e. God, is whole and eternal. Nature itself derives directly from God, but each part of it is less perfect because further removed from the great One. Everything imperfect is destined to die. But, though each individual is perishable, the species itself has some kind of eternity.

- The broadè river some time waxeth dry; *becomes*  
 3025 The greatè townès see we wane and wend; *fade and disappear*  
 Then may you see that all this thing has end.  
 Of man and woman see we well also  
 That needs, in one of thesè termès two, *periods*  
 This is to say, in youth or else in age,  
 3030 He must be dead, the king as shall a page:<sup>1</sup> *He = everyone*  
 Some in his bed, some in the deepè sea, *One ... another*  
 Some in the largè field, as you may see. *open field*  
 There helpeth naught, all goes that ilkè way. *the same way*  
 Then may I say that all this thing must die.

*Destiny is the will of Jove*

- 3035 What maketh this but Jupiter the king, *Who causes this?*  
 That is the Prince and cause of allè thing,  
 Converting all unto his proper well *its own source?*  
 From which it is derivèd, sooth to tell!  
 And here-against no creätüre alive *against this*  
 3040 Of no degree, availeth for to strive. *any rank*  
 Then is it wisdom, as it thinketh me,  
 To maken virtue of necessity, *it seems to me*  
 And take it well that we may not eschew, *what we can't avoid*  
 And namèly what to us all is due.  
 3045 And whoso groucheth aught, he does folly, *whoever complains*  
 And rebel is to Him that all may gie. *directs everything*  
 And certainly a man has most honoúr  
 To dien in his excellence and flower,  
 When he is siker of his goodè name. *sure*  
 3050 Then has he done his friend nor him no shame;  
 And gladder ought his friend be of his death  
 When with honoúr up yielded is his breath,  
 Than when his name appallèd is for age, *dimmed*  
 For all forgotten is his vassalage. *service*

---

1

3027-3030: The passage states the obvious: that every man and woman must die, young or old, king or servant. The awkward syntax is about as follows: "man and woman ... needs ... be dead" ; *must be* repeats *needs be*, and *he* refers back to *man and woman*.



3055 Then is it best, as for a worthy fame,  
To dien when that he is best of name.

*at height of h. fame*

*He reminds them that Arcite died at the height of his fame*

The contrary of all this is wilfulness.  
Why grouchen we, why have we heaviness,  
That good Arcite, of chivalry the flower,  
3060 Departed is with duity and honour  
Out of this foulè prison of this life?  
Why grouchen here his cousin and his wife  
Of his welfare that loveth them so well?  
Can he them thank? Nay, God wot, never a deal  
3065 That both his soul and eke himself offend.  
And yet they may their lustès not amend.  
What may I conclude of this long serie,  
But after woe I rede us to be merry,  
And thanken Jupiter of all his grace;  
3070 And, erè we departen from this place,  
I redè that we make of sorrows two  
One perfect joyè, lasting evermo'.  
And look now where most sorrow is herein,  
There I will first amenden and begin.

*complain*

*homage*

*who offend both ...*

*their feelings*

*argument*

*I advise*

*suggest*

*Theseus wishes Palamon and Emily to marry*

3075 "Sister," quod he, "this is my full assent,  
With all th'advice here of my parliament:  
That gentle Palamon, your ownè knight,  
That serveth you with will and heart and might,  
And ever has done since you first him knew,  
3080 That you shall of your grace upon him rue  
And taken him for husband and for lord.  
Lene me your hand, for this is our accord:  
Let see now of your womanly pity.  
He is a kingè's brother's son, pardee,  
3085 And though he were a poorè bachelor,  
Since he has servéd you so many year  
And had for you so great adversity,

*take pity*

*Give*

*by God*

*knight*

It mustè be considered, 'lieveth me *believe me*  
 For gentle mercy aught to passen right.<sup>1</sup>  
 3090 Than said he thus to Palalmon the knight:  
 "I trow there needeth little sermoning *I imagine / urging*  
 To makè you assent unto this thing.  
 Come near and take your lady by the hand."

*They marry and live happily ever after*

Bitwixen them was made anon the bond  
 3095 That hightè matrimony or marriage, *That is called*  
 By all the council and the baronage.  
 And thus with allè bliss and melody  
 Hath Palamon y-wedded Emily.  
 And God, that all this widè world has wrought, *made*  
 3100 Send him his love that has it dear abought; *"him" = everyone*  
 For now is Palamon in allè weal, *happiness*  
 Living in bliss, in riches, and in heal, *health*  
 And Emily him loves so tenderly,  
 And he her serveth also gentilly,  
 3105 That never was there no word them between  
 Of jealousy or any other teen. *vexation*

Thus endeth Palamon and Emily,  
 And God save all this fairè company.  
 Amen

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<sup>1</sup> 3089: "Mercy is preferable to insisting on one's rights." The implication is that, by rights, she should be married to a man of higher rank than Palamon.