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Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales has long provided readers with entertainment and enlightenment into the customs of the Middle Ages. This study proposes that with an awareness of the Medieval concept of marriage, as it is introduced in the "Knight's Tale," the collection of tales assumes additional importance and seriousness of purpose.

The marriage theme incorporates three major influences upon the philosophy of the period: St. Augustine, Boethius, and the Bible. It combines these teachings with the idea of hierarchical order that pervades all aspects of Medieval life, beginning with the moral center of each individual and reflecting in the external facets of his life. The condition of man's moral being is evident in his relationship with his family, society, state, and church.

For the alert Christian reader of the fourteenth century, the "Knight's Tale" provides a pattern for the proper way to order one's life through marriage and to reach eventually the ultimate goal of Celestial Jerusalem. The tale also shows the consequences of a disordered life that leads to eternal Babylon and damnation. The remaining tales present both positive and negative aspects of the marriage theme introduced in the "Knight's Tale" and conclude with the hope of salvation for repentant sinners offered in the "Parson's Tale."

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE IN CHAUCER'S "KNIGHT'S TALE"

by

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CHAPTER I

THE THEME OF MARRIAGE IN THE KNIGHT'S TALE

The theme of marriage that Geoffrey Chaucer develops throughout the Canterbury Tales involves a much wider frame of reference than the obvious interpretation of the union between man and woman. The metaphor reflects much of the philosophy of the Middle Ages and pervades all aspects of the life of the Medieval man: his inner nature and values, his social obligations, his religious commitments, and his political responsibilities. Considered as a whole, the tales, through the marriage theme, provide instruction or guides that will lead the comprehending Christian through a properly ordered and structured life to eventual salvation. This instruction assimilates the beliefs and teachings of philosophers and men of letters important to the thinking man of the Middle Ages. The Canterbury Tales conveys that instruction through the Medieval concept of marriage.

The position of the "Knight's Tale" as the opening narrative indicates the importance of marriage and sets it up as a basis for comparing and considering the aspects of marriage depicted in the other tales. Significantly, then, Chaucer introduces the theme of marriage in the "Knight's Tale" first, through the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta and, finally, in the union of Palamon and Emelye. With his marriage to the

queen of the Amazons, Theseus, the exemplar of wisdom, establishes in his life the correct hierarchical order that is the goal of the Medieval Christian and provides the proper example for the younger couple. The remaining Canterbury Tales are variations of this same theme as the numerous facets of "marriage" are explored. In order to understand fully the significance of the tale and its emphasis upon order and the hierarchical structure of both man and society that are implied in the term "marriage," it is useful to consider the influences responsible for much of that thinking.

The idea of existing hierarchy pervades all areas of Medieval life. God is at the top of this hierarchy, and in descending order along the chain are reason, imagination, and, finally, the senses. Each point in the structure includes all that falls below it, but it does not include the steps that rise above it in the hierarchy. Boethius explains this in Book V, Prose 4 of the Consolatione:

> For the wit comprehendith withoute-forth the figure of the body of the man that is establisschid in the matere subgett; but the ymaginacioun comprehendith oonly the figure withoute the matere; resoun surmountith ymaginacioun and comprehendith by an universel lokynge the comune spece that is in the singuler peces; but the eighe of the intelligence is heyere, for it surmountith the envyrounynge of the universite, and loketh over that bi pure subtilte of thought thilke same symple forme of man that is perdurablely in the devyne thought. In which this oughte gretly to ben considered, that the heyeste strengthe to comprehenden thinges enbraseth and contienith the lowere strengthe; but the lowere strengthe ne ariseht

nat in no manere to the heyere strengthe.
(156-174)[1]

This rigid hierarchy exists in the order of creation, so that man, who comes at the middle of the chain, may fall to the level of the animal or beast, but he may not ascend in the hierarchy to become God, or Divine Intelligence. According to Medieval philosophy, this same pattern of order exists within man, himself. This inner hierarchy of man is a moral one in which reason, the faculty of man that places him just below God in the broader hierarchy, has ascendancy over passion or sensuality, the quality associated with animals. If man does not exercise his reason to dominate his animal passions, his inner hierarchy is overturned and he descends to the animal level. He is "torned into a beeste" (Boece, Bk. IV, Pr. 3, 127). Only through the exercise of his reason can man maintain his proper place in the hierarchy and function as a man, not an animal. When man's hierarchy is in order, he is said to be "married."

Three important influences upon Medieval thought are evident in the development of the marriage theme in the Canterbury Tales. These three are St. Augustine, Boethius, and the Bible. Both St. Augustine and Boethius emphasize the importance of God as the true source of wisdom and happiness and

[1]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1957), p. 379. Subsequent references to the works of Chaucer are from this edition.

the charity of the New Law of the New Testament as the binding force that maintains the hierarchy in man and in his life. The two philosophers stress that the failure to maintain one's proper relationship to God and to control one's baser instincts results in chaos, confusion, the "imprisonment" of man's mind, and sin, which isolates man from the hope of salvation promised in the New Testament. How Chaucer relates these tenets to his theme of marriage will become more apparent as the philosophies of St. Augustine and Boethius are considered in more detail and applied specifically to the "Knight's Tale."

More than any other single writer, St. Augustine is responsible for molding the Medieval mind.[2] He views all things, not in the specific light of philosophy or even of theological science, but in the light of Christian wisdom and charity.[3] He explains in Book IV, chapter 4 of his Confessions that his life represented a long quest for wisdom initiated by his reading of Cicero's Hortensius, an exhortation to philosophical wisdom and truth.[4] His search ends when he reaches the conclusion that conversion to wisdom is conversion to Christ, the wisdom of God, who is both light

[2]Armand A. Maurer, Medieval Philosophy (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 20.

[3]J. Martain, ed., A Monument to St. Augustine (London: Sneed and Ward, 1930), p. 211.

[4]St. Augustine, Confessions, trans. by William Watts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), I, 109.

to man's mind and strength to his will.[5] The similarity of the pattern of the Confessions and that of the "Knight's Tale" reveals Chaucer's knowledge of the writings of St. Augustine and, also, his concurrence with the emphasis upon wisdom. Through his character, Theseus, Chaucer depicts the man who, like St. Augustine, has successfully completed his search for wisdom, and who, because he now understands his relationship to God, the true source of wisdom and happiness, has formulated the proper inner hierarchy that establishes him as a "married" man.

St. Augustine's approach to philosophy reflects his concern with his own unhappiness, which he felt resulted from his disordered thinking and moral life, and his struggle to bring order into his mind.[6] This led him to God as the source of all order and happiness. Chaucer echoes this same philosophy in the "Firste Moevere" speech of Duke Theseus as the "Knight's Tale" approaches its conclusion, and Theseus explains to the younger couple, Emelye and Palamon, that God has established an order in the universe that he created and maintains this order with a "faire cheyne of love." Palamon's unhappiness throughout the tale has resulted from his disordered thinking and his failure to maintain his inner hierarchy by keeping passion subordinate to reason. St.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Martain, p. 3.

Augustine considers philosophy inseparable from religion since he feels that philosophers aim at happiness as do the Christians. It follows that since only Christians may know true happiness and they alone possess the means to attain it, true philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom, is, therefore, identical with true religion.[7]

In his treatise Against the Academicians, St. Augustine outlines his program for seeking this desired wisdom; he turns away from all things that mortal men consider to be good and sets for himself the goal of pursuing truth. He resolves to follow what he considers the two guides to wisdom, the authority of Christ and human reason, so that he apprehends truth not only by believing it, but also by understanding it.[8] Human reason is not enough; faith in Christ must come first to prepare the way for understanding. Once man accepts the truths of faith, reason intervenes to help him understand what he believes.[9] Theseus has accepted the fact that faith in God must come before human reason can function properly; his moral hierarchy is thus arranged in its correct order. He is a "married" man motivated throughout the tale

[7]St. Augustine, Of True Religion in Augustine: Earlier Writings, ed. and trans. by John H. S. Burleigh (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 230.

[8]St. Augustine, Against the Academicians, trans. by Sister Mary Garvey (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ. Press, 1957), p. 82.

[9]Ibid.

by the binding force of the love of the New Testament, charity. God is at the top of Theseus' moral hierarchy, and his reason is subordinate to God; his "marriage" is intact.

St. Augustine's preferred path to God is "from the exterior to the interior" or "from the Inferior to the Superior."[10] Man can be sure that the world appears to him as he perceives it; however, his perception may not be reality. Sense knowledge yields only opinions about reality and not truth.[11] To know the truth, man must discriminate between reality and false images of reality, and this judgement is to be found in the intellect and interior mind.[12] The hierarchy of reason is comprised of intellect, memory, and will.[13] Intellect and memory should remain dominant over will in order to maintain the hierarchical structure. When the will is subordinate, then the hierarchy is in order and the psyche reflects "the Trinity - - - and the image of God in man."[14] If the will becomes dominant, the image of God in man is corrupted as a result. Material objects should serve only to make man more aware of God. In the "Knight's Tale," Palamon

[10]Maurer, p. 8.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 9

[13]Ibid.

[14]D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach through Symbolism and Allegory," Speculum, 26 (1951), 26.

and Arcite value Emelye for herself, not as a creation that makes them more aware of the existence of God. In each of the two young men, the will for an external object dominates the interior intellect; reason is in conflict with passion; the moral hierarchy is overturned; thus, each represents to the Medieval audience an example of the "unmarried" man, ruled by his senses and in contrast to Theseus, man ruled by his reason.

In this same situation, Palamon and Arcite illustrate another aspect of the interior-exterior philosophy of St. Augustine. As the two young men first observe the lovely Emelye walking in the garden below their prison tower, they experience the three conditions of suggestion, delight and consent that Adam experienced in the Garden of Eden. Her appearance provokes willful desire and not an intellectual awareness of God. Like Adam they respond to the "flambe of delit" that accompanies the contemplation of the "fruyt," and thus follow the initial stages which eventually lead to a repetition of the Fall of Man. The significance of the situation becomes clear in the final tale when the Parson presents an allegorization of the Fall and concludes:

> There may ye seen that deedly synne hath, first suggestion of the feend, as sheweth heere by the naddre; and afterward, the delit of the flesh, as sheweth heere by Eve; and after that, the consentynge of resoun, as sheweth heere by Adam.
> (CT, X, 330)

The Serpent, representing suggestion, tempts Eve, representing passion, or willful desire. She succumbs to his suggestion and delights in it. In turn, Eve causes Adam, higher reason, to consent. The fall of the inner or moral hierarchy is reflected by their exterior expulsion from Paradise.[15]

The Parson explains that the Fall of Adam produced the stain of original sin, concupiscence of the flesh, and that all men are subject to it. Man may withstand the "enticing of his flesh," but if he fails to do so:

> . . . thus is synne accompliced by temptacioun, by delit, and by consentynge; and thanne is the synne cleped actueel.
> (CT, X, 356)

The Parson also points out that sin involves the subversion of the inner hierarchy of man:

> And ye shul understonde that in mannes synne is every manere of ordre or ordinaunce turned up-do-doun.
> (CT, X, 259)

Before the Fall, man possessed reason to know what is right and a will naturally inclined to desire what was known to him. On the other hand, the beasts had no reason, and their desires were controlled by a concupiscence necessary to perpetuate themselves and their species. When man fell his reason was corrupted and his will was misdirected so that he acquired the concupiscence of the beasts to insure his own

[15]D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 72-74.

propagation.[16] In the Augustinian philosophy of the Middle Ages, this concupiscence, together with the accompanying defect in reason, is the malady of original sin.[17] In man, it represents the corruption of good, the replacement of one kind of desire with another,[18] that can only be corrected through wisdom and charity.

This correction process requires the reestablishment of order and the proper hierarchy. In the Fall, man's will was misdirected[19] and allowed to dominate his intellect, thus upsetting the marriage between will and intellect. The marriage must be restored before reason, or intellect, can once more dominate the passionate will and cupidinous love can be replaced by charity.

Above all, St. Augustine is concerned with concentrating the resources of the heart and mind on his search for happiness, which he describes as "joy in truth." He is drawn to God, who is truth, as the center of his interest, and the force attracting him to this center is love.[20] This love that unites man to God is a supernatural gift bestowed by

[16] Ibid., p. 27.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] St. Augustine, Confessions, II, 391-392.

God Himself.[21] Fallen man has no strength of his own to choose the good. By himself, he is enslaved to his passions and to the world. This enslavement distracts him from his own soul and from God. In this state he does not enjoy the liberty of true marriage because he cannot use his freedom as he should. Liberty in the true sense is incompatible with sin.[22] Having lost his liberty by original sin, man can regain it only by the grace of God, but even then man can sin and lose at one stroke both grace and liberty. He enjoys perfect liberty only in the next life when he will be incapable of sinning.

Love, then, is the binding force of the hierarchy of marriage. It is at the center of the moral life of man; for God, Himself, as the Bible states in I John 4:16, is love.[23] Theseus reminds Palamon and Emelye of the binding force of love:

> The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
> When he first made the faire cheyne of love,
> Greet was th'effect, and heigh was his entente.
> Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente;
> For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
> The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
> In certyne boundes, that they may nat flee.
> (CT, I [A], 2987-2993)

St. Augustine recognizes two kinds of love: love of God,

[21]Maurer, p. 16.

[22]Ibid., p. 17.

[23]Ibid.

and love of self and the world.[24] The love of God is a marriage that unites men into the City of God, a spiritual society whose head is Christ and whose members reign eternally with Him in Heaven; but there is a City of the World, which embraces those who love the world and self rather than God and who suffer eternal punishment. Love is movement or locomotion from one thing to another; thus love of God is a movement away from cupidity and toward God. In the metaphor of marriage, movement is symbolized by pilgrimage. This draws together Chaucer's themes of marriage and pilgrimage.

The City of God is the anticipated destination of every Medieval Christian. Any pilgrimage during the Middle Ages, whether it is made to the Holy Land or to the shrine of a Christian martyr, as Chaucer's pilgrims undertake, or whether it is made on the knees in a cathedral, is ideally a figure for the pilgrimage of the Christian soul through the world's wilderness toward the Celestial Jerusalem.[25] This pilgrimage of the soul is not in itself a journey from place to place, but an inner movement between the two cities described by St. Augustine, one founded on charity and the other on cupidity.[26] Love guides the pilgrim and determines the

[24]Herbert A. Deane, The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 33.

[25]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 373.

[26]Ibid.

direction of his journey. The imagery of the pilgrimage is established in the "General Prologue" of the Tales and emphasized in the "Knight's Tale" in the only speech of wise Egeus, Theseus' father, when, offering consolation for the death of Arcite, he concludes:

> This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,
> And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.
> Deeth is an ende of evry worldly soore.
> (CT, I [A], 2847-2849)

The importance of the pilgrimage is realized with the final tale, "The Parson's Tale." In the prologue to his tale, the Parson states that Paul in his letter to Timothy has reproved those who waive aside the truth in favor of wretched and uncouth fables; he is, in his turn, not going to present "draf" to the group, but instead he is prepared to "sowen whete," offering "moralitee and vertuous mateere" that will serve:

> To showe yow the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
> That highte Jerusalem celestial.
> (CT, I [A], 49-51)

Thus, the term "pilgrimage" in the Canterbury Tales has not only a literal meaning of a journey to Canterbury, but also a double, spiritual meaning of a journey to the Celestial Jerusalem, that St. Augustine calls the City of God, or to the infernal Babylon, which he describes as the City of the World. However, only a "married" man motivated by love can make the pilgrimage to the City of God.

These concepts of wisdom, order, the inner hierarchy of man, love, the plight of the fallen man, pilgrimage, and the

ultimate goal of the City of God are an important part of St. Augustine's legacy to the Middle Ages. They are also central to the Medieval concept of marriage. God, the true source of wisdom, has established order in both the universe and in man and binds this order with charity. God is at the top of the hierarchical order of Creation followed in descending order by man and animals. The dominancy of God over man, and man over beast constitutes a "marriage." The same pattern of hierarchy is found in man himself; in this inner or moral hierarchy, reason must dominate, or be "married" to, passion. Failure to maintain the inner hierarchy leads to the breakdown of the external hierarchies of family, state, and church. When the inner hierarchy is no longer "married," chaos and sin result.

Love, or charity, not only binds the order of the universe, but it also is the motivating force of the "married" man. The disordered hierarchy results when man is motivated by the self-directed love, cupidity, rather than charity. Before the Fall, man possessed reason to know what was right and his will was naturally inclined to charity, but when Adam consented to the delight of temptation, his will was misdirected, his intellect or reason corrupted, and his fall complete. When man's reason is corrupted and subjugated to passion, his hierarchy is no longer "married," and the Fall of Adam is reenacted. In the Medieval interpretation of Pilgrimage, only the "married" man, whose inner hierarchy

was properly ordered, could make the successful pilgrimage to the City of God and salvation. Thus, the same concepts that St. Augustine expresses in the service of Christian wisdom dominate the "Knight's Tale" and fuse in the metaphor of marriage that Chaucer uses for expounding his own Christian viewpoint.

Boethius, a student of philosophy born in the year 480,[27] provides one of the main channels by which the ideas of St. Augustine were passed on to the Middle Ages, since precedent for many of Boethius' ideas can be found in the works of the earlier philosopher. Chaucer's Boece is a translation of De Consolatione Philosophiae of Boethius, and his familiarity with its content is apparent in the "Knight's Tale," where he incorporates the widely-accepted teachings of Boethius into his development of the marriage theme.

For Boethius, as for St. Augustine, philosophy is wisdom, or the pursuit and love of God. Riches, honors, power, fame and pleasure are considered objects of desire, gifts of fortune that man erroneously pursues as he strives to attain perfect good. However, a man who seeks these limited means of happiness is doomed to disappointment, for they cannot fully satisfy, nor are they constant. In seeking them, man's inner hierarchy is disordered: he allows his passion to dominate his reason. This is the same condition that St.

[27]Maurer, p. 384.

Augustine described as the will dominating the intellect. Because his thinking is disordered, man can no longer reason clearly and becomes ruled by concupiscent passion. His moral hierarchy no longer represents the marriage of reason to sensuality, and he is moved by cupidity, rather than charity. In the "Knight's Tale," Palamon and Arcite represent such men as they are moved by cupidity in their pursuit of Emelye, a gift of Fortune, and become foils for Theseus, the married man ruled by charity.

Only God, the Supreme Good and source of perfect happiness, can fully satisfy the desires of man's rational nature. Lady Philosophy explains to Boethius:

> . . . we owe to graunte that the sovereyn God is ryght ful of sovereyn parfit good. And we han establisscheed that the sovereyne good is verray blisfulnesse. Thanne moot it nedis be that verray blisfulnesse is set in sovereyn God.
>
> (Bk. III, Pr. 10, 57-62)

In Book III of the Consolatione Boethius presents his philosophy that the happiness which the love of God affords cannot be taken away through misfortune, for it is within man and wholly dependent on his own rational control. The liberating power of the mind, the self-mastery which comes from a just estimate of the limited value of material, or transitory, satisfactions is the basis of Boethius' ethical doctrine. The "married" man, who asserts his reason above his passion and properly evaluates the unimportance of material

possessions, is not dependent upon the gifts of Fortune for his happiness; therefore, he can rise above Fortune. Fortune is the wrong way of regarding fate, but all men are subject to her in the sense that uncertainty and change, pleasure, anxiety, and depression are the ordinary lot of man.

The Medieval mind distinguishes two "natures" with reference to man, one "nature" which made virtue natural before the Fall, and one which made vice natural thereafter.[28] It is thought to be the business of man to "restore nature" by following virtue, since vice is, with reference to Creation, "unnatural" in a vicious sense. Boethius maintains in Book III, Prose 9 of the Consolatione that the man who pursues one partial good, or gift of Fortune, such as delight, loses not only the one he pursues, but all the others as well (94-121). Through inner "marriage" man may "restore nature," but the man who subjects himself to Fortune falls in the footsteps of Adam.

In the "Knight's Tale," the young men, Palamon and Arcite, are subjected to the whims of Fortune, and the Theban women remind Theseus of the instability of her nature. They are all victims of Fortune and, since they lack the "married" hierarchy, they allow themselves to be governed by cupidity and cannot rise above their misfortune. In their failure to exercise reason over sensuality, they pursue the transient

[28]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 398.

happiness offered by the material gifts of Fortune. They lack the wisdom of the "married" man to comprehend that true happiness can be found only in God. They lack marriage in their moral or inner hierarchies.

Boethius maintains that it is, nevertheless, possible for the man of reason to bear misfortune with equanimity of spirit:

> . . . it ne semeth nat to the wise man to beren it grevously as ofte as he is lad into the stryf of fortune . . . to conferen his sapience. For therefore it is called 'vertu' for that it sustenith and enforceth by his strengthes that it nis nat overcomen by adversities.
> (Bk. IV, Pr. 7, 79-89)

In Book II of the Consolatione, Boethius stresses that the man of reason may rise above fortune to the enjoyment of happiness based on a wise appraisal of the true values of things man naturally desires. In the "Knight's Tale," Theseus represents just such a man of reason whose moral hierarchy is properly structured. His will or concupiscent desire is subordinated to his reason, so that he is not directed by the cupidity of the City of the World, or Babylon, but rather by the charity that leads man to the City of God, Celestial Jerusalem. The wise Theseus is, in every connotation of the word, a "married" man. His wisdom leads him to acknowledge the existence of a Divine Power that governs the individual and the universe.

Desire for external objects of Fortune enslaves man

according to Boethius; thus he follows St. Augustine in the belief that the body is the prison of the mind or soul. In Book V, he explains that the human soul is more free when it is engaged in contemplation of the Divine Mind, less free when it is joined to the body, and still less free when it is bound by earthly fetters. Man is in utter slavery when he loses possession of his reason and gives himself wholly to vice:

> But the soules of men moten nedes be more fre when thei loken hem in the speculacioun of lokynge of the devyne thought; and lasse fre when thei slyden into the bodyes; and yit lasse fre when thei ben gadrid togidre and comprehended in earthli membres. But the laste servage is whan that thei ben yeven to vices and han ifalle fro the possessioun of hir propre resoun.
> (Bk. V, Pr. 2, 26-34)

Again we must consider the two "unmarried" men, Palamon and Arcite. The two fail to realize that they are imprisoned by their cupidity, not by the stone walls of the tower in which they are confined. By yielding to the temptation of Emelye and consenting to their passions, they lose possession of their reason and give themselves completely to cupidity. This is the ultimate slavery: they are captives of their own freedom even after they are removed from the tower, because they have allowed passion to exercise dominance over reason and turn the moral hierarchy "up-so-doun." The marriage of reason to sensuality is destroyed.

In Books II and IV of the Consolatione, Boethius

projects the importance of marriage as he echoes St. Augustine in presenting the Medieval concept that love is the principle of harmony in the universe. Divine love establishes and governs the changing and particularly discordant universe; it also governs the microcosm, man, in his relations with others:

> This love halt togidres peples joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrement of marriages of chaste loves; and love enditeth lawes to trewe felawes. O weleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede your courages.
> (Bk. II, Mtr. 8, 21-26)

The Creator orders and guides all things that he has placed in motion: he maintains perfect "marriage." He governs the "parfytly ymakid" world by "perdurable resoun" and binds the elements by "numbres propercionables." He extends:

> . . . the comune love to alle thingis, and alle thinges axen to be holden by the fyn of good. For eles ne myghten they nat lasten yif thei ne comen nat eftsones ayein, by love retorned, to the cause that hath yeven hem beinge that is to seyn, to God.
> (Bk. IV, Mtr. 6, 54-60)

With love at the center of the moral life of man, the ordering institution which directs the will, the source of moral action, is figuratively, marriage. In the final tale of the Canterbury Tales, the "Parson's Tale," a prose sermon on the proper preparation for confession and salvation and the true nature of the Seven Deadly Sins, Chaucer identifies Christ as "the Author of Matrimony" and explains that the sacrament of marriage is a noble and honourable one established in Paradise, in the state of innocence, in order to

multiply mankind to the service of God. The Parson relates that Christ was born into wedlock, and in order to sanctify marriage, He attended a wedding where He turned water into wine, and thus wrought His first miracle before His disciples. The true result of marriage is that it "clenseth fornicacioun and replenysseth hooly chirche of good lynage" (CT, X, 919) for that is the goal of marriage. The Parson cautions that a woman should be considered a companion to her husband, but if she is allowed mastery over the husband, she creates disorder.

Earlier in his treatise the Parson had explained that in sin every order or ordinance is turned "up-so-doun." For it is true that:

> God and resoun, and sensualitee, and the body of man been so ordeyned that everich of thise foure thynges sholde have lordshipe over that oother; as thus: God sholde have lordshipe over resoun, and resoun over sensualitee, and sensualitee over the body of man.
> (CT, X, 260-261)

When the hierarchy exists in its proper order, inner marriage exists. When the hierarchy is disordered, the condition of sin results. There is no inner marriage.

Boethius describes the conditions of inner marriage when he outlines the relationship of the faculties of perception. He points out that everything is known not according to its own power, but according to the capacity of the observer. Facts are acquired and comprehended in different ways by the senses, imagination, reason, and intelligence.

> For the wit of the body, the wiche wit is naked and despoiled of all oothre knowynges, thilke wit cometh to beestis that ne mowen nat moeven hemself her and ther, as oistres and muscles and oothir swich schelle-fyssch of the see, that clyven and ben norisschid to roches. But the ymaginacioun cometh to remuable bestis, that semen to han talent to fleen or to desiren any thing. But resoun is al oonly to the lynage of mankynde, ryght as intelligence is oonly the devyne nature.
> (Bk. V, Pr. 5, 25-36)

As in any hierarchy, each stage is inclusive of those that fall below it in the order, but cannot ascend to include the stages that are above it. Man's reason may include knowledge acquired through the senses of the sea creatures and the imagination of the animals, but he cannot possess the intelligence and knowledge of God. When man neglects to use his ability to reason and relies upon his senses or imagination, the hierarchy is disordered and the inner marriage is dissolved. He reacts in the manner of the animals, rather than with the wisdom of man.

In a society molded in a complex system of personal obligations, arranged in small hierarchies within the greater hierarchy of the state,[29] men think of one another as moral characters whose virtues and vices are apparent in their speech and actions.[30] Their behavior indicates whether the condition of the moral hierarchy envisaged in each individual

[29]D. W. Robertson, Jr., Chaucer's London (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968), p. 5.

[30]Ibid.

is a "married" hierarchy or an "up-so-doun" hierarchy. The "married" hierarchy expresses the ascendancy of reason over sensuality, or more elaborately, as the ascendancy of knowledge over the senses, as St. Augustine describes.

Moreover, in the Medieval society there are numerous institutional forms of the external expression of the inner hierarchy. The relation of Adam and Eve in Genesis suggests the similar hierarchy that the Parson describes in the family, where the relationship between husband and wife is also sacramentally a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the Church, a relationship which St. Paul had compared with that between the spirit and the flesh.[31]

In the Medieval Church, a bishop is solemnly married to his diocese, and a priest is regarded as the husband of his flock.[32] In a symbolic way, every Christian participates in the marriage of Christ to Church when his moral hierarchy is so ordered that his reason is married to his passion or his spirit is married to his flesh.

The idea of marriage extends into political facets of Medieval life as well as into the individual, social, and religious aspects. In the twelfth century, the Duke of Aquitane "married" the church of Aquitane.[33] Similarly, the idea

[31]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 375.

[32]Ibid.

[33]E. H. Kantorowicz, "Mysteries of State," Harvard Theological Review, 48 (1955), 78.

that a prince should be a "husband" to his people gradually acquired the force of law in France during the later Middle Ages. Robertson records that a fourteenth-century commentator on Justinian wrote:

> There is contracted a moral and political marriage between the prince and the respublica. Also, just as there is contracted a spiritual and divine marriage between a church and its prelate, so there is contracted a temporal and terrestial marriage between the Prince and the State.[34]

In the state, the prince was, as John of Salisbury explains in the Policraticus (5.2), the "head" to which the various parts of the commonwealth should be subjected in a hierarchical fashion just as the husband is the "head" of the family. In actual practice, the feudal system was a loose system of hierarchies. The prince in his marriage to the state is husband to all of the various hierarchies that constitute his realm. When the prince maintains his inner marriage of reason over passion, then he will exercise dominancy over his state and the external hierarchy will be in the proper order so that the state will flourish.

Marriage is, therefore, a principle of order in the individual, in the family, in the church, and in the state; in Medieval terms a well-ordered hierarchy of almost any kind is thought of as a "marriage." Therefore, it is necessary for Christians of every condition to be "married." In A

[34]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 375.

Preface to Chaucer, Robertson quotes from Thomas Brinton that "Every soul is either an adulteress with the Devil or a spouse of Christ."[35] A man either preserves the marriage contracted at baptism, or he abuses it. When a man is properly "married," the "marriage" between the spirit and the flesh, or the reason and the sensuality within him is preserved intact. When the sensuality or the lower reason rebels, the result is conventionally termed "adultery." Any mortal sin constitutes a kind of adultery; therefore, there are various kinds of adultery as the Parson describes them in his tale. For instance, a prelate who abuses his office for personal gain[36] or a prince who misuses his authority is termed an adulterer. Adultery implies generally what Chaucer describes as an "up-so-doun" condition in a hierarchy.

This pattern of order that exists in theory, in social organization, and in the arts, as well as in the individual, is a prevalent source of analogies in thought and expression; for once the idea is established, any single hierarchy suggests all of the others. Consequently, the opening tale presented by the Knight depicts the proper hierarchy in all its implications through the marriage theme. The character, Theseus, portrays the man whose married inner hierarchy is reflected in his wise leadership of his state and in his

[35]Ibid., p. 374.

[36]Ibid., p. 375.

exercise of the charity and mercy of the New Testament. Chaucer's audience would have recognized him as a married pilgrim journeying toward Celestial Jerusalem.

Conversely, the tale also illustrates, in Palamon and Arcite, the unfortunate results of a hierarchy turned "up-so-doun" when man allows his passion to dominate his reason and becomes ruled by cupidity. This situation can be corrected only by marriage, the re-establishment of the proper moral hierarchy. The remaining Canterbury Tales develop other aspects of the marriage theme, so that considered as a whole, the tales provide a guide for a life that will eventually lead to salvation or marriage to God in Celestial Jerusalem.

CHAPTER II

THESEUS - THE EXEMPLAR OF WISDOM

The character of Theseus dominates the action[1] and "sentence" of the "Knight's Tale" as the man of wisdom and virtue whose life represents the correct hierarchical order possible only for the truly "married" man. In the tradition of the classical iconography of the Middle Ages, his reputation as the conquering hero of the Thebaid and as a wise leader of a city whose patron saint is Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom, is firmly established.[2] Bernard Silvestris, referring to the story of the attempted rescue of Pirithous from Hell[3] states

[1]Paull F. Baum, Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), p. 97.

[2]D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 261.

[3]In Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art, Charles Mills Gayley explains how Theseus and Pirithous met on the plain on Marathon where Pirithous had been plundering the herds of the king of Athens. When Theseus arrived to halt the pillaging, Pirithous was immediately seized with admiration and offered his hands as a token of peace. The two swore inviolable fidelity. Later, when Pirithous aspired to the wife of the monarch of Erebus, Theseus, though aware of the danger, accompanied the ambitious lover to the underworld, Pluto seized them and set them on an enchanted rock at his palace gate, where they remained until the arrival of Hercules, who liberated Theseus, but left Pirithous to his fate. The Medieval man would have perceived Theseus' deed as an act of brotherhood and would have understood his rescue, while Pirithous' actions were controlled by passion and desire. See Charles Mills Gayley, Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art (New York: Ginn and Co., 1911), pp. 258-259.

that Theseus is to be recognized as "a reasonable and virtuous man who descends to the underworld in accordance with the virtuous manner of descent."[4] That is, he is a man who understands the fragility of worldly things; subsequently, his descent as a wise man represents the philosophical attitude toward the world that St. Augustine and Boethius emphasize.

It would have been difficult for Chaucer to make an abrupt departure from the traditional associations of wisdom and virtue which surrounded this "character."[5] Indeed, he follows tradition when he introduces Theseus as a great conqueror and an exemplar of wisdom. His actions from the very beginning of the tale indicate to the Medieval audience that Theseus' internal hierarchy is in order; his inner marriage, firmly intact.

In the narrative, Theseus first appears as the victorious Duke of Athens who has recently conquered the Amazons and wedded their queen, Hippolyta. This marriage would have particular significance for the Medieval audience familiar with the Augustinian and Boethian emphasis upon the hierarchical pattern necessary in man's life. Not only has he established the proper hierarchical order in his personal life by the subjugation of passion, represented by woman, to reason, represented by man, but he has, in an external manifestation of

[4]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 261.

[5]Ibid.

this marriage, united the two political territories of Athens, the city of wisdom or God, and Scythia, the city of the world or Babylon. He has accomplished this:

> What with his wysdom and his chivalrie,
> He had conquered al the regne of Femenye.[6]
> (CT, I [A], 865-866)

The explanation of his success is repeated in almost identical terms in succeeding lines:

> How wonnen was the regne of Femenye
> By Theseus and by his chivalrye.
> (CT, I [A], 877-878)

Clearly, Theseus' moral hierarchy is properly ordered; inner marriage exists. Therefore, he functions successfully in his capacity as ruler and maintains the political marriage of prince, or leader, to state. His married inner hierarchy is manifested in his domestic and political hierarchies.

Theseus seems to display a certain susceptibility to the courteous form of chivalric love when he takes pity on the distressed women of Thebes and still later in responding to the pleas of the Queen and Emelye for the lovers, Palamon and Arcite, when they are discovered fighting in the grove, However, the mercy that Theseus exhibits on both of these occasions clearly "tempers justice" as a reflection of the wisdom

[6]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), pp. 25-47. Subsequent reference to selections of Chaucer are from this edition.

of the "New Law" of the New Testament.[7] Theseus himself states the principle:

> Fy,
> Upon a lord that wol have no mercy,
> But been a leon, bothe in word and dede,
> To hem that been in repentaunce and drede,
> As wel as to a proud despitous man
> That wol mayntene that he first bigan.
> That lord hat litel of discrecioun,
> That is swich cas kan no divisioun,
> But weyeth pride and humblesse after oon.
> (CT, I [A], 1773-1781)

The "repentaunce" of Palamon and Arcite later in the tale may be a little doubtful, but there is nothing dubious about the principle that justice should be tempered with mercy to those who are repentant or in distress. This is the New Testament Law of mercy as opposed to the Old Testament Law of strict justice. Theseus can well understand the plight of the younger men on this subsequent occasion, for once he had been the servant of love, or cupidity:

> A man moot ben a fool, or yong or oold, --
> I woot it be myself ful yore agon,
> For in my tyme a servant was I oon.
> (CT, I [A], 1812-1814)

This is no longer the case with him, however, for now he is a "married" man: he has gained wisdom, replaced cupidity with charity, and established the proper hierarchical pattern in his life. His passion no longer dominates his reason; cupidity no longer directs his will.

[7]D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory," Speculum, 26 (1951), p. 24.

Theseus responds with the mercy of the New Law when the eldest of the Theban women reminds him that Fortune has granted him victory and honor just as she and "hir false wheel" have reduced the women from positions of importance and dignity to their present state of wretchedness and despair. In Book II, Meter 1 and Prose 2 of the Consolatione, Boethius is reminded that Fortune is fickle and unpredictable and that she heartlessly amuses herself by creating pain and misery for some, happiness and success for others. Nevertheless, the man of reason may rise above Fortune to the enjoyment of true happiness that is found in God. Theseus, the "married" man of reason and wisdom, can transcend misfortune, but he is not unmoved by the plight of the women. In responding with compassion for those who are victims of Fortune, he reflects the charity of the New Law:

> This gentil duc doun from his courser sterte
> With herte pitous, when he herde hem speke.
> Hym thoughte that his herte would breke,
> When he saugh hem so pitous and so maat,
> That whilom weren of so greet estaat:
> (CT, I [A], 952-956)

The "gentil duc" comforts the women and swears on his oath as a "trewe knyght" to avenge the wrong done them by the "tiraunt Creon," who had refused the proper burial for their husbands,

the unsuccessful, defenders of Thebes.[8] Carrying his gold "penoun," adorned with the Minotaur that he had slain on the island of Crete,[9] and his banner with the red emblem of Mars, the god of war, gleaming on a field of white, the "noble" Theseus fights and defeats the conqueror of Thebes.

The minotaur on his standard is not surprising. It commemorates an important incident from Theseus' past. In Book IV, Prose 3 of the Consolatione, Boethius warns that anyone who abandons virtue ceases to be a man, since he cannot share in the divine nature, and falls to the level of the beast. The Parson cautions that when man's hierarchy is "up-so-doun," he loses his virtue or reason and becomes a beast. By killing the half-man, half-beast Minotaur, Theseus symbolically has exerted mastery over the bestiality in his nature and restored the inner marriage of "resoun" to "sensualitee."

In avenging the Theban women, Theseus pays homage to

[8]According to Greek legend, Creon, King of Thebes, had refused proper burial for the body of Polynices. When Antigone heard the edict which denied her brother the burial rites that were considered essential to the repose of the dead, she decided to disobey it and bury the body with her own hands. When she was detected in the act, Creon, unyielding and unable to conceive of a law higher than his own, ordered Antigone be buried alive. Her lover, Haemon, the son of Creon, unable to avert her fate and unwilling to survive her died by his own hand. Gayley, Classic Myths, pp. 266-267.

[9]A. C. Spearing, ed., The Knight's Tale (Cambridge: The University Press, 1966), p. 68.

Mars,[10] as Arcite does later in his attempt to win Emelye, but Theseus acts in his capacity as a leader discharging his duty to his state and his responsibility to his office, not as a man ruled by wrathful passion. This is the wrath that the Parson refers to as "goode Ire" caused by

> . . . jalousie of goodnesse, thurgh which a man is wrooth with wikkednesse and agayns wikkednesse . . . . it is wrooth with the mysdede of the man . . .
> (CT, X, 538-539)

Thus, Theseus, in his wisdom, combines the qualities of strength and leadership with the mercy, compassion, and righteous anger of the New Law.

Theseus exercises mercy, also, in his decision not to punish the two youths, Palamon and Arcite, in strict accordance with the law concerning prisoners. Later, he eliminates "mortal bataille" from the tournament. At the close of the tale, Theseus, having been urged by his council, presses Emelye to marry Palamon on the grounds that "gentil mercy oghte to passen right." Collectively, these instances reinforce the idea that Theseus is a wise and merciful leader; the actions re-emphasize symbolically the traditional connotations of his character and reflect the married inner hierarchy.

The fact that Theseus participates in a hunt on the day

[10]Paul G. Ruggiers, The Art of the Canterbury Tales (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 161.

that he discovers Palamon and Arcite fighting in the grove offers no contradiction to the wisdom and integrity ascribed to him. In fact, it serves to emphasize his goodness and virtue, since the hunt is described as an act of God's "purveiance," and is conducted under the influence of "Dyane." Since antiquity, there has been a double significance associated with the hunt: one linked with Venus, the goddess of cupidinous love,[11] and another more virtuous hunt associated with "Dyane the chaste."[12] Late antique funerary monuments frequently combine representations of the celestial banquet with hunting scenes in which ferocious animals are the object of the quest.[13] These hunts represent the exercise of virtue necessary to the attainment of the banquet. The motif of the hunt continues to be used in early Christian funerary monuments with the same moral significance given Christian overtones; subsequently, the hunt for the boar or the hart becomes a fairly common motif in Christian art.[14] The more virtuous associations of the hart caused it to be transferred to the hunt of Diana, while the hunt of Venus became centered on

[11]Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Jr., Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 121-122.

[12]Ibid., p. 121

[13]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 263.

[14]Ibid.

rabbits, conies, and other small creatures.[15] It seems almost certain, then, that Theseus' hart-hunt shaped by Providence and carried out under the auspices of Diana, is an iconographic action designed to reinforce his attributes of wisdom and virtue.

In this same scene in the grove, Theseus indicates his wisdom in still another, and perhaps, more important way when he offers assurance that the providence of God is present in the changing bond of the world through the agency of destiny[16] and that:

> . . . oure appetites heer,
> Be it of were, or pees, or hate, or love
> Al this reuled by the sighte above.
> (CT, I [A], 1670-1672)

Thus Arcite's earlier protest that life consists of a blind pursuit of false felicities and that man is the victim of impersonal Fortune is countered by a description of a universe held in bonds by love, a universe in which nothing is left to chance. The death of Arcite following his victory at the tournament provides the occasion for the profound exploration of the idea of order. The long Boethian discourse of Theseus contains the solutions to the problems raised by Palamon and Arcite throughout the narrative and indicates the way to the ultimate resolution of the seeming irregularities of this

[15]Ibid., p. 264.

[16]Ibid., p. 76.

world. It is fitting that the agent of cosmic vision should be Theseus. As he orders the noble life of his world, so does he order his world's relationship with the higher order of the cosmos.[17] Theseus expounds the classical story of creation and locates man's proper place in submission to the perfect harmony of the universe.

The Boethian source of Theseus' stately discourse appears in Book III, Meter 9, and in Chaucer's translation, Boece, reads:

> "O thou Fadir, soowere and creatour of hevene and of erthes, that governest this world by perdurable reason . . . Thou drawest all thynge of thy sovereyn ensaumpler and comaundest that this world, parfytly ymakid, have frely and absolut his parfyte parties . . . Thou bindest the elementis by numbres propercionables . . ." (1-19).

The vision Boethius purveyed to the Middle Ages is of a perfectly harmonized, hierarchically structured universe. The influence of the capricious gods has been but the working out of a master plan; the Fate against which the agents have struggled is but the ordering of Destiny, given concrete form in the personalities of the gods and goddesses who influence the individual actions of life.[18] Together they constitute a fragmentary view of the plan of the universe as it exists

[17] Ibid., p. 270.

[18] Ibid., p. 373.

in the regulative mind of God in the design called Providence.[19] All the deities in the tale, even the fury that starts up out of the ground, are but manifestations of the power of the Prime Mover. Boethius, by virtue of his emphasis upon human reason as sufficient for man to know himself in relation to God, serves as a kind of bridge between the pagan cosmos in which men suffer at the hands of changeable gods and a universe in which change is but an illusion in the highly regulated and orderly progression, and in which chaos in the lives of the heroes is not seen as chaos, but as a part of a formal plan.

When he summons Palamon and Emelye in order to suggest the idea of marriage to them, Theseus follows the philosophy of Boethius as he speaks nobly of the fulfillment of God's purpose:

> The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
> Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love,
> Greet was th' effect, and heigh was his entente.
> Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente;
> For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
> The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
> In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee.
> That same Prince and that Moevere, quod he,
> Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun
> Certeyne dayes and duracioun
> To al that is engendred in this place . . .
> (CT, I [A], 2987-2998)

The "faire" cheyne of love" speech is a resume of the wisdom of Lady Philosophy with special significance for the subject

[19] Ibid.

of marriage. In Book II, Meter 8 of the Consolatione, Boethius expresses the philosophy popular with Medieval thinkers that love is the principle of harmony in the universe. Divine love establishes and governs the universe, and it should also govern the microcosm, man, in his relationship with others. In the words of Boethius:

> This love halt togidres peples joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrement of mariages of chaste lovers: and love enditeth lawes to trewe felawes. O weleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede your courages. (21-26)

The speech of Duke Theseus on the "cheyne of love" is, in a sense, an invocation to the celestial Venus. Just as there is a double significance associated with the hunt, there is, also, a dual interpretation of the Goddess Venus.[20] As the Goddess of Love, she may represent charity, as well as cupidity. Theseus restores order in the tale with a ceremony that "highte matrimoigne or mariage," and, since there is no "jalousie" in it, an essential ingredient of the love of the cupidinous, shipwrecked Venus,[21] it may be concluded that this is what Boethius calls a "chaste," i.e. faithful, marriage harmonious with the order that Theseus invokes. That Theseus perceives this love is in his favor and elevates him as a means of insight into the proper order of the universe.

[20]Huppé and Robertson, Fruyt and Chaf, p. 121.

[21]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 127.

It should be recalled that the first actions in which Theseus engages in the tale are his conquest of the Amazons and his marriage to their queen, Hippolyta. Mythology records that the conquest of the Amazons was one of the labors of Hercules, for which, as Boethius recalls, he gained immortality. These women who are figures for lust or sensuality[22] surrender to the Duke of Athens:

> What with his wysdom and his chivalrie,
> He conquered al the regne of Femenye.
> (CT, I [A], 865-866)

With this marriage, Theseus, reason, establishes "maistrye" over Hippolyta, sensuality, in one hierarchy, and in another places the city of Athens in a position of dominance over Scythia. He achieves this because his own moral hierarchy is in order. His own reason is married to his passion; therefore, he can extend this internal marriage to the external institution of marriage and subjugate Hippolyta, sensuality, to reason, Theseus himself. A further extension of his inner marriage includes the state, and is evidenced when in his role as leader or prince, he subjugates the City of the World, Scythia, to the City of God, Athens.

At the end of the tale, Theseus is instrumental in ordering still another marriage, the union between Palamon and Emelye. This marriage will restore Palamon's spiritual

[22]Richard H. Green, "Classical Fable and English Poetry in the Fourteenth Century," Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 131.

health and provide the correct inner hierarchy that is necessary for "pilgrims" to reach the "celestial Jerusalem" promised by the Parson. The decision advanced by Theseus has been determined in "parlement," as such important decisions should be reached by a wise ruler, and will result in establishing Thebes, the city of Venus and Bacchus,[23] in a position of "obeisance" to Athens, the city of Minerva. Athens will have "fully of Thebans obeisaunce" (CT, I [A], 1974). As a result of Theseus' intervention and guidance, Palamon's hierarchies are all restored to their proper order.

Clearly, the term "marriage" implies much of the philosophy of the Middle Ages; it combines the medieval concepts of wisdom, charity, virtue, and the various interpretations of hierarchy: individual, religious, political. The truly "married" man has the wisdom to comprehend the teachings of the New Testament so that he accepts them not on faith alone, but because he understands them as St. Augustine advocates. He consistently strives toward a life in which the binding force is charity, rather than cupidity, and which has as its ultimate goal the City of God, celestial Jerusalem, instead of the City of the World, Babylon. He correctly evaluates the insignificance of material gifts of Fortune in his realization that true happiness can be found only in God. He carefully arranges the various hierarchies in all phases of his

[23]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 265.

life so that he avoids an "up-so-doun" hierarchy that constitutes sin or "adultery." Subsequently, to analyze the term "marriage" is to review the Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages. Theseus, who is "married" in every connotation of the word, serves as the exemplar of wisdom through whom the metaphor of marriage is presented. His role in the "Knight's Tale" is that of exemplary guide for Palamon and Arcite and for the audience of the Canterbury Tales.

CHAPTER III

PALAMON AND ARCITE - THE UNMARRIED MEN

Chaucer provides in Theseus the example of the "married" man in Medieval philosophy to indicate to his audience how man should properly order his life. In Palamon and Arcite, he presents a warning to those who, like the two young men, lack the wisdom to comprehend the meaning of God's ordered universe or to question the real value of the gifts of Fortune and who fail to realize that cupidity is a self-directed love that leads away from God and toward enslavement. In this association they may be described as "unmarried" men whose moral hierarchies are "up-so-doun." Chaucer shows a deep concern for the traditional principles of Christian philosophy, the kind of philosophy found in St. Augustine and Boethius and in the Policraticus of John of Salisbury. He is much aware of the manner in which things "fair to the eye" could be abused by being contemplated with a view to "delyte" the flesh, so that the order of the mind is turned "up-so doun."

For example, the traditional process of "suggestion, delight, and consent" associated with Adam and the Fall of Man is illustrated vividly in the "Knight's Tale" when Palamon and Arcite, languishing in prison, observe in the appropriate garden setting, the beautiful Emelye:

> . . . that fairer was to sene
> Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
> And fressher than the May with floures newe
> For with the rose colour stroof hir hewe. . .[1]
> (CT, I [A], 1035-1038)

She is suitably arrayed and crowned to provoke the kind of attention she receives as she does "honour to May":

> Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
> Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
> (CT, I [A], 1049-1050)

St. Augustine maintains that whether beauty is used or abused depends on the inclination or "will" of the observer.[2] If he fails to act reasonably, he refers the beauty of what he sees to his own satisfaction in a material sense rather than to God; that is, he acts in cupidity rather than in charity. On the other hand, St. Augustine shows that through prudence, which enables man to distinguish between the eternal and the temporal; temperance, which enables the spirit to free itself from inferior beauty; fortitude, which strengthens the spirit in adversity; and justice, which enables man to preserve the hierarchical order, the spirit would achieve peace and harmony with the body in the contemplation of

[1]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd. ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 27. Subsequent references to the works of Chaucer are from this edition.

[2]St. Augustine, Augustine: Earlier Writings, ed. and trans. H. S. Burleigh, The Library of Congress Classics, Vol. VI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 257.

eternal beauty.[3] Since the beautiful is that which is loved, and love is the lesson of the Scriptures,[4] it is not difficult to understand that St. Augustine regards the problem of beauty as a matter of profound importance.

The importance of beauty in a moral sense is illustrated by the prominence which aesthetic matters have in the tropological description of the Fall of Man which John Scotus includes in the De divisione naturae.[5] Scotus' exposition shows unmistakable Augustinian influence. For purposes of tropological analysis, Scotus envisages Paradise as human nature, which includes two regions: interior and exterior. The first of these is man, who represents the spirit, and in it dwells truth and all good, which is the word of God. Hence, the interior region is the habitat of reason. According to Scotus, it contains the Tree of Life, which was placed there by God, and the Fountain of Life, from which flows the four streams of the cardinal virtues. This interior region should be "married" to the exterior region in a manner prefigured by the marriage of Christ and the Church. The exterior region, or woman, says Scotus, is the region of the corporal senses, as well as a region of falsity and vain fantasies. It

[3]D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Prespectives (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 67.

[4]Augustine, Earlier Writings, p. 257.

[5]John Scotus, De divisione naturae, PL, 122 cols., 825-829, as quoted in Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 70-71.

contains the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Serpent, which represents illicit delight. In a garden of this kind, true beauty and delight are to be found in the inner region, and whatever impresses the outer region as being beautiful should be referred to the inner region for judgment. However, this is not always done, since men are sometimes inclined to act with cupidity rather than with virtue.

Thus, according to Scotus, all error begins in the exterior or aesthetic region of the garden; and, through its delight in the beauty which it falsifies, it perverts the inner region of the garden just as Eve successfully tempted Adam in the Fall. The allurement of feminine beauty is a figure for that false attractiveness which once decisively perverted and, Scotus would say, continues to pervert the mind of man. In the "Knight's Tale," Emelye represents this allurement of feminine beauty.

The evil involved in this process of perversion does not reside in the object. It lies in the cupidity which Scotus describes as lurking beneath the beauty when it becomes a part of the image formed by the corporal senses. The image formed by the corporal senses is then placed in the memory and considered in thought. If the thought contemplates cupidinous satisfaction, the result is evil: the downfall of the reason and the corruption of the garden are distinct possibilities. On the other hand, continues Scotus, if the thought refers the beauty of the image to the Creator, all

is well. The marriage between the interior and the exterior exists. The "man" retains his hierarchical ascendancy over the "woman"; the spirit continues to guide the body; the beauty of the woman remains innocent.

Chaucer not only uses comcepts developed from the traditional biblical exegesis; he also uses scriptural imagery which carries with it overtones of meaning from the exegetical tradition.[6] Among the most resourceful complexes of related elements in Medieval poetry is that which concerns itself with gardens, and most of these gardens reflect in some way the gardens of the Bible: the Paradise of Genesis, the "garden enclosed" of the Canticle of Canticles, or others.[7] Generally, they represent either a Paradise of celestial delights or a false paradise of earthly delights.

Chaucer has Palamon and Arcite discover Emelye in a walled garden filled with the atmosphere of May, the month perpetually established in Paradise before the Fall,[8] and the melody of Emelye's voice. since love and music are closely related, there are two kinds of song just as there are two types of love in this garden.[9] Whether one hears the song of cupidity or the song of charity is determined by the kind of

[6]Ibid., p. 386.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 126.

[9]Ibid.

love that directs one's actions.

The physical description of the garden stresses the freshness of the garden, the flowers, the morning, the time of year, and Emelye's beauty and clothing; but this freshness is transient. The shade provided by the "braunches grene" suggests the shade sought by Adam and Eve and is frequently associated with scientia, for worldly wisdom is conducive to a false sense of security.[10] The leaves of the tree are the objects of worldly vanity -- wealth, physical beauty, music -- and the shade is the deceitful comfort which things of this kind afford, a comfort fortified by a scientia which excludes true wisdom or sapientia.[11] The image lacks the higher meaning of Divine truth. The leaves ultimately fall, leaving the person seeking shelter fully exposed to the heat and light from which he seeks to escape; this light is the sunshine of God's justice.[12] Emelye's complexion is compared with the color of the rose, a flower which suggests both good and evil associations. Rabanus Maurus in De universo[13] describes the rose as an unfading flower of martyrdom; on

[10]D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory," Speculum, 26 (1951), p. 26.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Rabanus Maurus, De universo, PL, CIX, 930 and 1115, quoted in Robertson, "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Gardens," p. 29.

the other hand, the heretics crown themselves with garlands of roses obviously associated with lechery and idolatry.

Both Palamon and Arcite respond with cupidity to the beauty of Emelye and the garden. This is the abuse of beauty that concerns St. Augustine. Each desires Emelye for herself, as a material gift of Fortune, rather than as a Creation leading one to God. Each allows his passion to overrule his reason: consequently, the inner hierarchy of each is now "up-so-doun." There is no "marriage": Palamon and Arcite are "unmarried" men. Because of this cupidinous response to beauty, the downfall of reason and the corruption of the garden become distinct possibilities. The tower as the inner garden is not "married" to the exterior region of the garden. The image of Emelye formed by the corporal senses of Palamon and Arcite has been considered in thought that represents cupidinous satisfaction, which is evil. To the Medieval mind, cupidity or self-love can lead only to disaster; for, as the source of all of man's sins, cupidity makes a Babylon of the individual mind and eventually leads to Babylon and away from Celestial Jerusalem. Palamon and Arcite seem destined for disaster and Babylon.

Palamon sees Emelye first:

> He cast his eye upon Emelya,
> And therewithal he bleynte and cride, "A!"
> As though he stongen were into the herte.
> (CT, I [A], 1077-1079)

He exclaims to Arcite:

"I was hurt right now thurghout myn ye
Into myn herte, that woe my bane be. . ."
(CT, I [A], 1096-1097)

The object which is "fair to see" thus passes as an "arrow" or image into the heart, where its force sends Palamon to his knees in a prayer to Venus that she deliver him from prison. Palamon considers Emelye an object of worship. His cupidity is expressed in the form of idolatry. Since Venus is conventionally associated with concupiscence, Palamon's prayer is further indication of the "up-so-doun" hierarchy and the absence of inner marriage.

The effect of Emelye's beauty upon Arcite is even less wholesome than the reaction that Palamon displays toward it:

"The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly
Of hire that rometh in the yonder place,
And but I have hir mercy and hir grace,
That I may seen hir atte leeste weye,
I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye."
(CT, I [A], 1118-1122)

Arcite's cupidity assumes the form of wrath. His reaction leads to a passionate dispute between the two sworn brothers; for Venus makes all men enemies, and cupidity destroys the charity in amicitia. Palamon quickly reminds Arcite:

"Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,
Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,
Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother,"
(CT, I [A], 1134-1136)

He continues to press his argument that he has been the first to see Emelye and has appealed to Arcite for counsel; therefore, Arcite is bound as a knight to support him and aid him in his plight.

Becoming especially irate, Arcite condemns all law with a Boethian echo:

> "Wostow not wel the olde clerkes sawe,
> That 'who shall yeve a lovers any lawe?'
> Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,
> Than may be yeve to any erthely man;
> And therefore positif lawe and swich decree
> Is broken al day for love in ech degree.
> A man moot nedes love, maugre his heed.
> He may not fleen it, though he sholde be deed,
> Al be she mayde, or wydwe, or elles wyf.
> (CT, I [A], 1163-1171)

In Book III, Meter 12 of the Consolatione, Boethius asks in exasperation, "But what is he that may yeven a lawe to loverys?" and finds himself forced to admit that Orpheus "lokede abakward" on Eurydice his wife when the two were almost "at the termes of the myght" because Orpheus "sette his thoughts in erthly things," and as a result of his lawless desire had lost "the noble good celestial." Love becomes a law unto itself when it abandons all wisdom and reason.[14]

Chaucer achieves the same philosophical result by having Arcite tell a fable and then, his reason clouded by passion, misinterpret it:

> We stryve as dide the houndes for the boon;
> They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon.
> Ther com a kyte, whil that they were so wrothe
> And baar awye the boon bitwixe hem bothe.
> (CT, I [A], 1177-1180)

Although his exemplum clearly indicates the futility of wrathful altercation, exactly the kind of altercation in which the two lovers are engaged over Emelye, Arcite

[14] Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 106.

interprets it as a victory for the kyte who acts as a single agent in his own behalf. Arcite concludes by setting forth as a doctrine the same attitude experienced by Adam and Eve when each blamed the other for their expulsion from the Garden:

> And therefore, at the kynges court, my brother
> Ec man for himself, ther is noon other.
> (CT, I [A], 1181-1182)

Thus, Arcite repudiates the law of comradeship and brotherhood and his conclusion, which suggests an inability on his part to follow a logical sequence of thought, indicates that the marriage of his reason to his passion no longer exists. His will is directed by cupidity. His inner moral hierarchy is disarranged, and this is reflected in the disintegration of his relationship with Palamon.

When Arcite appears again at the beginning of the second part of the tale, there is no doubt that his "immoderate thought" has led to the full development of a passion. His condition is described as:

> Nat oonly lik the loveris maladye
> Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye,
> Engendred of humour malencolik,
> Biforen, in his celle fantastik,
> And shortly, turned was al up-so-doun
> Both habit and eek disposicioun
> Of hym, this woful lovere, daun Arcite.
> (CT, I [A], 1373-1379)

The "medical language"[15] serves to emphasize the fact that

[15]Ibid., p. 106.

Arcite has undergone the traditional process of "suggestion, delight, and consent' first experienced by Adam. Bernard of Gordon, author of the fourteenth century Lilium medicinae,[16] warns that if such a lover's malady were not treated quickly, it could lead to mania and even to the death of the lover. Robertson proposes that Boccaccio's notes on the Teseida, and the mythographers provide the explanation that as a devotee of Mars (Wrath), Arcite meets his death through the action of an infernal fury (a wrathful passion) sent up by Pluto (Satan) at the instigation of Saturn (Time), who was, in turn, prompted by Venus (Concupiscence). Frustrated consupiscence often leads to wrath, which in time results in self-destruction.

Arcite further illustrates the "up-so-doun" condition of his inner hierarchy when he fails to recognize the Boethian precept that man is often responsible for his own exile or imprisonment (Bk. I, Pr. 5). Arcite does not rejoice at his release from the tower, for he has made a prison of his mind from which he does not wish to escape. The physical freedom from prison promises an unwelcome release from his imprisonment to love; "prisoun," then, becomes exile from his love:

> Now is my prisoun worse than beforn;
> Now is my shape eternally to dwelle
> Nought in purgatorie, but in helle.
> (CT, I [A], 1224-1226)

To dwell in prison near Emelye is "blisse"; indeed, Palamon

[16]Bernard of Gordon, Lilium medicinae, quoted in Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 109.

is in "paradys." Arcite's attitude illustrates the point that Boethius makes when he asserts his view that "We seken after felicitee," but in pursuing it, "We goon wrong ful often." Boethius understands that a man becomes a victim of Fate only in wishing for the gifts of Fortune, rather than in spiritual gifts which alone bring happiness and are above Fortune. Arcite, unfortunately, lacks the wisdom of Boethius, so he comes to precisely the opposite conclusion from the same premise. As he interprets it, his error has been to think that escape from imprisonment would be good, when the only good was being near Fortune's fairest gift, "the woman he loves." Failing to comprehend that trust in any earthly thing is deceiving, he erroneously concludes:

> There now I am exiled from my wele.
> Syn that I may not seen you, Emelye,
> I nam but deed; ther nys no remedye.
> (CT, I [A], 1272-1274)

Arcite has undergone the moral fall. His reason is corrupted. His will is directed toward cupidity, and this situation results in the consent of reason. His fall is complete. He is truly not married, and his self-destruction seems inevitable.

The second prisoner, Palamon, does not share Arcite's evaluation of his situation; he considers himself neither in "paradys" nor blessed. Nevertheless, he still misinterprets his situation and voices a confusion arising out of the problem of the suffering of the innocent and gives vent to

the dilemma of man forced to restrain his passions for fear of the Divine reprisal:[17]

> And yet encresseth this al my penaunce
> That man is bounden to his observaunce,
> For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille
> Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille.
> (CT, I [A], 1315-1318)

This distinction between the animal's natural instinct and man's capacity to restrain "what nature desires" has been treated by both St. Augustine and Boethius. Perhaps the fact that Palamon recognizes this obligation of man to restrain his passion works in his favor as the tale unfolds toward its final conclusion. Nevertheless, his inability to control his "bestiality" allows the altercation in the grove where both Palamon, "a wood leon," and Arcite, "a crueel tigre," fight "as wilde bores." Thus, like Arcite, Palamon has descended to the level of the beast, because the marriage of reason to passion no longer exists in his inner hierarchy.

Palamon laments the fact that Arcite has been reprieved while he must remain a prisoner and questions God's purpose in permitting evil to afflict man and the innocent to suffer. He is unable to reconcile the facts of God's existence, which he does not doubt, and the existence of evil. If the power of Heaven is absolute, why should so much evil exist in the world? He asks:

[17]Robert Pratt, "'Joye After Woe' in the 'Knight's Tale'." JEGP, 57 (1958), p. 418.

> . . . O crueel goddes that governe
> This world with byndying of youre word eterne,
> . . . . . .
> What is mankynde moore unto you holde
> Than is the sheep, that rouketh in the folde?
> . . . . . .
> What governaunce is in the prescience,
> That gilteless tormenteth innocence?
> (CT, I [A], 1303-1314)

Palamon does perceive that "al the wo that prisoun" gives is doubled "with peyne that love" gives him.[18] But from this he fails to deduce any consolatory truth. Because his reason is distorted, he forgets that man cannot expect to understand completely the Divine Intellect of God and His Providence. He does not yet comprehend, as Boethius points out, that the remedy for Fortune lies in the pursuit of virtue, and the "care and wo" of the world enables the wise man to make his virtue strong in order to resist self-gratification.

So, while Palamon and Arcite maintain opposing points of view concerning which of them is the most fortunate, the released Arcite or the confined Palamon, they share the same condition, that of the fallen man. A man who lacks marriage in his inner hierarchy cannot maintain properly structured exterior hierarchies. As a result of the disordered moral hierarchy, the bond of brotherhood between Arcite and Palamon is broken.

Although the conditions of Palamon and Arcite are serious, perhaps they would not receive much sympathy from

[18]Ibid.

Chaucer's audience. To the Medieval audience, they would seem ridiculous or comic.[19] When the contrast between cupidinous love and love in accordance with God's order, charity, is absolutely clear, the nonsense of the protestations of the irrational lover, the absurdity of his sufferings, and the foolishness of his passionate desires are evident.[20]

Further indication of the "up-so-doun" condition of the young lovers evolves from the descriptions of the temples of the deities to whom the youths appeal before the tournament. Through Chaucer's use of classical iconography, the Temple of Venus confronts the supplicant with the natural results of concupiscence painted on the walls: broken sleep, sighs, tears, lamenting, the fiery strokes of desire, and lovers' oaths. These are followed by a series of personified abstractions generally associated with cupidity: Plesaunce, Hope, Desir, Foolhardyness, Beautee, Youthe, Bauderie, Richesse, Charmes, Force, Lesynges, Flaterye, Despence, Bisynesse, and Jalousye. Finally there appears: "Festes, instrumenz, caroles, daunces, /Lust and Array, and alle the circumstances/ Of love." (CT, I [A], 1918-1933).

Chaucer adds a description of a garden with its porters,

[19]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 466.

[20]Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Jr., Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 146.

"Idelnesse" and "Narcisus," so that the Garden of Delight becomes an iconographic attribute of the Temple of Venus. The garden acquires its general significance from the Bible as it is followed immediately by the "folye of Kyng Salomon." As St. Augustine describes in his On Christian Doctrine (3.21.31),

> His beginnings were redolent with the desire for wisdom; when he had obtained it through spiritual love, he lost it through carnal love. (14-15)

Medea and Circe, Turnus, and Cresus are included as further evidence in the lesson for Palamon that:

> . . .wysdom ne richesse,
> Beautee ne sleighte, strengthe ne hardynesse,
> Ne may with Venus hold champartie . . .

To emphasize the fact that he who seeks assistance from Venus almost inevitably suffers misfortune, Chaucer adds a picture of Venus in which she is depicted "naked, fletynge in the large see" as an indication that the "sailor" of Venus loses all of his possessions and suffers shipwreck. Nakedness is appropriate since the crime of libido is difficult to conceal and also denudes its victims of counsel.[21] The roses Venus has are commonplace and Robertson considers the explanation offered by Fulgentius to be standard: they blush and prick with their thorns just as libido blushes with shame and pricks with the sting of shame. Chaucer departs from

[21]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 372.

his predecessors in one detail. While Venus is usually shown holding a conch shell in her hand, Chaucer depicts her holding a "citole" which accents the association with music and the fact that libido has its own "melody."[22] Chaucer completes his description by including blind Cupid, whose significance is obviously linked with cupidity. In theological terms the melodies of love are the "Old Song" of the "Old Man," who represents the inherited evil habits of the flesh.

While Arcite prays to Mars for a victory in arms, which he considers to be the means of possessing Emelye, Palamon prays for Emelye herself. For him, she is an object to be worshipped. With "hooly herte" he makes a "pilgrymage" to the temple of Venus. Chaucer's choice of words seems to distinguish Palamon's appeal from that of Arcite and, perhaps, foreshadows the final outcome of the tale.

Arcite seeks success in battle from the God of War, and the images inspired by Mars and Saturn in the Temple of Mars provide an inclusive and uncompromising panorama of existence in a moral hell and a cosmic chaos.[23] The sow devours the baby "right in the cradel" (2019); the man-eating wolf tears his victim at the foot of Mars' statue, to the glory of the god; the glance of Saturn was "the fadir of pestilence"

[22]Ibid.

[23]William Frost, "An Interpretation of Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale,'" RES, 25 (1949), p. 301.

(2469) images of manslaughter, suicide, treason, murder, and rapine complete the decorations of Mars' temple.

The last edifice is built like a dungeon:

> The dore was al of adamant eterne,
> Yclenched overthwart and endelong
> With iren tough; and for to make it strong,
> Every pyler, the temple to sustene,
> Was tonne greet, or iren bright and shene.
> (CT, I [A], 1990-1994)

Imprisonment is an important symbol in the tale, especially in the case of Arcite. Ironically, his long-desired release from captivity leads first to exile and then despair, finally to a strenuous life of practical expedients crowned by illusive victory and death. His epitaph spoken by Theseus includes these lines:

> . . . goode Arcite, of chivalrie the flour,
> Departed is with duetee and honour
> Out of this foule prisoun of this lyf . . .
> (CT, I [A], 3059-3061)

For Arcite, release from prison has been no more than escape into a larger prison, until the final release of death.[24]

The two young men are reunited when Arcite, realizing that death is imminent, summons Emelye and Palamon to reaffirm his affection for Emelye and to effect a reconciliation with Palamon:

> Fare wel, my sweet foo, myn Emelye!
> And softe taak me in youre armes tweye,
> For love of God, and herkneth with I seye.
> I have heer with my cosyn Palamon
> Had strif and rancor many a day agon

[24]Ibid.

> For love of yow, and for my jalousye.
> And Juppiter so wys my soule gye,
> To speken of a servaunt properly,
> With alle circumstances trewely -
> That is to seyen, trouthe, honour, knyghthede,
> Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede,
> Fredom, and al that longeth to that art -
> (CT, I [A], 2780-2791)

Thus, the bond of "amicitia," the love of friend or neighbor, that had been broken when the two young men became involved in "amour," the passionate or romantic love that is false love, is restored.[25] Also, at that time Arcite suggests the course of action for Emelye and Palamon that Theseus and his council later propose:

> As in this world right now ne knowe I non
> So worthy to ben loved as Palamon,
> That serveth yow, and wol doon al his lyf.
> And if that evere ye shul ben a wyf,
> Forget nat Palamon, the gentil man."
> (CT, I [A], 2793-2797)

Arcite's final words "Mercy, Emelye!" complete the implication that he understands better the hierarchical system of order in the universe and in the life of the individual and the association of order with the universal love of the New Law.

In his speech of consolation following the death of Arcite, Egeus provides the insight which, perhaps, the younger men have never gained completely, and thus assists in lifting the tone of the story to the level of "high sentence."

[25]Bernard F. Huppé, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales (Albany: State University of New York, 1964), p. 56.

All men must die, he says; implicitly he is suggesting that too much lamentation over death is folly for the living and insulting for the dead. In a Christian society, according to Medieval thought, there are two ways to mourn the death of a loved one: either the bereavement represents the loss of a purely physical object, taken away by blind Fortune, or the deceased may be regarded as having been virtuous, so that the ideas of resurrection, hope or inspiration are suggested.[26] If the first reaction is maintained, it may lead to sloth and despair. The second attitude leads to a recognition of the Providential order.[27] To mourn Arcite as a physical object lost to Fortune would be to make the same concupiscent error in judgment that Arcite made when he valued Emelye as a gift of Fortune and would lead the mourners to despair. Surely this is not the way that Arcite should be mourned. Egeus is suggesting then the hope and inspiration of Resurrection and salvation for Arcite.

While Arcite has not been completely virtuous, he has re-established the bond of friendship between himself and Palamon, and, in a final display of "gentillesse,"[28] his mention of marriage between Palamon and Emelye indicates that

[26]Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer, p. 464.

[27]Ibid.

[28]A. C. Spearing, ed. The Knight's Tale (Cambridge: The University Press, 1966), p. 65.

he has lost his cupidinous desire for Emelye. In the final tale, the Parson explains:

> The remedie agayns Ire is a vertu that men
> Clepen mansuetude, that is Debonairetee;
> And eek another vertu, that men callen
> Pacience or suffrance.
> (CT, X, 654)

Thus, in his final words, Arcite displays the gentleness and graciousness that the Parson offers as the remedy for wrath. If his will is no longer misdirected toward cupidity, if he is now guided by his reason rather than his passion, if his moral hierarchy has been restored to its proper order, then it must be concluded that he now has a "married" inner hierarchy and may, therefore, be considered a virtuous man. Certainly, Theseus, the exemplar of wisdom, considers him "goode Arcite" who has departed from the "foule prisoun of this lyf (CT, I [A], 3061) with "duetee and honor" (CT, I [A], 3060).

Thus, Egeus, the only one who could "gladen" Theseus (2837) serves in a sense as an oracle as he presents his message of profound insight. The important thing is not to continue mourning excessively for Arcite, but to find the answer to the question that he had asked in prison, "What is this world?" and to act accordingly. Egeus provides the answer:

> This world nys but a thrughfare ful of wo,
> And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.
> Deeth is an end of evry worldly soore.
> (CT, I [A], 2847-2849)

This point emphasizes an important theme of the poem. Every man is a pilgrim passing through this thoroughfare of woe to

his ultimate destination. The manner in which he conducts his pilgrimage will determine whether that final destination is the City of God, Celestial Jerusalem, or the City of the World, infernal Babylon. The direction of his pilgrimage should be man's constant concern.

Earlier, when he failed to realize that man produces his own destruction when he pursues the fragmentary goods of the world,[29] Arcite had protested that man was the victim of impersonal Fortune. When presenting to Palamon and Emelye the council's proposal that they marry, Theseus counters that protest with a description of a universe held in bonds by love, a universe in which nothing is left to chance. Following Boethius, Theseus speaks of the fulfillment of God's purpose:

> The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
> When he first made the faire cheyne of love,
> Greet was th' effect, and heigh was his entente.
> . . . . . .
> That same Prince and that Moevere, quod he,
> Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun
> Certeyne dayes and duracioun
> To al that is engendred in this place . . .
> (CT, I [A], 2987-2998)

The actions of man, his sin and corruption, proceed under laws of an ultimate Providence.[30] Man's proper wisdom is not to cry out against it, but to accept his destiny. Arcite's death is not meaningless since it empowered him to reassert

[29]Paul G. Ruggiers, The Art of the Canterbury Tales (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 163.

[30]Ibid., p. 57.

his relationship with Palamon and to encourage marriage, the ordering device necessary for all men if they are to reach Celestial Jerusalem.

The "faire cheyne of love" speech of Theseus places emphasis upon the accommodation of the two agents, Palamon and Arcite, to the plan of the universe according to the New Law of charity.[31] It is this universal principle of love in operation that has allowed the reconciliation of Palamon and Arcite in the last moments of Arcite's life. It is because of this "faire cheyne of love" that the Parson in the final tale can offer hope of salvation for Arcite if he is truly repentant.

After Arcite's death, Theseus and his formal proposal that Palamon and Emelye wed aid in the re-establishment of Palamon's married inner hierarchy. Although some time has elapsed since Arcite's funeral, Palamon has not renewed his pursuit of Emelye. It appears that already his reason is beginning to dominate his passion, and his will is no longer misdirected toward cupidity. The marriage of Emelye is an exterior reflection of the marriage in Palamon's moral hierarchy: it also unites the two cities of Athens, the city of Minerva, and Thebes, the city of Venus and Bacchus. So that, like Theseus, Palamon would have his life correctly ordered in the ideal relationships of the "married" man: reason to

[31]Ibid.

passion, man to woman, Christ to church, and Prince to state.

Through the characters of Palamon and Arcite, the "Knight's Tale" implies that the trials of this world are the corrective means by which man's will accommodates itself to Divine Necessity.[32] Indeed, the tale provides a rational order within which man's suffering has meaning and justification. Worldly experience may be converted into love and service, both suggesting the ideal relationship of Church to Christ, of the soul to God.[33] The will may be redirected toward charity and God: the moral hierarchy may be repaired: inner marriage may be restored.

Arcite has found his "welfare" in his departure from the "foule prisoun of this lyf" (3063), and Palamon has found his "wele" (3101) in his marriage to Emelye.[34] Thus, the end is happy for both of the "unmarried" men who, for a while, allowed their misdirected will to carry them toward the city of eternal damnation, Babylon.

In the "Knight's Tale," Chaucer presents two ways of conducting one's pilgrimage through life: the way of the "married" Theseus, whose properly ordered life leads to the Celestial Jerusalem, or the way leading to Babylon that the "unmarried" Palamon and Arcite pursued. The truly "married" man has

[32]Ruggiers, p. 173.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Pratt, p. 418.

the wisdom to both accept and understand the teachings of the New Testament; therefore, realizing that true happiness can be found only in God, he constantly strives toward a life bound by charity and avoids the "up-so-doun" hierarchy that constitutes sin, or adultery. The "unmarried" man, like Palamon and Arcite, lacks the wisdom to comprehend the meaning of God's ordered universe or to realize that cupidity is a self-directed love that leads away from God and toward enslavement and the "up-so-doun" hierarchy that is adultery.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE IN THE FORM OF THE "KNIGHT'S TALE

The form that Chaucer uses to relate the "Knight's Tale" incorporates the same regularity, order, and balance that are characteristic of the marriage theme itself. In fact, the unity extends to include the Knight who presents the narrative to the other pilgrims. William Frost describes him as a man of high rank, wide travel, and loyalty to the ideas of his class and age.[1] Thus, marriage is expressed in the Knight's concept of universal order, a prevalent belief of the period. The lessons of the tale imply a pious, logical mind in the instructor, a deep acceptance of Christian faith and chivalric standards, and an heroic disposition to face the vicissitudes and disasters of a dangerous calling. This, too, is a marriage, a marriage of the faith of the Knight to the standards of chivalry that he champions. More important, however, is the Medieval view that ideally knights are instituted so that they may defend their country and so that they may repel from the Church the injuries of the violent. From Alanus de Insulis' De arte praedicatoria, we learn that is is the duty of a knight to "keep temporal peace safe from

[1]William Frost, "An Interpretation of Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale,'" RES, 25 (1949), 302.

violence" and to "restore peace to his own breast."[2] Therefore, the function of the knight is to maintain spiritual and material order or marriage. Thus, the harmony, order, and unity important to the marriage theme itself are initially evident in the pilgrim selected to present the tale. This complements the content of the story, and the form in which the message of the narrative is presented to the audience.

The "Knight's Tale" is a reflection of universal order: the form is an amplification of the theme of marriage characteristic of the universe. Chaucer calls attention to the Consolatione in Theseus' speech in Book II, Meter 8:

> This love halt togidres peples joyned
> with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrement
> of mariages of chaste loves; and love
> enditeth lawes to trewe felawes. O
> welful were mankynde, yif thilke love
> that governeth hevene governede your
> courages. (21-26)[3]

It would be unusual if, in a tale of such symmetry and balance, the law of love should encompass the death of Arcite, but not provide for the living. The marriage of Emelye and Palamon is a foreseen and forecrdained part of that wise plan:

> That speces of thynges and progressiouns

[2]Alanus de Insulis, De arte praedicatoria, PL, 210 col., 186, quoted in D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press. 1962), p. 174.

[3]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), pp. 340-341. Subsequent references to the works of Chaucer are from this edition.

Shullen enduren by successiouns,
(CT, I [A], 3013-3014)

as the means by which, in the Boethian scheme, the unity of God is imitated.[4] With this view, man may assume the assurance of a gracious cooperation with the forces of nature derived from the necessity of death. Palamon and Emelye are free to cooperate with what God has ordained in order to obtain virtue. Thus the tale includes the double pattern of consolation and reconciliation invested by its philosophical statement.[5] If the law of love, charity, could reconcile Palamon to the inevitability of dying as the end of man, surely it must also offer him the necessity and grace of a properly ordered life through marriage to Emelye.

The philosophy of order permeates the action of the tale, which evolves from the symmetrical and balanced arrangement of episodes, themes, and characters. Charles Muscatine considers this symmetry to be the most prominent feature of the "Knight's Tale."[6] He defines the term "symmetry" as "a high degree of regularity and order among parts" and concludes that the "Tale" achieves unity through this regularity. His definition of the term "symmetry" could also explain the

[4]Paul G. Ruggiers, The Art of the Canterbury Tales, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 165.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Charles Muscatine, "Form, Texture, and Meaning in Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale,'" PMLA 65 (Sept., 1950), 914.

Medieval concept of the term "marriage." Significantly, then, the form of the narrative is the formal expression of the conceptual center of the tale, since through the order and regularity of marriage, the Medieval man achieves moral unity and, consequently, unity with man, state, church, and God. This unity between agent, theme, and form of expression is aesthetically pleasing to the reader and not only makes him more receptive to the message of the tale, but also heightens his appreciation of the subtle skill and technique of the author.

There are differing opinions concerning the reason why Chaucer does not delineate his characters more carefully in this tale.[7] Perhaps, he deliberately elects to emphasize the order and balance of the tale instead of the characterization in order to duplicate the marriage theme in the form of

[7]J. R. Hulbert feels that the lack of characterization of the chief figures in the story is the greatest weakness of the "Knight's Tale." He quotes Professor Greenlaw's statement in Selections from Chaucer: "Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye are all lay figures: we have no real acquaintance with them, no impression of individuality." Miss Grace Hadow in Chaucer and His Times states that there is little distinction made between Palamon and Arcite and that they might as well be twin brothers. J. R. Hulbert, "What Was Chaucer's Aim in the 'Knight's Tale'?" SP, 26 (1929), 377.

Thurston suggests that the characters of the "Knight's Tale" are less clearly drawn than those in the other tales because the narrative is a romance and Chaucer is indirectly removing attention from the characters to the long-extinct codes and rites of chivalry. Paul T. Thurston, Artistic Ambivalence in Chaucer's Knight's Tale (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1968), p. 2. In a similar vein, W. H. French points out that the characters of Medieval literature represebt certain principles or concepts and are only the means of expression. W. H. French, "The Lovers in the 'Knight's Tale,'" JEGP, 18 (1949), 322.

the story. In order to allow the characters to embody the concept of marriage, he intentionally sacrifices a realistic delineation of the character. He intends the characters to represent universal figures: the man who orders his life correctly and is properly "married," as Theseus, or the man who, like Palamon and Arcite, allows his will to be misdirected toward cupidity and sin. To emphasize each character individually would destroy the unity of theme and form and detract from the universality of the message.

Muscatine refers to the obvious symmetrical character-grouping in which there are two knights, Palamon and Arcite, in love with Emelye and Theseus, in a position above, who sits in judgment and serves as the center of authority and balance between the opposing interests of the two young men. Paull Baum compares the structure with a double isoceles triangle with Palamon and Arcite at the common base and Theseus at one peak and Emelye at the other.[8]

Paul Thurston declares that Theseus is the unifying force in the narrative.[9] This is true: in his role as the "married" man, he is the characterization of the theme of the tale and brings to the story the order that is implicit in the understanding of "marriage." Certainly, he is prominent in the

[8]Paull F. Baum, Chaucer: A Critical Appreciation (Durham: Duke University Press, 1958), p. 96.

[9]Thurston, p. 226.

series of processions that serve to advance the movement of the tale. His travels, his return to Athens after the defeat of the Amazons and marriage to Hippolyta, his second return after conquering Thebes and taking the two prisoners, and his organization of the tournament between Palamon and Arcite constitute the major portion of the events and create a mood of triumph which intensifies with Arcite's funeral procession and reaches its climax in the marriage of Palamon and Emelye. The incidents portray him as the wise leader of his country, who rules with strength, compassion, and mercy. The success with which he performs his duties and responsibilities to his people and his state is a reflection of his married inner hierarchy that orders the external hierarchy of prince to state. In this way, Theseus becomes a personification of the marriage theme by unifying the events of the narrative and providing the example of the interior and exterior order that is present in marriage.

To recall only a few of the instances of symmetry and balance in the action of the story, it may be noted that the two lovers are cousins, born of sisters, and are found lying side by side at Thebes. Each of them has his divinity, Venus and Mars, to whom he appeals, and each wins according to his appeal. The temples of the divinities rest atop identical marble gates at the east and west sides of the amphitheater and are described in parallel accounts. At the tournament, each young lover has a chieftain and a hundred followers to

assist him, and Theseus declares the joust a draw. Thus, the two men seem equal; neither appears to be favored over the other. In terms of the marriage theme, each is guilty of adultery, since each allows his will to be misdirected toward cupidity and sin. Much of the action central to the situations of the two men occurs in May, the month associated with cupidity: the discovery of Emelye in the garden, the fight in the grove, and the final tournament. All of these incidents result from misdirected, concupiscent will. The balance and order of the situations and descriptions, again, reflect the inclusive order of the marriage theme.

Muscatine recognizes that the order which distinguishes the framework of the poem is also the heart of its meaning.[10] However, he associates the order with the ceremony, dignity, power, repose, and assurance of the life of the nobility. He feels that the story is concerned with the two noble activities, love and chivalry, of a society in which form is full of significance, in which life is conducted at a dignified processional pace, and in which life's pattern is a reflection of the order of the universe. While the chivalric aspects of the situation are described in minute detail, there is little of the intimate, distinctive details of look, attitude, and gesture that mark some of Chaucer's more realistic poems. The symmetry of scene, action, and character-

[10]Muscatine, p. 919.

grouping, the slow pace of the narrative and expansive description, the predominately lyric and philosophic kind of discourse, all indicate that the tale is not intended to include delicate characterization or exciting plot.

Indeed, the structure of the poem works against vibrant story interest. Symmetry in character-grouping, movement, time, and place supports the leisurely narrative in producing an over-all sense of deliberateness. Nevertheless, to limit the interpretation of the tale to a description of the life of one particular segment of society, the nobility, is to seriously limit its scope and intention. The story assumes wider proportions if it is viewed in light of its concern with two kinds of love, charity and cupidity, in a society in which form and order, or "marriage," are full of significance and in which life is a pilgrimage and a reflection of one's married inner, moral hierarchy. The deliberate slowness of movement parallels the course of the pilgrimage through life.

Muscatine maintains that the descriptive sections of the poem, while not adding to the plot, contribute to the currents running throughout the poem that make up the portrayal of the noble life.[11] He refers to the descriptions of Emetrius and Lygurge and their colorful magnificence that befits nobility. It is his opinion that, although they figure little in the narrative, they contribute to the element of

[11]Ibid., p. 922.

richness in the fabric of the noble life. The two opposing chieftains and their armies, also, contribute to the balance and order of both the form of the tale and the marriage theme. Their animals and personal attributes, voice, size, comparison with the lion and the griffin give them a martial quality that is attributed to the entire company. The description associates them with Mars, the God of War and Wrath, and the bestial element in man that becomes dominant when he allows cupidity to direct his will and passion to dominate his reason as Palamon and Arcite have done. This forges another bond of order and symmetry in the tale by stressing the polarity of Arcite, the unmarried man ruled by passion or cupidity at one extreme, and Theseus, the married man ruled by reason or charity, at the other.

To complete the balanced and symmetrical scheme, inherent in the narrative form, the "Knight's Tale" ends with the same succession of events with which it opened: battle, victory, and marriage. In the opening situation, Theseus had fought and defeated the Amazons and married their queen, Hippolyta. In the conclusion of the narrative, Palamon battles with Arcite, is eventually victorious, and marries Hippolyta's sister, Emelye.

Thus, the form of the "Knight's Tale" exemplifies the order that is associated with marriage in all of its connotations and associations, both internal and external. Since

it is through the order and regularity of marriage that Medieval man achieves moral unity and, consequently, unity with man, state, church, and God, Chaucer allows the philosophy of order to dictate the action or movement of the story. This movement evolves from the symmetrical and balanced arrangement of themes, episodes, and characters. However, the sharp delineation of characters is sacrificed so that they may more clearly embody the concept of marriage. For instance, Theseus becomes a characterization of the marriage theme by unifying the situations of the narrative and providing the example of the interior and exterior order that is present in the true marriage. The series of processions and descriptions provide the slowness of movement and deliberateness that Chaucer desires to portray the married man's continuing pilgrimage toward salvation and final marriage with God.

For his narrator, Chaucer selects the Knight, a man who accepts the concept of universal order, who represents marriage in his union of Christian faith and the standards of chivalry that he endorses, and whose duty it is to maintain spiritual and material order (marriage) in his political territory. The Knight's acceptance of order in the universe indicates that his own moral hierarchy is properly married. This is also reflected in his relationship to the city he governs.

It may be concluded, then, that Chaucer has structured

a married hierarchy, in ascending order, of narrator, form, and theme. A comprehending audience will perceive this as further indication of the importance of order in the life of the Medieval Christian seeking to complete his pilgrimage to the Celestial Jerusalem.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

According to the philosophy of the Middle Ages, it is the responsibility of every man to be "married." The relationship of each man to his wife, family, friends, state, and church is considered an external indication of the condition of his internal hierarchy. When his moral hierarchy is properly ordered, his will directed toward charity, and his reason dominant over his passion, or base desires, then his external relationships will also be in their proper hierarchical order: man dominant over woman, prince dominant over state, and prelate dominant over members. The "Knight's Tale" has established the importance of maintaining one's moral hierarchy and the subsequent falling into place of the external hierarchies when this is accomplished. It has also depicted the chaos and disorder that result when man's inner hierarchy is allowed to be turned "up-so-doun" in a reenactment of the tragedy of Adam succumbing to Eve, or reason succumbing to passion. The marriage theme, then, may be viewed as an introduction to the other Canterbury Tales, since all of the relationships in the tales may be considered either an adherence to or a departure from marriage.

The tales demand the device of comparison and contrast to understand fully their secular and spiritual context.

They illustrate the dangers of loving the world too much and reject the material life.[1] The Parson issues an admonition and an exhortation, but the audience must see its meaning in the context of the knowledge of good and evil that has been evolving from the tales. The emphasis lies not only in action and conflict and upon love in all its range from secular to divine, but also upon virtue as the highest goal for the spiritual man, the married man.

Chaucer seems to say that After the Fall, man has continued to live in a world in which the ideal uses of the law of love lie beyond the grasp of his fallen nature.[2] Love is the necessary principle of order in the universe. For human beings it provides the model of behavior for charitable and just action between lord and subject, parents and children, husband and wife, friend and friend, class and class. However, without that primal, natural innocence that man enjoyed Before the Fall, participation in the law of love may be precarious. Man After the Fall translates love downward into a variety of lesser loves with their subtle power to divert from the highest good, God. Such loves inevitably corrupt unless participants in them assume responsibility for observing morality, reason, and proper marriage. However, for the

[1]Paul G. Ruggiers, The Art of the Canterbury Tales (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 254.

[2]Ibid., p. 250.

enlightened individual there is a wisdom that grows out of the human condition of marriage and the passage of time: an acceptance of charity, resignation, joy in the natural order, and a final recognition of the relation of the goods of this world to the Highest Good, which is God.

The Canterbury Tales provides both positive and negative exampla of the theme of marriage. One of the "Ideal Tales" is the "Clerk's Tale" in which wifely obedience is a principle of rational conduct that is reflected in the larger principle of social obedience. Peace in society is an indication of peace in marriage when the wife's will is obedient to her husband's will. Peace for the country is a reflection of the wife's obedience. The country enjoys security because Griselda endures all the trials and tests that Walter, her husband, places before her. These tests are representative of the trials which all men may endure on earth, and her way of responding to these trials is a way all men must emulate.[3] Griselda, woman, is subordinate to Walter, reason. The marriage hierarchy is in order and the state prospers.

The "Man of Law's Tale," another positive exemplum of the marriage theme, also concerns itself with woman's place in marriage and with the true meaning of marriage. The heroine is an object lesson in Christian fortitude and its

[3]Bernard F. Huppé, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales (Albany: State Univ. of New York, 1964), p. 142.

triumph over Fortune. The tale indicates the "righte way" of the pilgrimage. Constance is described as possessing the true beauty which comes from inner goodness and which should not lead to desire, but to praise of the Creator of such beauty. Her beauty is a touchstone to the good or evil in the soul of the beholder.[4] The end of the tale indicates that true happiness is not in this transitory world, but in an eternal one.

Through the character of Cecelia, the "Second Nun's Tale" represents higher perfection in marriage. Cecelia shares with Constance and Griselda the function of leading others to salvation throug example, thus combining the contemplative and active lives. She epitomizes human sapience looking directly in contemplation toward God.[5] The tale is one of voluntary chastity in marriage, of conversion, and of martyrdom. Cecelia is the emblem of perfection toward which Constance and Griselda strive, toward which the Parson strives, and which the Pardoner betrays. She represents the high life of the spiritual leader who must combine in himself the life of contemplation and of active leadership. Thus, in this tale, the marriage theme is reflected in the external hierarchy of priest to church.

These three tales depict otherworldly interests, and in the themes of the three, marriage is more clearly suggestive

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ruggiers, p. 240.

of a higher union, union with God. Yet, with the "Knight's Tale," they clarify theological and moral values and provide a note of hope for man's adaptibility[6] to the ways of God.

Chaucer offers both positive and negative exempla of the theme of marriage, perhaps hoping that his audience may recognize themselves in the negative ones and strive to follow examples set by the positive. The negative tales present reenactments of the Fall of Man. For instance, the "Franklin's Tale" and the "Merchant's Tale" indicate that the responsibility for "desray" is shown to belong primarily to the husband because he should establish sovereignty over the wife.[7] Arveragus in the "Franklin's Tale" has relinquished husbandly control so that the marriage is an illusion, not the reality. In the "Merchant's Tale," January becomes a blind slave to lechery. He ignores his reason and allows his will to be directed toward self-indulgence. As reason should control the will, the husband should control his wife. The wife is responsible for her actions, but the husband, being dominant in the hierarchy, is responsible for her actions as well as his own.[8] Thus, January is the source of corruption in the tale; his sin is primary; he violates the order of God.

Chauntecleer in the "Nun's Priest Tale" share the errors

[6]Huppé, p. 189.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 162.

of Arveragus and January, since he, too, allows his reason to be subjugated to his will. He disregards reason in favor of his own self-satisfaction when he fears that Pertelote may withhold her favors. Thus, he repeats the Fall of Adam because of his delight in Pertelote and his consent in his reason to ignore the warnings of danger. Thus, God does not choose for man; man falls of his own consent.

The Wife of Bath argues for female supremacy,[9] a direct flouting of God's order. Her prologue reveals that the peace which she claims results from the wife's sovereignty is in reality a Babylonian confusion.[10] The tale she tells involves a young bachelor who allows his will to be misdirected, loses his reason, and responds as a beast. He later allows the "loathsome" woman, who knows that women desire "maistrie" over men, to assume sovereignty over him. Thus, the true marriage does not really exist.

The "Miller's Tale" ends in Babylonic confusion resulting when men seek only their pleasures and allow the woman to rule, in clear defiance of God's law. John does not maintain "maistrie" over Alisoun, and the chaos and confusion that ensue represent the lack of order in the inner hierarchy and the absence of inner marriage.

[9]Edward Wagenknecht, The Personality of Chaucer (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 77.

[10]Ibid., p. 198.

The failure of the "husband" to assume authority in either the family or the state has grave consequences, but the most damaging consequences result from default in spiritual leadership.[11] The Church is the vessel of salvation. The criticisms of the ecclesiastics that Chaucer presents through the Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner are criticisms against the abuses in the Church.[12] The abusive practices of each of these Churchmen may be traced to the "up-so-doun" condition of their moral hierarchies. Their refusal to serve God is an indication of the absence of marriage in the inner hierarchy.

The "Pardoner's Tale" is an example of those who make the wrong pilgrimage, the exact opposite of the one described by the Parson, and encounter spiritual death through the pursuit of material gain. The community of evil in which the young men, devil's disciples, are united by pledge dissolves quickly under the pressure of self-interest.[13] The inner marriage has been turned "up-so-doun" by the cupidinous desire for worldly gifts of Fortune. Thus, the tale illustrates a form of marriage that is not related specifically to the family situation, but to friendship which disintegrates when the moral marriage is overturned. The Pardoner reveals his own

[11]Ibid., p. 124.

[12]Ruggiers, p. 129.

[13]Ibid.

villany; he is evil and seems to rejoice in it.

The "Summoner's Tale" is an exposé of the methods employed by an unscrupulous Friar, his hypocrisy, his twisting of words, his false pretensions, his greed, and his misuse of the priestly office. The Friar berates Thomas for his display of anger, which the Friar claims is a result of his failure to submit to his wife's demands, the "up-so-doun" hierarchy. His own anger, however, at the news that Thomas has already confessed to the parish priest and the rage with which he reacts to Thomas' "gift" far surpasses that of the sick, old man.

The Friar tells a story of a Summoner who swears allegiance to the devil and finally becomes his victim. The Summoner shows himself to be more wicked than the devil, but not quite so clever. He puts himself in the power of the devil simply by his arrogant reliance upon the devil's regard for the letter of the law,[14] a concern that the Summoner does not share. The devil is bound by God's law, which will not allow the innocent to suffer: he cannot take anyone unless God is willing and the victim consents to sin. The Summoner's only salvation lies in a sudden act of repentance, in an appeal to God's mercy. He has his moment to repent, but fails to respond. The Summoner lacks the married inner hierarchy that every man should have.

[14]Huppé, p. 199.

The "Canon's Yeoman's Tale" offers another negative example of spiritual leadership. The story of the attempt to turn objects into gold describes "adultery" that does not involve a family situation. This tale is a practical and spiritual comment upon the perils of alchemy for those who may be misguided into the practice by a concupiscent desire for material wealth.

The "Knight's Tale," which is an excellent example of symmetry within itself, also balances with the final tale, the "Parson's Tale," to provide a framework within which the remaining Canterbury Tales fall. The two stories are Chaucer's established poles of thought, implying the ideals by which man lives and prospers. Taken as a pair, the tales offer first, stoic resignation to the chain of being in which all creatures have a place, and, finally, a more dogmatic response which transcends the pagan mystery and asserts the responsibility that every man must assume for his own life.[15] Both are patterns of consolation, one sober, resigned, and perhaps slightly pagan,[16] and the other, cheerful in its threats, confident in its gloom, and completely Christian.

The "Parson's Tale" offers instruction as the journey draws to a close with its vague setting, descending sun, and

[15]Ruggiers, p. 10.

[16]Ibid.

final tale told by a priest whose only interest is the salvation of souls. There is a sense of the brevity of time and the admonition of the need for haste that was suggested earlier in the "Knight's Tale." The general air of entertainment gives way to edification as the metaphorical relationship between "this viage" and "the wey . . . Of thilke parfait glorious pilgrymage/ That highte Jerusalem celestial" is emphasized. What the "Knight's Tale," by virtue of its philosophical metaphor of marriage, implies about the pilgrimage of this life, the "Parson's Tale" exceeds by virtue of "pure and unadorned doctrine."[17] It replaces the stoical resignation of the "Knight's Tale" with an active, purposeful prescription by means of which man, through wisdom, may overcome vice and with virtue and penance set himself upon the "righte wey of Jerusalem celestial." It is a call to virtue and a sanctified life possible for the "married" man. Thus, the metaphor of marriage that Chaucer develops in the first tale, the "Knight's Tale," extends through the other Canterbury Tales, also, and reaches its conclusion in the description of true marriage presented in the final tale by the Parson.

Clearly, the Canterbury Tales are more than just interesting and entertaining stories depicting scenes of everyday life in Medieval England. Taken as a unit, they provide man with a guide by which he can measure himself and evaluate

[17]Ibid., p. 250.

his own life in terms of the vices and virtues portrayed by the characters in the various tales. It is only with some recognition of the philosophy of the Middle Ages that the complete scope of the tales and the importance of the marriage theme that extends throughout them begin to come into focus.

The Medieval audience would recognize the Christian philosophy of St. Augustine, Boethius, and the Bible that is central to the development of the marriage theme. Both St. Augustine and Boethius stress the importance of the hierarchical order in the universe and in man that Chaucer develops in the "Knight's Tale" through the metaphor of marriage. The binding force that maintains the order and structures the various hierarchies that pervade all areas of Medieval life is the charity of the New Testament. The chaos and sin that plague man are the results of his own cupidity, a turning away from charity to the willful, self-directed love of material objects.

In the "Knight's Tale," Chaucer provides an illustration of the two ways in which man may conduct his life, the right way and the wrong way. Like Theseus, the married exemplar of wisdom, he may properly order his moral hierarchy by subjugating his passion to his reason and thereby reflect this inner marriage in the external hierarchies of his relationships to family, society, state, and church. On the other

hand, he may follow Palamon and Arcite and allow his concupiscent desire to misguide his reason so that his passion become dominant and causes the "up-so-doun" hierarchy that results in "adultery" or sin.

The remedy for sin or adultery is the restoration of order in the inner hierarchy; this may be accomplished only through marriage. In the philosophy of the Middle Ages, it is the responsibility of every man to be married in order to complete his pilgrimage to Celestial Jerusalem, salvation, marriage with God. This is the message that Chaucer conveys to the Middle Ages through the metaphor of marriage.

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